

Animal ordinance goes into effect after years of work

By Trish Hernandez

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On Saturday (Oct. 10) the new Taos County Animal Ordinance went into law and is enforceable. The writing of this ordinance has been a long, arduous and grueling process in my opinion — an informed opinion, none the less, as my involvement and participation began in 2012.

In 2012 I approached the county commissioners and manager to have the Taos County Animal Control Advisory Board reinstated to update the 2011 ordinance. They approved after listening to my reasons for the update.

I put together a small group of people to serve on this board and we went to work on writing the ordinance, meeting regularly with then-Taos County Manager Steve Archuleta. The criteria I used in choosing the board members were their knowledge of the animal challenges in our county of Taos. Also, I considered their experience in animal welfare, advocacy and knowledge of the laws in our county, state as well as national animal organizations, such as the ASPCA and Humane Society of the United States. We were very fortunate to have on the board, a woman who was very well-connected with these national organizations.

The animal ordinance took months to write. Much research was done and we attempted to present the best set of animal laws serving all the people in our county. We knew, of course, not everyone was going to abide by the laws and would protest.

Honestly, we did not all agree at times and had to come to good compromises. It was tough and my commitment was so strong that I kept on going even when I felt defeated.

My animal advocacy in our community began around 1999 – 2000. Having been in “the trenches” working on our animal challenges, I often felt discouraged and actually went to manager Archuleta and attempted to resign from the board even though I was the chair. Archuleta helped me through this and I kept my commitment to the commissioners.

This is all very personal, but there has been so much that went into this ordinance and in the public eye, I feel many people hold me solely responsible. I get email, comments on Facebook, etc. from citizens who are very angry about the animal laws. Yes, I did start the process, but as you will see I hardly finished it.

When the board completed the new ordinance it was handed to Archuleta and he gave it to county attorney Robert Malone to make sure we stayed within the boundaries of the state animal statute. I thought it was finally over, but *au contraire*, it had just begun! Due to the fact that animal control dealt directly with Stray Hearts Animal Shelter and parts of the ordinance affected our shelter, a hold was put on the commissioners signing a resolution.

The animal shelter was dealing with a situation that was damaging and it took a long while for the shelter to emerge even stronger than before. Negotiations with the shelter were basically at a standstill and the animal ordinance was in limbo. More time passed. At the current time negotiations have resumed and the shelter has a good working situation with the county with both working towards the best compromise in their contract.

Free at last? No. A new animal ordinance was introduced to the county from a man who, without any authorization, took it upon himself to replace the boards' ordinance. The county was now looking at both ordinances and wanting to take the best from each. Time went on and now we are in 2014. By this time I am feeling what was all the work for? It was getting way too complicated and I still felt unless you have worked with our animal challenges, it was just an intellectual pursuit.

Rumors were like a wildfire with people reacting after hearing wrong and misinformed information. Commissioners were hearing from their angry constituents and reacting. All I wanted was "out" as the complaints were many times directed at me. It was just a mess. Being a "public figure" in animal advocacy and known by many to be involved with writing the animal ordinance, I am often targeted. I get that. Commissioner Tom Blankenhorn formed an animal ordinance committee with the goal of bringing the ordinance to a final conclusion enabling it to be resubmitted and signed by the commissioners into law. An announcement to the public was put in the legal section of *The Taos News* giving the date of the commissioner's meeting that it would be passed and so it was.

Please, upon reading the new animal ordinance, direct your comments to our county commissioners. The commissioners approved the ordinance and had a strong influence in the changes. Personally, I stand by the ordinance and put my concerns into enforcement through animal control and the Sheriff's Department. A new animal control officer will start in a few days for the county and there will be two county ACO's again. Call dispatch (575) 758-2216 or 758-2217 for your animal reports.

That is it folks. This is how it all happened!

Contact Trish Hernandez at taosbark@gmail.com or (575) 741-5149.



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