

**Open Work Session**  
**Proposed Community Cat Regulations**  
**March 3, 2020**

Mrs. Kim Nock, Executive Director of the Wicomico County Humane Society, and Ms. Susan Coleman, Director of Community Cats Coalition came before Council. Mrs. Nock said she is going to let Ms. Coleman speak first since this is her expertise, and then she will talk about the Humane Society and how this affects them. Ms. Coleman said they wanted to come before Council to talk about community cats. She said they are working closely with Mrs. Nock at the Humane Society. She explained, when Animal Control gets a complaint, they round the cats up and bring them in to the Humane Society. She said her group takes them out, gets them fixed and vaccinated, and puts them back at their sites. She said they want to have verbiage put into the law stating, once these cats are fixed and vaccinated, and they ear tip them to identify that they have been, they will be left alone, and they cannot be re-trapped. She said, by taking these cats out of the shelter system, they are not being euthanized. She said rounding these cats up and killing them is not working, and has not worked in decades. She said they practice trap, neuter, return (TNR), and that way the colonies get stabilized, no new cats come into the area, no new kittens are being born, and that decreases the population because their number one goal is to get the numbers of these cats down because some people complain about them, and they understand that. She said they do not want them trapped and killed, so they offer a free service where they will trap and fix them for free, and then bring them back, and that way they keep them out of the shelter where there is a cost every day to feed, clean, and take care of these cats. Mrs. Nock clarified, when Ms. Coleman is speaking of Animal Control rounding them up, she is speaking of City Animal Control. She explained, their County Animal Control Officers do not trap cats. She said the Humane Society rents traps to the public so they can trap them themselves, and in the past when they were brought in, pretty much every feral cat was euthanized because they had no outlet for them. She said, when she started in August, their live release rate was 54 percent at the shelter, and she has it up to 87 percent right now, solely due to working with these organizations to handle these feral cats as opposed to the Humane Society handling them. She said they also have a lot of grant money come in for low-cost spay and neuter, and they encourage people who bring in feral cats to allow them to be fixed and released back on the property. She said she thinks there is a big crossover of resources when organizations spend money to help the community and the County, but then the cats are brought into the Humane Society and they turn around and euthanize them. She said they are, basically, asking there be something added to the Code. She said the only thing in the Code right now is the definition of the community cat, and they would like for it to be added that a community cat cannot be brought into the shelter, or, if it is trapped, it has to be re-released.

Mr. Davis asked if Mrs. Nock said the City of Salisbury is the only one bringing in cats, to which Mrs. Nock responded, yes, they are the only ones who trap. She clarified, County Animal Control does not go out and trap feral cats. Mr. Davis asked if she has approached the City, to which Mrs. Nock responded, yes, multiple times. She said she actually asked for a meeting between City and County, so they sat down and talked and are all trying to get on the same page, but apparently there are higher ups who are not on the same page, and feel like this is a service they have provided for the City in the past, and they are going to continue to provide it. She said it is a burden on City Animal Control Officers because they have to humanely trap, and that means they constantly have to check the traps and cannot leave them sitting unattended. She said the Humane Society tries to help them, but then they bring the cats to the Humane Society and they have no resources. She said, if they are ear tipped and fixed, they know they are part of a TNR program, so they do their best to try to locate what colony they came from by talking to these different groups and finding out who the caretakers are and make sure they get re-released

into that colony. She said, in the City Code, the TNR program has to be approved by Animal Control, and then any release of those TNR cats has to be approved by Animal Control. She said that is all very time consuming, and City Animal Control does not exactly know where all of these colonies are located. She said there is also a reason for that because there was a situation in the past where they had permission to release cats behind the Kohl's building, and she does not know if anyone remembers, but City Animal Control Officers were going out and destroying everything that these people were working for. She said they were destroying their housing, they were flipping their food and their water over when they had permission to have a colony on that property. She said City Animal Control Officers have vocalized to her that they want to work something out where they are not having to go out and trap these cats all the time. She said these cats are of no danger to the community, they are vaccinated, and they are not going to reproduce. She said, if they leave them where they are, they will naturally keep the other cats out. She said they have also developed a huge foster program because they are getting ready to go into the cat season where they are going to have cats stacked in their shelter. She said they will have litter after litter after litter brought into the shelter for them to try to get adopted. She said, if they are kittens, they can do their best to get them adopted, but many times just being in the shelter situation they cannot keep them healthy. She said they are actually working with foster parents to take them out of the shelter situation and keep them at home until they are healthy enough to bring them back in and get them adopted. She said there are a lot of things the Humane Society is doing to try to help the situation, and they value their relationship with these different cat organizations, but it has to be in the Code somehow where people have to leave these cats alone, or they are just wasting resources.

