

Low-cost spay and neuter being discussed for Roanoke

A group met last Wednesday at Roanoke City Hall to discuss the best way to do a low-income spay and neuter program for pets in Roanoke.

Joining in the conversation were Police Chief Adam Melton, Mayor Mike Fisher, Councilman Mack Arthur Bell, Randolph County Animal Shelter Board President Chuck Smith, Code Enforcement Officer Mike Cofield and Patt High, an activist with the shelter.

Smith said they have been discussing the possibility of such a program and wanted to get input from those present. The idea is to get low-income people to realize how important spaying and neutering is to reduce the animal population.

They had several flyers they had drawn up and wanted to know which ones the group liked best. They plan to distribute the flyers and provide information to the newspaper and radio station.

Robyn Smith, who has worked for Citizens for the Welfare of Animals in Clay County, as well as working closely with Randolph County's shelter for about one and a half years, will oversee the transportation of dogs and cats to be spayed and neutered.

Flyers are being handed out Wednesday but she says the following figures will be: female dog spay-\$65 for any size dog and whether it is pregnant or in season; male dog neuter-\$50; female cat spay-\$45 and male cat neuter-\$30. The pets who have not had a rabies vaccination must be vaccinated for an additional \$15. This is much less than the usual \$150 to \$200 cost for spaying and neutering.

She said according to state law any animal brought into a clinic must have its rabies vaccination. If it has been vaccinated, bring the certificate with the dog to the animal shelter in Wedowee. A tent will be set up at the shelter where forms will be filled out, then the owner will get the pet, which will be put on the bus. There are extra carriers so if you don't have a carrier do not let that stop you, she said. Owners will have to ensure their pets do not eat or drink anything after midnight the day of the surgery.

The pets will be taken to West Georgia Animal Clinic, an excellent facility. People here might know Robyn Smith from her 13 years working in positions here such as 911, radio dispatcher and for the police and sheriff's departments.

"My part is getting information out to people, coordinating the transports and talking to people, reassuring them their pets will be safe," Robyn said.

She hopes to get the program started in November but people wanting to sign up their animals for the van can contact her at 334-863-0101, NOT at the shelter number. If she does not answer leave a message and she will call back.

Those planning to spay or neuter their pets must be at the shelter before 6 a.m. The pets will be put on the van, go to Georgia, be examined, have the surgery, be observed overnight and returned to the shelter by about noon the next day.

She said she wants everyone to feel comfortable about sending their pets for the surgery.

All Randolph County residents can participate but Chuck Smith said they are concentrating on Roanoke. He said they need to know which is the right area to be



Penny L. Pool

Help on the way

Discussing how to implement a pet spaying and neutering program for low-income residents of Roanoke are (from left) Roanoke Code Enforcement Officer Mike Cofield, Police Chief Adam Melton, Randolph County Animal Shelter

Board President Chuck Smith (back to camera), Councilman Mack Arthur Bell, Mayor Mike Fisher, and Randolph County Animal Shelter Volunteer Patt High, who is displaying a flyer promoting the program.

working in. They believe they can make an impact on the number of stray animals running loose. They plan to have somebody go into the schools and talk about the advantages of spaying and neutering, which include pets living longer and being more docile. He said they hope to refine the plan and need input. This is definitely of benefit for the city.

High pointed out about 40 percent of the intakes at the shelter come from Roanoke.

"We're quite certain we will get grants for this," Smith said, and they already have someone working on that aspect.

He said they already have a sizeable PetSmart program. They hope to bring more in the first of the year. PetSmart is a major player in the spay and neuter world.

Pets will be operated on by a licensed veterinarian. It will be low cost but high quality.

Smith said they do not agree with the Humane Society's focus about animals being put down if they are not adopted. Randolph County Animal Shelter has a positive viewpoint of adopting animals. They do well, as you can tell by looking at their Facebook page.

High said the shelter went from 1,300 Facebook followers to almost 4,000. Some people will sponsor older, larger animals that are harder to adopt so the adopter pays little or nothing.

