

# **JUSTICE FOR BUSTER: Alton Animal control saved**

by Brittany Kohler, Content Manager  
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**ALTON** - Nearly 150 animal rights supporters showed up to peacefully protest on the City Hall steps before the Alton City Hall meeting, July 22, in conjunction with a recent incident involving the death of an Alton family's pet and the city's essential need to keep the Animal Control Department active.

It was recently announced that due to city budget cuts, Alton Animal Control was on the chopping block to be eliminated.

At the opening of the meeting, Alton Mayor Brant Walker announced that they had many difficult decisions to make pertaining to budget cuts and they hoped to have a plan set for an alternative to Animal Control but unfortunately, one was not established in a timely manner.

“The city today received confirmation that we received an unexpected revenue from reimbursement of the Corps of Engineers,” said Walker. “I asked the city treasurer and the city comptroller to work this afternoon and this evening to rerun our budget numbers based on this unexpected revenue. Because of this unexpected revenue, I can now recommend to the city council that we will fund Animal Control for the rest of this fiscal year.”

Soon after, the city council made it sanctioned and Animal control was officially funded until March of 2016.

Although that was great news, citizens were still distressed about a dog’s wrongful killing.

Before the meeting, “Justice for Buster” was chanted along side 3<sup>rd</sup> Street by those participating in the rally as cars drove past, honking in support of the cause. SEE VIDEO BELOW:

Buster was an elderly dog that belonged to the Harris family for 14 years. He got loose on Sunday and the family called Animal Control the next day to report the missing pet. Unfortunately, the animal control officer was on vacation, so two Alton police officers were called to the scene in proxy.



Buster was injured and reported by the police as aggressive. However animal experts explain that injured dogs tend to be anxious and scared when in pain, not necessarily *aggressive*.

The officers followed orders from higher and took the dog to a remote location where they shot him.

Jackie Spiker read from the police report written by one of the officers at the scene, “I used the departmental issued 12-gauge shotgun and fired two rounds into the animal striking it...The animal turned towards me, lowered its head and began growling and snapping it’s teeth...And when that happened, the other officer pulled his departmental issued Glock 23 40-caliber pistol firing two rounds, stopping the animals charge.”

“That is overkill, not euthanasia,” said Spiker. “Euthanasia is the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of a hopelessly sick or injured individual or animal in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy. That wasn’t mercy.”

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It was stated that Buster was neutered, current on vaccinations and micro chipped, yet the dog had not been scanned before being taken to the remote area to be sentenced. This upset many animal lovers in the area.

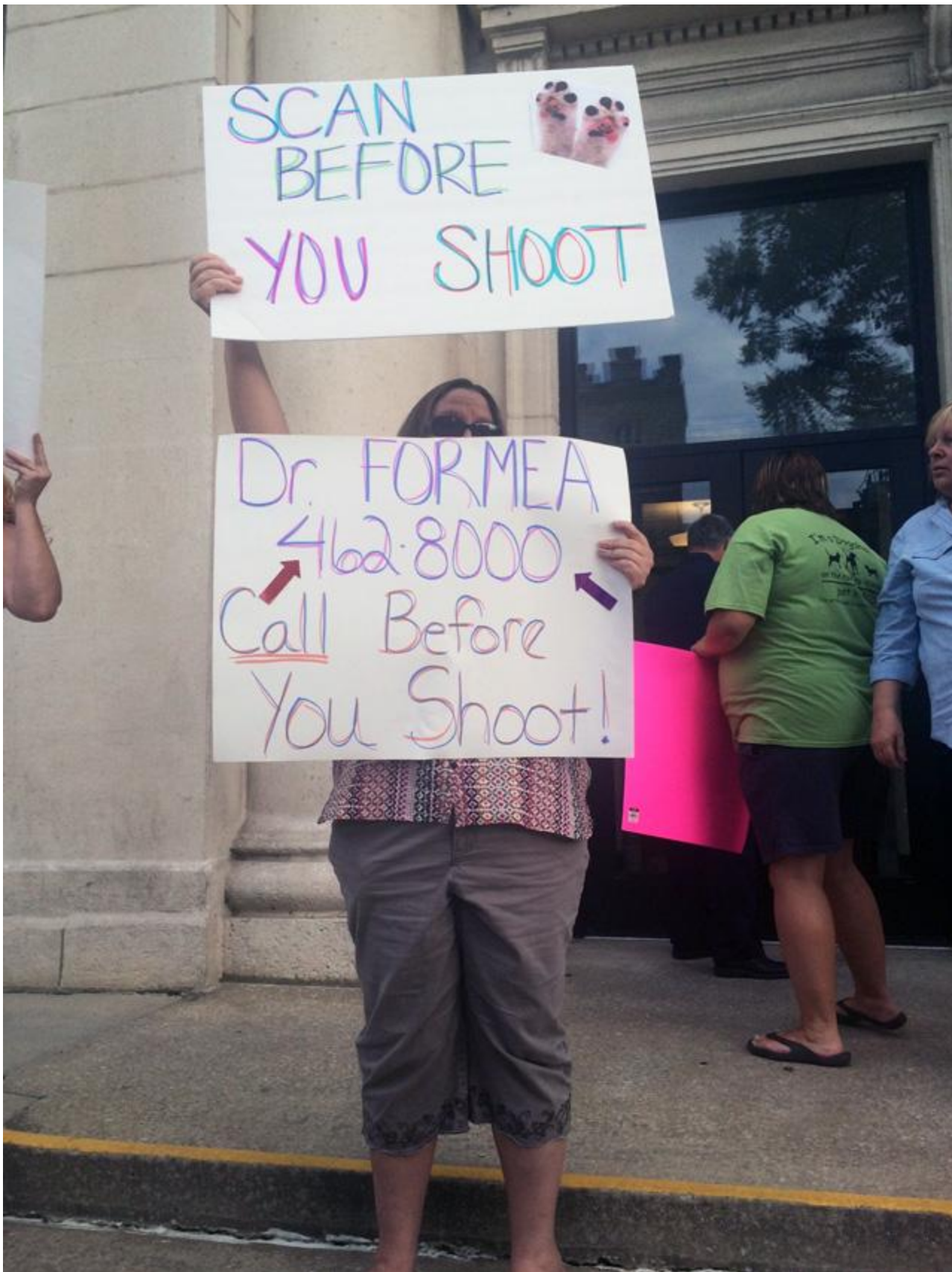
One of the main reasons locals were insistently pushing to keep Animal Control in Alton from the beginning was to prevent incidents such as this from happening. Several speakers indicated that it takes much training and experience to handle these situations properly and it was clear that the officers did not possess the proper knowledge in animal behavior to suitably handle the situation.





“They claim that the dog aggressively bit someone on the hand however the hand appeared uninjured... what the heck is that” said Spiker. “I’ve been aggressively bitten by a Chihuahua and I was bleeding.”

Betsy Clayton, an animal rights activist that runs the Save Alton Animal Control Campaign on Facebook wanted to make clear that the campaign is not against the police officers and understands that they were given orders, just as any job, and were following procedure.



“I was assured a plan would be put in place and animals would not be shot, and no order was in place to do so,” she said in a post. “This dog was not taken to a vet to assess his injuries or scanned for a chip, so owners could be contacted.”

Animal enthusiasts are hopeful that a situation such as Busters will not happen again and are grateful that funding is being provided to keep the Animal Control Department in Alton.

A question has risen from Altonians: Do you think that if Buster's death and the manner in which it was handled weren't made public, that funding would have still been found to keep Animal Control?

Some speculate that maybe Buster died for a reason, as a sacrifice to save Animal Control in Alton.