Mr. Holloway asked, if someone in the City calls and complains about cats and the City traps them and brings them to the Humane Society, and she takes care of them and fixes them, do they release the cats back to where the City captured them, to which Mrs. Nock responded, if they are ear tipped, that means they have gone through a TNR program, which means they are being overseen by a caretaker and a colony. Mr. Holloway asked, if someone complains because the cats are there, does she take them back to where the people were complaining, to which Mrs. Nock responded, they are pulled out of their colonies by people feeding them outside of their colonies. She said, if people are more educated about how this works and they stop feeding them from their back doorstep, these cats would not pull from their colonies, they would stay where they are, so this is really about education. She said they have to figure out a way to get the public to understand all the different things they need to do to work with these people as well. Mr. Holloway said he will ask her one more time. He then asked, do they take the cats back to where they were trapped from, to which Mrs. Nock responded, not necessarily back to that specific location, but back to the colony. Mr. Holloway asked if they put the cat somewhere along the street, to which Mrs. Nock responded, it is an approved colony that is part of a TNR program. Mrs. Coleman said, if someone complains, they go door to door and try to work with Animal Control when someone complains. She said they had one lady complaining on one set street, so her partner went to that lady and knocked on the door and explained the whole process, and that, by calling Animal Control, that cat is going to be killed. She said these people did not understand that, and they said they do not want the cat killed, so they explained how TNR works. She said, if the cats are really a nuisance, which they can be, they have devices they give the person for two weeks that they stick in the ground and it emits a high-pitched noise that only cats can hear, and it will keep the cats out of their yard. She said they give that to them free of charge for two weeks. She said they also have brochures to teach people how to keep the cats out of their yard, but nine times out of ten people do not understand the whole process of what they are doing. She explained, if that group of cats is taken out, another group is going to come in, and the process is started all over again. She said, by fixing the whole colony and putting them back it prevents more kittens from being born, and the colony will eventually die out because there are no more kittens being born. Mr. Holloway said he understands how it works.

Ms. Coleman said these are healthy cats, though they understand there are some cats that are very sickly and inbred and carrying things. She said, over the past three months, she has taken 168 cats out of the shelter. She said they fix them, they are fat and healthy, and someone is feeding them. She said they are going door to door to find these caretakers so they can work with Animal Control to let them know where the colonies are located. She said, when someone is complaining, Animal Control can give them the person's name, and they can go chat with the person, give out their brochures to inform them, and put the cat back in the colony. She said then they find the colony caretaker and tell them these cats were fixed. Mrs. Nock said, according to Code, they are allowed to be free roaming. She clarified, domestic cats are not allowed to be free roaming anymore, but TNR cats that are part of a TNR program are allowed to be free roaming, so technically these cats can be picked up, brought in, and then the caretaker of the colony can come and take them right back out. She explained, there may be a resident who has chosen to TNR cats onto their property, and they have every right to come in and reclaim their cats back. She said it becomes an endless cycle of expense for the Humane Society, so that is why they are trying so hard to work with these different organizations. She said Council can see the figures, and they have gone from having a 54 percent live release rate to having an 86 percent live release rate. She said she thinks when people are educated and it is explained to them in that manner, they are going to make different choices, and they are going to make a different phone call. She clarified, instead of calling City Animal Control, they are going to call Forgotten Cats, or Community Cat Coalition, or one of those organizations. She said there is also a possibility of funding where they have the ability to get a lot of grants for this kind of work, and the County has the ability to fund this kind of work as well because, ultimately, they are benefiting their community. She said, as much as they get bashed for their euthanization rates, people just do not understand they cannot just stack cats up in the hallway.

Mr. Dodd asked if Mrs. Nock knows that the County Council cannot make Code for the City, to which Mrs. Nock responded, she understands that. She said they have meetings with the City, and they have to try to all work together in some manner between herself and these different organizations. She said she understands that this Council is not the City, and the Codes are not the same. Ms. Coleman said she has taken 168 cats that cost the Humane Society \$100 per cat to house, and they have to be housed for three to six days. Mrs. Nock added, plus the cost of euthanasia and the cost of cremation, and all of that is \$16,000. Mr. Dodd asked where these cats come from, to which Mrs. Nock responded, the biggest portion are coming from the City. Mr. Holloway said the cats in the country are smarter, to which Mrs. Nock responded, maybe people just are not bothered by them because there is more room and space.

