

Joint Statement on the Humane Society funding issue

Sevier County Government, along with the cities of Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge and Sevierville, released the following statement:

Over the course of the last several months, Sevier County Government along with the cities of Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge and Sevierville have been working diligently to address the additional funding requests by the Sevier County Humane Society. The county and city governments operate budget-wise on a fiscal year basis beginning July 1 as opposed to the Humane Society which operates on a calendar year basis. For this current fiscal year 2015-2016, the total contributions for the operation of the shelter by all governments were \$190,000. In addition, the county and each city have together committed to a five year plan to provide \$750,000 in capital funds for a new shelter.

In addition to a request for an additional \$45,000 to bridge an operating funding gap until July 1, 2016 when the new fiscal year begins for each government, the Sevier County Humane Society is requesting \$391,000 in operating funds from the governments for fiscal year 2016-2017. This represents an increase of \$201,000 or over double the current amount of operating funds. This request for a significant increase in funding comes as the animal shelter intake of animals has decreased from a high of 5,000 in 2009 to less than 3,000 in 2014. As would be the case with any department, office or organization requesting such a drastic increase, each government is committed to thoroughly reviewing the request to understand why such a large increase of funding is needed with total animal intake decreasing. This normally is a part of each government's budget process which is currently in progress.

In reviewing the request, it was noted that expense reports as provided by the Humane Society reflect a fairly consistent trend of total expenses over the last seven years, averaging around \$400,000. However, their budget for 2016 was \$540,000, representing a 33% increase from the prior year expenses and a 35% increase from the seven year average. The funding increase is made up of several factors including a few small increases for a variety of areas: \$9,000 for facilities, \$20,000 for animals, and \$10,000 for administrative costs. However, the largest proposed increase of funding, around \$118,000 from prior year expenses and around \$101,000 from the seven year average, would go toward personnel expenses. Certainly the governments of Sevier County are not opposed to funding proper staffing of the shelter; however, the Humane Society decided to increase this expense, including additional personnel and the addition of employees to their health insurance, without first consulting with the governments to ensure adequate funds for these management decisions. Unfortunately, the Sevier County Humane Society has chosen to mount a publicity campaign implying the problem is simply a lack of funding from the governments of Sevier County. The fact is this is a

complex issue that should have necessitated a better line of communication during their decision to change the management of the shelter.

Sevier County, Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge and Sevierville are committed to creating a safe, healthy and comfortable environment for animals that may need to come under the care of an animal shelter. We applaud the citizens of Sevier County, volunteers and businesses that have and continue to support the care of animals in our area. We hope that we are able to continue working through these issues with the Sevier County Humane Society as the provider of these services.