



Clark County Commission on Aging
1300 Franklin Street, 6th Floor
Vancouver, Washington

MEETING NOTES

Wednesday, November 20, 2019
4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Nancy Dong, Amy Gross, Franklin Johnson, Marjorie Ledell, Meghan McCarthy, Linda O’Leary, Larry Smith, Pam Wheeler

Absent: Chuck Green

1. Welcome and call to order

Larry Smith opened the meeting.

Approval of agenda

The agenda was approved.

Approval of meeting minutes

The October 16 meeting minutes were approved.

Excused absence

Chuck Green was excused from the meeting.

2. Presentation: Older Adults and Pets: Health Benefits and Challenges

Details on each presentation are available in the CVTV video recording and presentation slides.

Presenters: *Cheri Martin and Bob Libby, Humane Society of Southwest Washington*

Presentation highlights:

- Why do we love animals? They’re honest, they need us, they don’t yell at us, and they love us unconditionally.
- Matchmaking:
 - Making certain we do everything we can to ensure a pet will be a good fit in its new home is an extremely important part of what we do at Humane Society of Southwest Washington (HSSW). A typical starting point in the matchmaking process is to ask, “What are you looking for in a pet? Do you already lead a fairly active lifestyle, or are you looking for a friend to help stay on track with a new exercise routine? Do you have allergies? Do you have a yard? Are there other pets in the home? Are there children in the home or grandchildren who visit?”



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- Physical limitations or mobility issues can make taking a dog outside for bathroom breaks and walks difficult. For a person in this type of situation we talk with them about considering adoption a cat. Faced with difficulties in getting around easily, a cat can make a fantastic companion. They can be left to their own devices a good bit longer than a dog and are so easy to entertain that they practically do it for themselves. Cats don't usually ask for much, and most cats are perfectly content to sit in a sunny spot on the floor and silently judge you.
- Previous experience with pets is another important consideration. For an adopter who's never had a pet before, a high energy puppy or an aloof cat that is sensitive to handling may not be the most appropriate choices. An adult or senior dog who's already had basic obedience training or a super chilled out lap cat are likely to be much better options for a first time, older pet owner.
- What sort of personality is going to be the best fit? Part of what makes dogs and cats such wonderful companions is that, just like us, they have their own unique personalities and quirks. Some people prefer a very outgoing, active pet with a ton of personality, while others may get along best with the opposite type of animal. The best way to get a sense for what an animal's personality is, is to spend some time getting to know them. You may not going learn everything, but you can certainly learn enough to know whether it might be a good fit for you and your lifestyle.
- Cat or dog?
 - Cats:
 - It's hard to imagine a more ideal small friend than a cat. You're probably not going to go for long walks on the beach with your cat – although, never say never – but there are some things about cats that really set them apart as companion animals. Plenty of cat people will probably disagree, but they're a fairly low maintenance animal that doesn't ask for much. For someone who has physical limitations that make things like taking a dog out to use the bathroom or for a walk difficult or impossible, cats can be a fantastic option. They're much easier to care for and very easy to entertain. A warm lap and belly rubs are often all a cat needs, and those belly rubs and pets can be incredibly calming and rewarding for the person giving them. Cats are often allowed in apartments or senior communities where dogs are not.
 - According to a 2016 study by Oregon State University, cats may in fact enjoy social interaction with people more than food. A group of 50 cats were denied food, toys, scents, and interaction with humans for a period of several hours. Once the four stimuli were reintroduced, 50% of the cats chose people over the other options.
 - Dogs:
 - A study conducted by the Mayo clinic¹ reported those who gain the most from having a pet are dog owners. Having a dog is a great motivator to adopt a more active lifestyle. According to the American Heart Association, dog owners are 54% more likely to get the recommended amount of exercise than their non-dog owning

¹ [1] Terri Malloy, "Your heart's best friend: Dog ownership associated with better cardiovascular health", Mayo Clinic, [newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/your-hearts-best-friend-dog-ownership-associated-with-better-cardiovascular-health/](https://www.mayoclinic.org/discussion/your-hearts-best-friend-dog-ownership-associated-with-better-cardiovascular-health/), August 23rd, 2019