Mr. Cannon said Mrs. Nock has done really great work and he is really pleased with everything she is doing with the Humane Society, and Council also appreciates the work Ms. Coleman is doing for the Coalition. He said there are only three references to cats in the entire ordinance, and he does not know why the Animal Ordinance Committee did not include more about cats, but there is a definition, and two other comments as far as cats are concerned. He said he thinks what Anne Arundel has done is great, and it is always good not to reinvent the wheel. He then asked what happens if there is a community invaded by feral cats that have all been clipped and neutered, but the neighbors call and say there are 13 cats outside their front door, and is anyone going to do anything? He asked how they can address that as a County, to which Ms. Coleman responded, they have to find the caretaker and see if they can get all the friendly kittens or cats taken out or removed, which they normally do at the time they are trapping them, but they have to track down the colony caretaker and see what the situation is, and why the cats are roaming that far away from their colony. Mrs. Nock said many times it is because someone near that person is feeding them. Mr. Cannon asked for clarification on what they are calling the caretaker, to which Mrs. Nock responded, the caretaker is the person who feeds the colony. Ms.

Coleman said the caretaker keeps an eye on them and will call the Coalition if a new cat shows up. Mr. Dodd asked if the caretaker is a responsible person, to which Mrs. Nock responded, yes, it is the person responsible for the colony, and Ms. Coleman added, it is the dedicated caretaker. Mr. Cannon asked what enforcement there is when there is a problem in a neighborhood with cats, and they go to the caretaker about the problem, to which Mrs. Nock responded, they will also go to the community. She clarified, they go to the houses around that area and educate them on what not to do, and how to deter cats from even coming to their property. She said most of the time when cats leave the colony it is because someone outside the colony is feeding them. She said everybody sees the cats and feels sorry for them, so they put a little food out on their back doorstep, but then before they know it, they are actually causing more harm than good because they are pulling the cats away from where someone is taking care of them. Mr. Cannon asked if they have a process in place for educating, to which Mrs. Nock responded, they pass out brochures in that area and knock on doors and talk to people. She said they try to educate people when they come into the shelter the best they can, but they are always going to have people who do not care and do not want the cat on their property, and they do not care if they kill it. She said they are always going to have that, but most people are reasonable. She said they can explain to them that what they are doing is going to be an endless cycle and they are going to spend their time trapping a cat here and there, dragging it into the shelter and the shelter euthanizing it, and then by the time they get back they are going to have another cat that has had a litter. She said calling one of these community organizations to come out and mass trap and fix them all at one time is the key to getting it manageable. Mr. Cannon said he understands, but the majority of calls any of the Councilmembers are going to get, whether it is cats or dogs, is how come they keep calling the County and nobody does anything, but now Council knows there is a policy in place to address those concerns for releasing them. Mrs. Nock said she thinks it also includes education on the County website and educating people who they need to call when they have a problem. She clarified, there is nothing written in the law that says an Animal Control Officer has to come out and trap a cat, and Council can make that determination if they want to, but certainly the County Animal Control Officers do not come out and trap cats. She said they also do not trap squirrels or raccoons, but the City has a wildlife license. She said a feral cat is basically considered a wild animal. She said the County does not have a wildlife license to trap, but the City does. She said they trap raccoons, possums, and feral cats. Mr. Holloway asked why the County does not have that license, and could they get it, to which Mrs. Nock responded, she has no idea. She clarified, she has only been in this position since August, so she does not know if she can get it. She then asked Mr. Holloway why the County should go out and trap raccoons and possums? She said that is their territory. Mr. Holloway said he was not talking about that, he was talking about cats, and he was not talking about raccoons and possums. Mrs. Nock asked, if he wants that expense added to the County budget, that is going to be huge. Mr. Holloway said he just asked her why the County does not do it, to which Mrs. Nock responded, she is saying she is sure they probably could apply for one because, if the City can get one, she does not see why the County cannot get one, but that would be a big added expense to the budget with Animal Control Officers going out and doing cat trapping.

