

Report: Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control Meeting, 9/2/10

It was not a "formal" public meeting with sections of uninterrupted presentation, but more on the lines of the previous meetings times 10. There were approximately 15 or so L.A. County Kennel Group members and at least that many, probably more, of various Rescue, Last Chance for Animals, Best Friends, etc. people. I think the employees of Last Chance and Best Friends outnumbered the volunteers that came with them.

Marcia Mayeda only had a few major points to which she wanted to address. Marcia had already visited with several of the show kennel owners, so had been prepped and understood the rationale behind the kennel owners' objections.

Some of Marcia's were not really in contention.

Kennel run size.

One of her issues was how to create enough appropriate space in kennel runs/places of the dogs' primary occupancy without employing the 3x the length of the dog's body as proposed in the most recent draft. She seemed to understand and accept that using that formula would make too wide an area to be practical. People discussed square footage depending on the dog, which might work.

Some thought that it could go by weight, but that isn't realistic as a basset hound might have similar weight as a German shorthair, yet require less area for their run. The kennel owners also brought up that there are standard sizes of runs based on pre-manufactured panels, etc. and that customizing beyond that could be very costly.

A disagreement occurred when kennel owners said their experience showed that sometimes a dog needs a smaller kennel because of high drive and fence running, not fence fighting, but fence running. The Best Friend, Last Chance people were adamant that proper socialization, exercise and training would avoid all fence running. That there was something wrong if the dog ran the fence. Those who know dogs, and know that sometimes it is just the dog's drive, immediately opposed this.

One of the kennel owners proposed a tier violations of offending kennels. Anyway, some form of fine and prohibition of sales that would escalate with non-conformance. Also, increased numbers of inspections and reinspections paid for by the violators. Somebody suggested that that should apply for all kennels not just commercial ones.

Inspections could also be based on the number of breeding dogs that people were licensed to have. 'Say up to 50 dogs -- one annual inspection. Up to 75 -- 2. Up to 100 -- 3, etc. with annual fees also on a sliding scale based on number of breeding dogs.

Throughout the meeting, it was repeatedly brought up that DACC inspections were random and unannounced. In fact, one of our "main" speakers had just been inspected before she came to the meeting.

Stacked cages.

The Kennel Group reiterated again that they were talking about stacking in the context of temporary crating, weather situations, grooming, etc. Also that rarely do stacks go more than a few high.

Marcia said that the concern was stacks several "cages" high with just wire flooring, with no pans, etc. She was asked if she ever saw that in L.A. County and replied that she did not.

Another approach would be that if there was stacked cages, that people would be asked to show inspectors a larger, more permanent housing situation for the dogs. That stacked kennels might be acceptable as temporary "housing," but that there would need to be other accommodations as well.

Wire flooring.

Marcia was asked if there was any licensed kennels that had wire flooring other than areas where puppies, before weaning, were kept with their dam, or where convalescing animals were held. She said no, and that there was a hard surface in addition to the wire -- usually coated -- flooring, and the dam seemed to be removed from the pups for pottyng. One woman from the kennel owners group explained about HogWire, which they never heard of. One of the handlers mentioned that many coated breeds were kept in what is called "Cocker Crates" to maintain their coat and to prevent it from breaking. Long flowing coats can be destroyed for showing if the dogs are allowed to be on gravel or run through stickers, etc. They are taken out for exercise on lawn or another non-breaking surface.

Vet visits.

Here there were some fireworks. One man, a VERY good, assertive and well-spoken kennel owner, made quite a presentation about the ability of kennel owners to evaluate their dogs. He said that to use the money available to take each dog to the vet once a year without a specific reason was a waste of money, and created a hardship when Vets were truly needed. One of the kennel owners said that she had just spent over \$6,000 unsuccessfully trying to save a dog. That's what the money should be for, not a visit that didn't tell the owner anything, and the dog might get sick one month later. Our "guy" spoke again about liability to the vet, and that if he said the dog was o.k. and it wasn't, the vet could be sued. Our man got the room to erupt into shouts and moans when he said that kennel owners want the best for their dogs -- they want them to be healthy, have good pups and have a good product to sell to the buyers. The word "product" started the mouths.

The ARs suggested that vet techs go out with the inspectors, but Marcia said that the budget was not there for that.

Also, the kennel owners expressed concern over the sanitation aspect of vet techs inspecting multiple dogs in a given day and possibly spreading disease from one kennel to another.

The two hours were up and Marcia never got to the issue of how many and at what ages a dog can be bred. As she said, the two sides would never agree on that, and she knew it.

Then Jennifer from Best Friends said she was sitting there in the back of the room watching all the smiling and laughing, and but that it wasn't a laughing matter. Mark from Best Friends repeatedly said the only way to address the issue was a cap of 50 breeding animals. He talked about the horrible conditions at a raid from which he just returned in Hawaii. That's all he wanted to harp on, a cap of 50 breeding animals. One of the kennel owners mentioned the longtime kennels that had hundreds of dogs, kept immaculately, with lots of trained staff. Mark rudely commented that there were no Rockefellers or Dodges in the Antelope Valley.

The kennel owners repeatedly kept trying to make the point that it was the Department that had failed in their responsibilities to inspect the substandard kennels.

Sup. Antonovich's deputy, Norm Hickling, asked the kennel group who had 50 intact bitches? Somebody said, "Like we would say?" 1/2 the room laughed, and the other 1/2 glared. Then he changed and asked if some would say how many breeding dogs they had. A few people answered, but not everybody. It is the consensus that Hickling/Antonovich is trying to pacify Best Friends by a 50 breeding dog cap. The kennel group replied with very good points regarding why that should not be. One was that it has been shown that 50 one year would be downwardly reduced in following years. Another response was that breeders grow out dogs and don't know in advance who'll be worthy or appropriate to breed. Also, that dogs aren't bred every year, so there's also the aspect of genetic diversity.

When Norm mentioned World Kennels, the kennel that made the news a few years ago for awful conditions and too many dogs, he was asked (and didn't answer) if, when the problem had been brought to DACC's attention, didn't the rules in place then deal with the situation? But BF Mark said that they had to take 60 of the 200 dogs (the kennel exceeded what their license permitted). That restarted talking about what happens if kennels are over their permitted limit. Do they all get killed? Anyway, BF Mark just kept pushing for a cap of 50, and the kennel owners kept saying, "enforcement, fine the violators and make them pay for more inspections"

The kennel owners basically pointed out that sufficient rules were already on the books and were working pretty effectively, but had not been enforced consistently. A tiered inspection program with more frequent inspections of kennels with larger numbers of breeding animals would remedy that. DACC knows who the violators are and this would give them the tools to inspect & cite more often.

There apparently are ~8-10 questionable substandard kennels in LA County, mostly with small dogs, out in the Little Rock area. The point is that DACC already knows whom they need to be supervising.

It was 4 o'clock and Marcia simply said, "You can stay and debate if you want, but we are going." I think all the kennel members just got up and left.