- counterparts. As just about any dog owner will tell you, play time and physical affection are incredibly rewarding...not only for the dog!
- Dogs can help keep you safe! Studies have shown that barking dogs help deter burglaries and other violent attacks. With their heightened senses of hearing and smell, dogs can detect things you can't and alert you to possible danger like fire, carbon monoxide poisoning.
 - What are the benefits of pet ownership?
 - Pets give people purpose, keep them active and provide companionship. Pets are the great connectors to other people.
 - Pet Owners are Healthier:
 - A recent study comparing cardiovascular health scores of pet owners to non-pet owners found people with pets report a higher level of physical activity which often leads to healthier blood sugar levels, lower blood pressure, and decreased stress.
 - Pets boost your immune system: There are a number of studies that indicate owning a dog [improves immunity](#) by exposing [us to microbes](#) we wouldn't otherwise encounter in our clean indoor environments and by boosting our levels of immunoglobulin A, an antibody that plays an important part in immune systems.
 - A cat purring is one of the most comforting sounds in the world and while it certainly means your cat is happy and comfortable, the sound has also been long associated with a therapeutic healing ability on human bones and muscle.
 - While these health benefits are important for people of all ages, they become much more critical as we age.
 - Pet Owners are Happier:
 - A recent poll conducted by the AARP² found that pet ownership helps people enjoy life and feel loved. Older adults living alone or facing difficulties with their health, say a pet helps them cope with their emotional and physical symptoms and helps to take their mind off the pain.
 - Seniors can often spend a number of days without any social interaction. Interaction with a cat and or dog can create connection and company.
 - Adopting a pet is often a great move for people with anxiety because dogs and cats can reduce stress and anxiety. Just petting an animal [seems to reduce stress](#) in the short term. You see dogs in court rooms, hospitals, nursing homes, classrooms, and airports. In those settings, they make [people in stressful situations](#) feel better.
 - If you have a dog, you've probably noticed that he's pretty good at facilitating interactions with other people when he drags you out of the house to go on a walk. You'll probably have more conversations with strangers when you're walking with your dog versus [when you walk alone](#), and some of those strangers might even become your friends.
 - Any pet owner probably has plenty of anecdotal evidence that owning and interacting with a pet can improve your mood. A review of numerous recent studies determined that there's evidence for animals'

² [2] University of Michigan, National Poll on Healthy Aging, www.healthvagingpoll.org/report/how-pets-contribute-healthy-aging, April 3rd, 2019

- ability to [promote a positive mood](#) in the people who interact with them. And most people know that spending time with a dog increases your levels of oxytocin, also called the “love hormone.”³
- Pets are Therapeutic – Even if You Don’t Own One:
 - Where health issues or living restrictions don’t allow for having a pet, visitation therapy can provide many of the same benefits. These visits can help to ease feelings of loneliness and depression, as well as providing opportunities for social interaction. Regular visits from a therapy animal become an enjoyable routine that an older person can quickly learn to look forward to.
 - Visiting with an animal can be a soothing, enjoyable experience for someone who has difficulty with speech or hearing. Pets are good listeners no matter how you choose to communicate with them. For someone who wants to talk but may not be comfortable sharing certain things with friends or family members, a therapy animal can offer a chance to share without fear of judgement. And the affection they return is unconditional.
 - Even a short visit with a therapy animal provides an opportunity to feel like you’re caring for them. Giving treats, grooming, belly rubs, and short walks are as rewarding for the person as they are for the animal. In addition, these activities can be great for helping with basic physical skills.
 - Challenges of Pet Ownership⁴.
 - Financial Worries: include significant medical expenses and ongoing care – flea and tick medication, cost of food, grooming, etc. For people on a pension, the costs of pet ownership may be prohibitive, or they may elect to spend money on a pet at the expense of food or other items for themselves.
 - Mobility and Health: for seniors with mobility and other health issues that make getting around more difficult, having a pet can become problematic. Dogs need to go outside for bathroom breaks. Some breeds, especially if the dog is young, can need a fair amount of physical activity and mental stimulation every day. In particular, for this age group, which may be less mobile and more likely to have balance issues, pets (and their accoutrements such as pet beds and food bowls) can be a tripping hazard. A dog or cat getting under foot can present a substantial risk, especially when mobility issues are part of the equation. Pets are responsible for approximately 86,000 injuries related to trips and falls each year. Roughly 88% of the falls are from dogs, while cats are responsible for around 11%.⁵
 - A Pet’s Life Expectancy: For older adults, the possibility that they may be outlived by their pets can be a very real and distressing concern. Cats have a life expectancy approaching 20 years, and dogs aren’t that far behind. It’s a very good idea for everyone, not just seniors, to put down in writing how pets will be

³ <https://www.cheatsheet.com/culture/ways-pets-improve-your-life.html/>

⁴ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fellow-creatures/201906/the-challenges-and-benefits-pet-ownership-seniors>