Mr. Taylor said, addressing Mr. Cannon's question about why there is not more in the County Code, one of the reasons is because the language in there was proposed by the Committee that revised the Code, and that was actually their suggestion. He said he thinks the main thing is that it is also mentioned in one other place in the abandonment of animals and that returning a TNR cat is not deemed to be abandonment if they take it back to where they got it. He said, addressing the concern and the issue, he does not think the language from the Anne Arundel Code is going to make a whit of difference for two reasons. He said, first of all, they have indicated it is primarily a City problem, and they can put anything they want in their County Code and then the City can tell them to take a hike if they want to. He said he hopes they would not do that, but they can. He said the other thing is that it is primarily an education

problem, and putting something in the Code does not educate anybody because nobody he knows sits around reading the County Code at night. He said he thinks the problem really needs to be addressed maybe in some other way than just to put a lot of language in the Code that really is not going to do much of anything, and, in some ways, he thinks it might actually be counterproductive right now. He said he will give Council a personal example; he and his neighbor get stray cats where they live and they take them in to get their shots and get them neutered. He said sometimes they become domestic cats, and sometimes they do not, but to hit a person with all this verbiage and tell them that if they are going to do this, they are going to have to read all of this, he thinks is actually going to be counterproductive. He said they do not really need any language to do the TNR. He said there is nothing in the State Code that requires anything in the County Code at all, and they can already do this. He explained, when they changed the law two years ago, they put that in just to make sure nobody would be accused of abandoning an animal, and that is why they did that, but it is wide open. He then asked, if the City is the problem, have they talked to the City Council or the Mayor, and, if so, are they just telling them to take a hike, to which Mrs. Nock responded, no, they have a meeting with them on March 16. Mr. Taylor said he thinks that is the root of trying to address their concern. Mr. Cannon asked Mr. Taylor if they already possibly have the authority? He said, if they look at Section 133-2, at the very bottom there is a definition that is called a trap-neuter-return program, and it specifically says a program approved in writing by the Animal Control Authority for humanely trapping, sterilizing, vaccinating for rabies, ear tipping, and returning community cats to their original location. He said that sounds to him like it already gives them that authority, they just have to have a program that is approved in writing, and he guesses it would have to be approved by this Body, to which Mr. Taylor responded, he does not know why there would need to be any Legislation, but he can look at that further. Mrs. Nock said they do not have those approvals, and it says that in the City Code as well, but they do not have those approvals.

Mr. Cannon suggested, as opposed to rewriting the entire ordinance based on Anne Arundel, they might be able to take Anne Arundel's verbiage and create their own program, and then Council could approve that or amend it however they might see fit, to which Mr. Taylor responded, that is not going to do anything. Mr. Davis added, that is still not solving the problem.

Ms. Karlene Morrison with Westside Animal Rescue then came before Council, and said her background is she is a PhD in zoology and animal behavior. She said, to speak to the County problem, if this Body does not do something from the County perspective, they have to think of it this way; she said the City is within the County, so if the City and County are at odds, it is just going to be a nightmare. She said there has to be at least some fundamental basis on the County level, and she thinks Mr. Cannon is absolutely right that, if it has already been done, they do not need to reinvent the wheel. She said, as far as verbiage, she lives in Nanticoke about as far out in the County as they can get, so she sees this all the time. She said people out there do not read the Code, but they do not have to read the Code to know if it is in the Code about cats that are ear tipped being part of what they call a managed colony. She said this is where she has been for the last 15 years, so if somebody calls her from Waterview and says there are ten cats in their back yard who are not neutered or spayed, she goes out and traps them, gets them neutered and spayed, and asks the people if they want them back. She explained, if they do not want them back, they try to adopt them, but if they want them and take them back, that now becomes a managed colony. She said there is a caretaker, which is the person who was feeding them before and taking care of them and is now willing to continue taking care of them, except now they are not breeding, they are vaccinated, and they are clean. She said, if there were kittens from that, they try to get them adopted. She said, if there are some that are older and they do not think they are adoptable but the person is willing to continue taking care of them, that now becomes a managed colony. She said they have the same problem in the County that people have in the City except they are a little further

apart. She said, in the County, the solution often is not to pick up the phone and call the Humane Society, but the solution is to take a gun, and she has lived there for almost 20 years. She said she has traps, and she can tell somebody she will give them the trap and she will come and check it. She said she has had people move into her neighborhood and call her to say they have only been there for two to three months and there are a bunch of cats in their backyard, and their neighbor told them to just put a saucer of antifreeze out. She said they also will sit on their deck with their gun, but she has people call her to say they do not want to be shooting a gun off their deck, and they do not want to kill these animals, and they do not want to put poison out. She said they need to know that, if these cats are ear tipped and have come from a managed colony, they are being taken care of. She said it is illegal to sit on a deck and shoot them or put poison out because their neighbor's cat, who is a domesticated cat, could wander across the yard and get into that dish of poison, and that is the problem in the rural area. She clarified, it is not as much of a problem as it is in the City because they have bigger spaces, so the cats have more places to roam. She said the problem in the City is that cats do not know the boundaries of neighbor's yards, or where there is a managed colony. She said cats do not recognize that, just like raccoons do not recognize it, bears do not recognize it, and deer do not recognize it. She said, in the County they have more space, but they still have the same problem.

