



MEDIA RELEASE

Lincoln County Board of Commissioners

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COMMISSIONERS TO CONSIDER ANIMAL SHELTER MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT AT UPCOMING PUBLIC MEETINGS

A proposal to transfer management of the Lincoln County Animal Shelter to a local non-profit organization will be considered by the County Commissioners at two upcoming public meetings.

If approved by the commissioners, the agreement would see FOLCAS, the Friends of the Lincoln County Animal Shelter, take over operation of the facility.

The draft agreement is now available for review on the county's website, <http://www.co.lincoln.or.us>. The public is encouraged to review the document before the two Board of Commissioners meetings are held. There will be opportunity to provide comment on the proposal at those meetings, which are scheduled for 6 p.m. on Wednesday, September 14 in the Hennings Auditorium of the Hatfield Marine Science Center (visitor's center) in South Beach and 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, September 28th at the Courthouse in Newport.

"We realize this is an issue of intense interest to many members of the public," said Commissioner Bill Hall, who participated in a series of meetings with the FOLCAS board of directors to develop the proposal. "We believe the draft agreement addresses the issues of standards of animal care, oversight of public funds and the long-term viability of the shelter."

In the spring of 2009, Sheriff Dennis Dotson, whose office is responsible for operation of the shelter, proposed that the facility be closed to the public and the operation be scaled back to only house animals brought in by animal control and law enforcement officers. This proposal came in response to an unprecedented decline in revenues in the county's general fund that led to staff and service cuts throughout the organization.

A public outcry over the shelter plan ensued, leading to the creation of FOLCAS. FOLCAS, the Commissioners and Sheriff crafted a one-year funding plan to keep the shelter open and a five-year shelter operating levy, which also funded three animal control positions, was placed on the November 2009 ballot. FOLCAS was active in the campaign to pass the measure, which voters approved by a 71 percent margin.

"It's important to look at the option of a public-private partnership," said Commissioner Don Lindly. "Animal control would remain with the county. The county would continue to have an active voice in the day-to-day management of the shelter through an oversight committee. We would also monitor the distribution and use of levy monies for the shelter."

Under the proposal, FOLCAS would develop an operating budget for the shelter, and the county would make quarterly payments to the organization. FOLCAS would agree to provide an annual audit or financial review as long as it receives public funds, with those reports to be made available on its website.

Current shelter employees would be transferred to the FOLCAS payroll. Under Oregon law, the nonprofit would have to maintain employees' current salaries for one year.

“The simple reality is that our financial situation is still very challenging,” said Commission Chair Terry Thompson. “We have cut about 15 percent of our workforce. We are continuing to struggle to provide legally mandated services, which makes it very difficult to look at maintaining programs that are not within our legal mandates.”

Commissioner Hall said: “People have asked me why we want to fix something that isn’t broken. I want to make it clear that our consideration of this plan has nothing to do with the commissioners’ feelings about the quality of the shelter operation under the Sheriff, which have been very good. But the reality is that our costs are going to continue to grow faster than our revenues for some time to come, and it’s important that we look for ways to maintain services like this while containing the growth of expenses.”

Hall said the Sheriff has been at the table for some of the meetings with FOLCAS, and his questions and perspective have been helpful in shaping the proposal, although he has not endorsed it.

Commissioner Lindly added: “People have said it’s risky to entrust the shelter to an organization that hasn’t previously managed a facility of this type. There may be truth in that, but there’s also a risk in counting on the continued willingness of voters to approve additional taxes at the same, or an increased level.” The agreement states that the county believes a reduced levy will likely be needed when the current levy expires in order to continue funding for animal control as well as paying to house animals brought to the facility by law enforcement.

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