



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

# Work Session Summary Minutes

## Public Spay/Neuter Program for Dogs

December 18, 2025. 10:30 AM

Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Salem  
5th Floor, Suite 5232, Commissioners Board Room

### ATTENDANCE:

**Commissioners:** Colm Willis, and Kevin Cameron, Danielle Bethell

**Board's Office:** Trevor Lane, Alvin Klausen, and Matt Lawyer.

**Community Services and Economic Development:** Nicolette Neuhauser, Lauren Thielke, and Kelli Weese.

Commissioner Danielle Bethell called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

### **Shelter Operations Overview**

- Current intake processes for lost and abandoned dogs in Marion County:
  - Intake from dog officers, general public, and law enforcement:
    - After hours or special situations like owner hospitalization or arrest.
  - Immediate triage on arrival:
    - Vaccinations:
      - Distemper, parvo, and Bordetella.
      - Not rabies initially.
    - Deworming, flea treatment, health check, and behavioral observation.
  - Stray hold protocols:
    - Minimum three days without identifiable owner information.
    - Five days if any ownership clue is present.
  - Active efforts to reunite dogs with owners:
    - Letters, calls, microchips, and community involvement.
    - Current return-to-owner rate is 50%, higher than national average.
  - Upon completion of stray hold, dogs become property of the shelter:
    - More behavior and medical exams done before adoption or transfer to rescue partners.
  - Enrichment and exercise program uses volunteers and behavioral staff.
  - In-house contracted veterinary staff integrate medical and foster care.
  - Fee structure for reclaiming dogs:
    - Impound fees.
    - Boarding fees.
    - Microchip.
    - Registration.
    - Required licensing.
    - Assistance fund available for homeless pet owners.

## **Spay/Neuter Program**

- Identified increasing intake and length of stay due to:
  - Lack of accessible low-cost spay/neuter options.
  - Growth of unaltered dogs, especially in homeless communities.
- Three models for public assistance:
  - High-volume, one-day clinics with outside vets and mobile services:
    - Vaccinate and sterilize large numbers quickly and cost-effectively.
    - Need space and arrangements for aftercare and liability coverage.
  - Voucher program model:
    - Subsidizes surgeries via local clinics.
    - Long-term prevention, minimal liability, and program sustainability.
  - Expanded on-site veterinary services:
    - Adding public surgery days to complement existing shelter operations.
    - Addresses community need.
    - Is limited by clinic capacity and owner compliance.
- Disease prevention needs:
  - Especially Parvo outbreaks in public spaces like Wallace Marine Park.
  - Urgency for vaccination and outreach to high-risk populations.
- Consider working with local and national partners to supplement county funding.

## **Discussion**

- Program risks and benefits of each model:
  - High-volume single-day clinics:
    - Serves quickly and helps with outbreak risk.
    - Needs logistical coordination, space, partnerships, and aftercare planning.
    - Lower per-animal cost but higher upfront event costs:
      - County must manage liability.
    - Greatest immediate impact on population control:
      - Especially in high-risk or underserved areas.
  - Voucher programs:
    - Sustainable, lower liability, less staff-intense, and spread over time.
    - Easier to administer.
    - Success depends on owner follow-through and partner clinic capacity.
    - May be slower to impact outbreaks compared to clinics.
    - Community engagement and proactive ownership responsibility.
  - Expanded on-site services:
    - Gradual service expansion with existing facilities.
    - Moderate logistical needs.
    - Limited by clinic days and staff/vet availability.
    - Risk if animals are not promptly picked up post-surgery.
    - Supports overall access to spay/neuter.
    - Less reach than large events.
    - Incremental impact on community and outbreak control.
- Challenges in serving marginalized communities:
  - Fear of separation from pets among homeless.
  - Distrust of government agencies.
  - Barriers to accessing traditional spay/neuter or veterinary care.
- Cost structures and possible funding sources:
  - High-volume clinics (rapid response):

- Costs:
  - Facility/event space rental.
  - Medical equipment:
    - Spay packs and supplies.
  - Contracted vet services.
  - Aftercare/emergency support.
  - Staff/volunteer time.
- Funding sources:
  - County budget allocations:
    - Up to \$25,000 ceiling.
  - Potential contributions from community partners:
    - Local businesses, and Rotary.
  - National grants:
    - BISSELL Pet Foundation and others.
- Voucher programs (prevention):
  - Costs:
    - Subsidies for individual spay/neuter procedures at local clinics.
    - Limited staff/administrative support.
    - Initial start-up/tracking/marketing expenses.
  - Funding sources:
    - Dedicated county funds:
      - \$5,000 initial allocation.
    - Potential outside grants:
      - Banfield Foundation, Rachel Ray Foundation, and others.
    - Possible co-funding or match from partner organizations.

- Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement (CARES) team and outreach for on-site care in encampments.
- Highlights of:
- Compassionate responses.
- Limited resources.
- Animal welfare challenges on staff and constituents.
- Partner with neighboring counties facing similar public health concerns.
- Legal, liability, and notification issues related to communicable diseases in public dog parks.

## Other

- Fast response to Parvo outbreaks, public awareness, and institution responsibility.
- County, city, state, and private stakeholders manage dogs' welfare in park areas.
- Emotional and community health aspects:
  - Human-animal bond's role in recovery and homelessness services.
- Vision of housing with on-site kennels for people experiencing homelessness.
- Advocacy, creative funding, and flexibility in program design as things shift.

## Next Steps

- Immediate outreach to Polk County for spay/neuter and disease prevention efforts.
- Organize a census of dogs in targeted parks and encampments:
  - With photos and basic owner info
  - Leverage partner agencies for data gathering.
- Report funding source for first \$5,000 allocated to the 2026 voucher program:
  - Finalize where this will come from by January.

- Detailed design of voucher program:
  - Including qualifiers, budget structure, community marketing, and tracking.
- Plan and budget a high-volume, single day spay/neuter clinic:
  - Targeting late July.
  - Select partners, event site, equipment, and aftercare protocols.
  - Up to a \$25,000 county investment ceiling.
- Include prevention (voucher) and intervention (clinic) funding in FY 26-27 budget:
  - Clear justifications and prevention model.
- Schedule voucher program and clinic plan update to Board before execution.
- Prepare budget:
  - Cost range and ceiling for clinic.
  - Board approval and external fundraising.
- Coordinate with Polk County for shared planning and possible joint presentations:
  - Attend their meetings if requested.
- Housing and animal services integration plans for supportive housing initiatives.
- Ongoing reporting and feedback to Board on program progress and funding use.

**Adjourned** – time: 11:43 a.m.

**Minutes by:** Mary Vityukova

**Reviewed by:** Gary L. White