⁵ [3] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, www.cdc.gov/dogscats, March 27th, 2009

- cared for if something should happen to their owner and talk through possible options for pets with caregivers and family members, so everyone knows what they would like to happen in the worst-case scenarios.
- Finding Pet Friendly Housing: Seniors with pets may delay moving into care homes or assisted living, even past the point when they are able to live independently because those homes do not take pets. Friends and family may discourage seniors from getting a pet due to concerns about who will take care of the animal if the person has to move into an assisted living facility.
 - Community Resources for Pet Owners:
 - Pet Food Programs
 - CHOW

The CHOW program provides supplemental food to more than 850 families in Clark County. Recipients are able to come to the shelter once a month and collect dog and cat food, treats, and litter.
 - Animeals

HSSW provides pet food to the Animeals program, run by Second Chance Companions. The food is then distributed to Meals on Wheels recipients, folks in assisted living and senior facilities, and to area food banks.
 - Food Pantries

Pet food is also distributed to area food pantries through our partnership with the Clark County Food Bank.
 - Veterinary Assistance, HELP Program: Our HELP program was created to provide financial assistance to low-income folks, to help with the cost of urgent care for their pets. There is limited funding available which means we have to be judicious in our distribution of funds and there is a maximum benefit of \$750 per animal.
 - Emergency Boarding: Because seniors with pets may be less likely to visit the doctor or agree to hospitalization if they worry about their pet, HSSW will care for pets while someone is in a hospital or otherwise unable to care for their pets due to an emergency situation for up to 30 days. We also work with YWCA SafeChoice to provide the same service to women seeking shelter from domestic violence situations.
 - Home Again Guardian Program: As we mentioned earlier, oftentimes seniors worry that having a pet late in life might mean the pet will outlive them. HSSW created Home Again Guardian Program to deal with this concern as a part of our estate planning program. Through the Home Again program, HSSW will immediately take pets of people who have passed and place them in foster care until a new home is identified.
 - Homeless Shelters: some local shelters allow pets. Otherwise, the HSSW will hold animals. One reason people don't enter shelters is because of their pets.
 - Keeping Families Together Initiative: Family = a person and a pet. The two major reasons pet owners surrender animals are 1) they can't afford vet care, or 2) behavior issues. We are building urgent vet funding for low income families that will be offered on a sliding scale. We are partnering with local veterinarians to open up appointments on the same sliding scale. We anticipate this effort will open up about 5000 appointments for the local community. Vets are very happy about this because they take calls and have to say no when people are unable to pay for services. We are also starting a behavior education

training center – where anyone can bring their animal if they are having trouble with training a pet.

- Free Wellness Clinics for the Homeless: this is a free service where community vets and shelter vets provide animal care. The clinics offer exam, flea/tick, shots, leashes, sweaters, food, etc. We will start offering these monthly starting in 2020.

Q&A and Comments from Commission on Aging:

- **Nancy:** How many animals are “returns” or “exchanges”? **Response:** It happens, typically within a week of taking an animal home. We will take animals back and provide a credit towards a different animal, if returned within a certain time period. We want as few barriers as possible.
- **Nancy:** Is HSSW a no kill shelter? **Response:** We are an open admission shelter. We accept all animal control animals, even if an animal is very sick or a danger to public safety. If the only humane thing to do is euthanize the animal, then we do euthanize. “No kill” is not a term we are using anymore. Some shelters are not open admission and can turn away pets.
- **Marjorie:** How many HSSW volunteers are seniors? **Response:** Roughly 2/3.
- **Larry:** When client come in to adopt an animal, how deeply into their personal life do you go? **Response:** It depends on the person and how much they want to share.
- **Nancy:** if a person has certain health challenges, i.e. is blind or deaf, do you have specialized therapy animals. **Response:** there are really specialized programs for service animals. If someone needs specifically trained animal, the shelter won't be the one providing it. Sometimes organizations will pick shelter animals to become service pets.
- **Amy:** what if someone has an emergency medical event, like a heart attack? **Response:** Clark County animal control responds and bring pets to the humane society. We accept any stray regardless of circumstances. We would try to find some kind of information, even if it is just a family member contact to find out the situation. We have an emergency boarding program called Safe Haven, which covers things like an unexpected hospital visit. We hold pets up to 30-days at no charge. If there is a situation where the pet owner may not be able to resume pet care, we will give the pet to family if possible, or make it available for adoption.
- **Linda:** many people's home location changes as they age. Do you have any stats on how often a person can take a pet to a nursing home? **Response:** I don't know the exact number, but this does happen. We get lots of phone calls with older people getting ready to move into assisted living, or in situations where it is no longer practical to have a pet anymore. We probably had 3-4 cases this week.
- **Marjorie:** are there any policies you would like to see in place with the County to improve your relationship with animal control? **Response:** the more info they can provide, the better, but they don't always know the full story. We can ask our admissions supervisor for policy suggestions. Animal control meets with our admissions department monthly.
- **Linda:** are there other shelters that help you out? **Response:** if we don't have room, we contact the humane society locations in the West Columbia Gorge and Cowlitz County.
- **Pam:** do we have a foster program? **Response:** our emergency boarding program is not foster based. Our foster program is cat-centric, i.e. stray kittens. We have roughly 300 volunteers who foster for HSSW.

