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Norman animal shelter makes emergency funding request

By Mack Burke Transcript News Editor 1 hr ago



Joy Hampton / The Transcript

In this July file photo, Bear gets a belly rub from adoption coordinator Megan James, right, while Capt. Lance Arnold looks on outside of the new Norman Animal Welfare Center.



When the Norman Animal Welfare Center moved into its new facility in June, animal advocates rejoiced.

The facility at 3428 S. Jenkins Ave. has 15,000 square feet of space, which is enough room to house 75 dogs and 40 cats. That keeps animals off the streets and protects them from the threat of euthanasia.

But less than a year into operation, the \$3 million facility is strapped for funds and short on personnel.

The new facility acquired more residents, but it didn't get any more human hands to help with the increased capacity. Norman Animal Oversight Committee member Rebecca Bean said that's a problem.

She chalks it up to poor planning. She said part-time staff veterinarian Amy Tyler was able to cobble some medical supplies together from the old location, but those have since run out.

Now, the shelter is seeking a \$20,000 mid-year funding request.

"The shelter has run out of medical funds," Bean said. "The shelter has asked for a \$20,000 mid-year adjustment, which is kind of like an emergency request. As far as I know, nothing has been done with that request ... It's been unanswered."

According to a social media release from Norman Animal Welfare Now, the funds are being sought for medical supplies, but the group is also calling for an additional \$50,000 in Fiscal Year 2018 for "crucial" expenditures such as medical supplies (\$20,000), food \$3,000, kennel shade sails (\$10,000), a trailer Carport (\$5,000), phone management software (\$10,500) and kennel Improvements (\$5,000).

In the immediate future, Bean said animals will begin to suffer without an influx of funding.

"What I know, from being a volunteer, is that if the volunteers don't come, the animals aren't getting out of their cage," Bean said. "So, that creates a situation that's quite hard on the animal. A really nice dog, who has a good amount of energy, if it's not getting exercise, it can start to go crazy in that kennel. So, you can take a dog that was formerly adoptable and within the course of weeks or months, if it's not getting socialized and not getting enough exercise, it can become un-adoptable."

Bean said the Animal Oversight Committee is requesting two more full-time employees for the shelter, the conversion of the part-time veterinarian position into a full-time position and the cross-training of office staff in all roles at the facility to provide more flexibility.

While Bean believes the situation is critical, others have a different take.

"I think it's a natural reaction to say, 'The shelter's going to run out of money,'" Officer Lance Arnold said. "But the reality of it is, we're not to that point, by any means. We certainly have had to make some adjustments, but it's nice to have versus need to have."

Arnold, who heads the Animal Welfare division, said the situation isn't dire, but money is tight.

"I'm confident that if we get to the point where it becomes a true emergency, we'll get the funding that we need. We don't have an unlimited amount, but we have a healthy amount in our donation account that we haven't reached into yet."

While the Animal Oversight Committee is pushing for two new full-time positions, the shelter is in the process of trying to fill two already vacant ones. Arnold said it's hard to find the right people for the job, but even in their absence, he said the shelter will find a way to fulfill its mission.

"We're not going to stop doing anything that we've done since the shelter has been completed and renovated. We have started down a positive path ... We will just have to be more creative in how we address some of those things," he said.

Ward 7 city council member and former committee member Stephen Tyler Holman said the truth is probably somewhere in between those two assessments. He said he trusts Arnold when he said the shelter can get by, but said some of the funding is needed.

"The medical supply increase, that sounds pretty important," Holman said. "Maybe we could fund that now. The trailer carport, maybe that doesn't need to be funded right now. And kennel improvements, I'm curious what that is, because it's a brand new facility. I'm wondering what improvements need to be made at \$5,000."

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