Ms. Morrison said all of the people in the audience who are part of her group are paying for this out of their own pockets, and the amount of donations they get could be put on the head of a pin. She said she had a healthy 401k when she moved here, but it is gone. She said most of the people in the audience who do TNR are the ones putting the money out, and it comes out of their pockets. She said they then put the cats back in a managed colony where they have a caretaker who takes care of them, but because the cat wanders into somebody's backyard, it gets picked up and taken to the Humane Society after the money and time that has already been spent. She said it is a lot of time because they set traps that have to be checked every four to five hours to make sure something else is not caught in the trap, but they do all that, spend the money, and have this healthy cat that someone is willing to take care of, but then find out it is in the Humane Society. Mrs. Nock clarified, it is legal for a cat to be free roaming.

Mr. Dodd said they are running out of time, so they are probably going to have to schedule another Work Session, to which Mrs. Nock responded, and they will probably have to schedule with the City as well because that is the majority of the problem.

Mr. Taylor said he does not think the Anne Arundel County ordinance addresses the problem they have mentioned. He clarified, if somebody pulls a gun out and shoots a cat, he does not think that is really addressed in that ordinance, but he thinks they might actually have something in their ordinance now. He said a lot of this is kind of hard to change just by writing some laws.

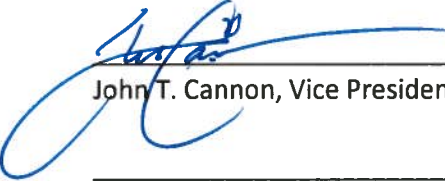
Mr. Hastings said they briefly mentioned \$100 for the cost of keeping a cat, and then it was said it can eventually be \$16,000. He then asked if they have specific numbers when it comes to per cat costs, to which Mrs. Nock responded, that is the average that has been calculated in general. She said it varies, and the City would probably be different than the County because they are not physically sending Animal Control Officers out to do the work. Mr. Hastings asked if the \$100 is per cat, to which Mrs. Nock responded, yes. She said it has been documented in other studies, and that is the figure they came up with. She said, since she has been there, they have sent 168 cats to the Community Cat Coalition instead of euthanizing them, so that has basically saved \$16,000. She said the whole no-kill thing is so big right now, and they want their figures to be respectable, and they want to be respected by the community, but they cannot be respected by the community if there are not some sort of regulations on killing mass amounts of cats. Ms. Morrison added, most of the people here go to a variety of conventions every year,

and at the last convention she went to, Sally Cats Alley, there were representatives from major cities all across the country, and they had figures over a three to four-year period of how much money was saved by getting away from trap and kill, and going to TNR, and the figures are astounding. She clarified, they need to do their homework, they need to collect the data, and they need to know what they are talking about, but in some cases, depending on how large the City is, they are talking about millions of dollars, or thousands of dollars a year that the taxpayers are not paying to do repetitive work. Mrs. Nock added, unfortunately, because she is fairly new to her position, as Council knows, things were not handled very well prior to her getting this job, so it is really hard for her to go back and pull data because she has actually found complete discrepancies on the amount of animals they even took into their facility, so she would not even want to try to do it with the figures she has been left with. She clarified, since she started, she has tried to document what these organizations have helped them with.


Ms. Lark Abelson with Town Cats came before Council and said nine times out of ten an established colony will keep out other cats, and that is just the way it works. She clarified, they may let one or two in occasionally, but, for the most part, a stabilized colony will keep strangers from coming in.


Mr. Dodd said he thinks they have a lot of work ahead of them, and he appreciates them introducing this to Council, and he thanks everyone for what they do. He suggested Mrs. Nock get in touch with Mrs. Hurley after she works something out with the City and gets some idea on what they are doing because it looks like they have a lot of work ahead of them. Mrs. Nock said it is not a quick fix. Mr. Dodd again thanked them, and Mrs. Nock said they appreciate Council's time. There was no further discussion.

  
Larry W. Dodd, President, District 3

  
John T. Cannon, Vice President, At-Large

Ernest F. Davis, District 1

  
Nicole Aale, District 2

  
Josh Hastings, District 4

  
Joe Holloway, District 5

  
William R. McCain, At-Large

  
Laura Hurley, Council Administrator