- **Amy:** is there a pet trust program? **Response:** you can set-up a plan for your pet through our planned giving department. **Amy:** what is the cost? **Response:** it has to be part of the planned giving program but I am not sure about the minimum.
- **Franklin:** can you talk about the aspect of dealing with homeless people and their pets and how much impact it has? **Response:** Some people don't think that homeless people should have pets. A study done in the UK, however, showed homeless pets are often in better condition than many other pets. We offer clinics for homeless pet owners on a set day of the month, and we anticipate at least 50 visits each clinic. We are also working with Council for the Homeless with our staff and volunteers to better work with the homeless community. We are also part of Project Homeless Connect-, where we will provide a pet clinic at the Navigation Center and then shuttle participants to the resource fair at another location, and vis versa. We will also help with the point in time count. We think there are about 660 homeless families in Clark County with pets.
- **Franklin:** when you get mass donations, such as with a hoarding case, is there any socialization/assessment before placing pets? **Response:** yes. Typically there is an investigation into the situation and we just hold the pets. Then we provide medical treatment. You could have pets that are really scared or may never have been socialized. Every animal goes through a behavior assessment and has a behavior plan written.

Q&A and Comments from Public:

None

3. Debrief: What have we heard? Potential recommendations? Request(s) for more information?

- **Linda:** we need to note in our findings that seniors could spend longer without human interaction because they have a pet at home.
- **Marjorie:** we could include resources described in our annual report, we could include the statistic about the number of volunteers at HSSW who are older adults, and we could include the statistics shared on homeless families and their pets
- **Marjorie:** in an annual report inset box, we could call out the three new HSSW programs.
- **Nancy:** because of direct relationship between contact with pets and wellbeing for seniors, is there an outreach program where animals are brought to community centers, or another location, as a service, or to foster adoption? **Response:** it has happened in the past and was not received well if we charged for the service. We have talked about it, i.e. an emergency boarding foster program, where you could bring animals either to private homes or an assisted living center. It's finding the right animals and making sure they behave. This is more of a challenge then it used to be because of health and behavior issues, but it would be a great idea.
- **Linda:** our speakers mentioned people going into assisted living can't always take their pets, but as aging population up, this may be something that becomes a larger issue in the future.
- **Franklin:** with apartment rentals, do you know senior living and pet stats? **Response:** there are typically pet size restrictions and in assisted living facilities, the pets may only be allowed in certain areas of the facility. Also, it typically costs more to bring a pet with you. At an assisted living facility, often services are provided to walk your animal for you. Because more and more older adults want to bring their pets with them, the centers are starting to be more accommodating.

- **Amy:** do you do disaster response with animals? **Response:** we are part of the animal control response for Clark County. There is a plan to take animals if something happens in the county, and, there is a plan if something were to happen to our HSSW space.
- **Amy:** are you happy with animal control resources? **Response:** yes.
- **Nancy:** are you purely funded by fundraising and donations? **Response:** We are funded through our contracts with the county and cities and with donations, fundraising and grants.

4. 2019 Findings and Recommendations

- Public comment on recommendations – none
- Motion to approve the 2019 findings and recommendations with the inclusion of edits discussed during our work session such as recognizing outstanding food gardens and facilitating permitting for fresh food trucks, and to include the findings and recommendations on pets just discussed.
- The commission approved the recommended motion to approve the 2019 findings and recommendations with the suggested revisions.

5. Public Comment - none

6. New Business, Updates and Announcements:

- There will be no CoA meeting in December.
- The next Commission on Aging meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 15, 2020 and will be a joint meeting with the County Council.

7. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:40pm.

The Clark County Commission on Aging provides leadership and creates community engagement in addressing the needs and opportunities of aging.