Using rescues and things like Facebook they move many animals, almost making it a no-kill shelter. By state law they cannot adopt out any aggressive animals. And if they get in a sick animal they may have to put it down. It has taken eight years to get to this point in the Roanoke area, Smith said.

The shelter received the 2014 Community Service Award from the Randolph County Chamber of Commerce.

Smith wanted information Roanoke has about calls they get about picking up animals and wanted to know about their data base. He said they want the preliminary information to compare to calls after the program is in force. Those giving grant funds will want to know if the program is working and if there are less intakes at the shelter and less calls after it is implemented.

Melton said this is a great idea. The big thing will be marketing and getting the word out through schools, churches and organizations.

"We have an excellent reputa-

tion," Smith said of the shelter and its dealings with many rescue groups across the U.S.

High said they designed the flyers so the phone number can be torn off the bottom of flyers. Robyn Smith has been hired specifically to take calls on this. She said the prices will be listed on the flyers so people will know what it will cost. The chief said they would make the flyers available in the justice center's lobby.

Cash, checks or money orders will be accepted. A deposit will have to be paid before the van's run to Georgia.

Chuck Smith there is a certain amount of money set aside for those few who call and say they cannot afford this. But they have found when something is free it is not appreciated.

Smith said they went to see how West Georgia operates. The veterinarian and her crew can do 50 animals a day. The facility is clean and up to date.

This will not only help the animals and residents but lower the amount of animals that come into the shelter. They hope someday to have a picture made when they are by empty cages.

A cat can have up to four litters of 3-to-6 kittens a year. A kitten can go into heat as early as five months old. One cat can have as many as 7,000 kittens during her lifetime, Robyn said.

Smith asked "where do we start?"

Bell asked about the worst areas are and Cofield said when he picks them up he lists the street where he picked them up on a card. If he picks up six dogs or six puppies he fills out a separate card for each of them.

High asked if there is any area where people dump the dogs--somewhere somebody drives up and dumps a dog from a vehicle. Do they have any idea where the dogs come from?

Cofield said they come from irresponsible owners who let them run loose. They can be cited if a dog is in heat or in season. If he goes to the door and tells them they have to put the dog up he said he is told, "It is not mine."

"There is not a lot of dumping and it's not dogs--it's cats they put in boxes and leave at a stop sign," he said.

Smith said they would like to target the low income because these are the folks who need help.

High said the elderly population can feed them and take them to the

vet occasionally but they can't afford to spay and neuter them. That pet helps them to get up and moving in the morning. That pet is their friend.

Mayor Fisher said, "This is a very positive message and you're starting out with younger kids." When you get them interested you bring in the whole community, he added.

Councilman Bell said what they are trying to promote is much needed. When the flyers are prepared he would like to get some flyers to hand out to area churches and organizations. The grant for those of low income will help.

It was stressed the group is not trying to hurt anybody's business like area veterinarians but are trying to help those who are not going to have their animals spayed and neutered because they do not have the money.

Chuck said when animals are dropped off in the woods there is a 90 percent chance they will not live. They cannot fend for themselves.

High said a dog sitting alone on a road as a car drives off leaves the dog thinking, "What did I do wrong?"

The mayor said with Christmas right around the corner some people might want to give a gift certificate for the spay or neuter for a neighbor's animal.

High said that is an excellent idea. This is the shelter's eighth year in business and to celebrate the anniversary they are promoting their sponsored dogs--dogs who have been there too long. If a donor sponsors it a person can get the dog free or at a lower price.

Since October, 2007 they have had 3,200 animals come through the shelter. They started with an average of about 11 and then started the photo project and they adopt as many as 110 a month, many through rescues. The adopters send follow-up photos of how the animals are doing.

They have set aside a minimum of \$8,000 annually to do the spaying and neutering, Chuck Smith said.

People like shelter manager Elisabeth Stanford and kennel manager April Richardson are making them successful, he said. And they could not do it without the volunteers, such as the two board members who regularly come in to clean the cat cages. The shelter has four and a half staff members but many volunteers make it possible for them to operate.