Town Fire Marshal Closes Pet Rescue Shelter for Numerous Fire and Building Code Violations

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Farmingville, NY – On Wednesday, March 30, a Brookhaven Town Fire Marshal and a Law Investigator responded to a citizen complaint about an animal shelter operating as Friends of Freddie Pet Rescue at 200 Middle Country Road in Middle Island. The action to close down the premises by the Town comes only one month after a fire killed 14 dogs that were being housed in an illegal puppy store in Coram. In that case, the business owner had failed to obtain construction and change of use permits.

The Town will issue tickets to Friends of Freddie Pet Rescue and Aldrich Management for interior alterations without a permit, not having a certificate of occupancy for pet adoption and for a storage shed in rear of building that is not on the site plan. Tickets will also be issued to Paws Unite People, and Hough and Guidice for not having a valid certificate of occupancy.

Upon arrival at the Friends of Freddie Pet Rescue, the Fire Marshal and a Law Investigator were granted access to the space. It was found that approximately 100 dogs were being kept in a 4,600 square foot area encompassing four tenant spaces in the building. A review of town records related to the building indicated that certificates of compliance and certificates of occupancy for individual tenant spaces did not exist, and no permits had been applied for to date. Throughout the inspection of the premises, animal rescue staff were cooperative and attempted to make the necessary arrangements to relocate all of the dogs.

During the inspection of the premises, it was discovered that some marked exit doors were found to be obstructed, obscured or inoperative while others were accessible and opened properly. Some exit signs were not illuminated as required. A fire extinguisher was overdue for inspection, and the effectiveness of emergency lighting could not be determined. Multiple ceiling tiles were missing or water stained due to water intrusion from apparently significant roof leaks, with what appeared to be some visible mold growth on the walls in some areas near the ceiling. Various electrical violations were noted as well. The building is equipped with a fire alarm system and an automatic fire sprinkler system, and both systems appeared to be in service. However, there was no smoke or carbon monoxide detection noted in the animal rescue tenant spaces, only manual pull stations, one of which was hanging off the wall. Due to the fact that no certificates of compliance or certificates of occupancy exist for the tenant spaces, the effectiveness of the existing fire alarm and sprinkler systems as presently configured could not be readily determined. Dog cages and corrals were noted throughout the animal rescue area.

"I commend our Town Fire Marshal for his swift response to protect the animals being housed in the building," said Supervisor Ed Romaine. "His action may have avoided another tragedy like the recent fire in Coram that killed a number of puppies. Let this be a warning to any business that does not comply with our building and fire codes. Violations will be issued and we will shut you down. It is a serious offense that we do not take lightly."

Councilman Michael Loguercio, "By closing this business, we are sending a clear message to those who think they can violate our Town code. Putting the health and safety of our residents, and even pets in jeopardy will not be tolerated and I urge anyone who suspects a business is in violation, to call 451-Town to file a complaint. We all need to do our part to help make Brookhaven a safer place for everyone."

The Brookhaven Town Animal Shelter was advised of the situation, and an Animal Control Officer responded to evaluate the condition of the animals as well as assist in determining where the dogs could potentially be relocated to. The Suffolk County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was notified, and a captain in the law enforcement division responded to evaluate the condition and treatment of the animals on behalf of that agency. Due to the noted safety violations, a Brookhaven Town Senior Building Inspector posted a condemnation placard requiring the premises to be vacated immediately and the Fire Marshal posted an order to maintain an approved fire watch until such time that it can be determined that the fire alarm and fire sprinkler systems are compliant for the spaces as configured. A thirty-six (36) hour timeframe to complete the relocation of all animals was granted by the Brookhaven Town Law Department.

As the occupancy of any building or tenant space requires the issuance of a certificate of compliance and a certificate of occupancy for such building or tenant space, the certificates are required in order to lawfully re-occupy the spaces. As all tenant spaces within the building will be evaluated, including another animal rehabilitation
organization in an adjacent tenant space, enforcement actions will be ongoing. Multiple court appearance tickets will be issued for the safety violations noted, as well as for occupying without certificates of compliance and certificates of occupancy.

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