

Brookhaven Announces Actions Against Animal Abuse & Abandonment

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FARMINGVILLE, NY-- Supervisor Mark Lesko and the members of the Town Council today announced actions Brookhaven is taking in response to an increase being seen in animal abuse and abandonment.

"During these tough economic times, with foreclosures continuing to increase in our communities, we're seeing an increasing number of cases of pets at our animal shelter that have been abandoned, abused, or malnourished. Our Animal Shelter has worked diligently to protect this vulnerable population, and today we are announcing steps we will be taking to protect our pets in Brookhaven," said Supervisor Lesko.

During the first six months of 2009, the Brookhaven Town Animal Shelter saw a significant decrease in adoptions from the previous year, with 60 fewer dogs being adopted in the first of this year than in 2008. Redemption of dogs brought to the shelter or picked up by Animal Control Officers has decreased even further, with more than 160 fewer dogs being redeemed by their owners between January and June of this year as compared to the same period in 2008.

In response, the Supervisor and Town Board announced that Brookhaven will be making animal abuse and abandonment a priority of the Town's Quality of Life Task Force. Over the past several months, Town Animal Control Officers have responded to several actions by the Quality of Life Task Force, where abused or malnourished animals were found on derelict properties condemned by the Town.

"Our Animal Shelter staff has provided excellent care for the dogs and cats at our shelter, and provides programs such as free rabies shots and adoption events for residents who have pets or are looking to make an addition to their family. These new initiatives will add to our commitment to protecting the pets of Brookhaven, and go after those who abuse them," said Councilwoman Jane Bonner, the Town board's liaison to the Animal Shelter, who was instrumental in creating the new Help the Animals Fund.

Supervisor Lesko also announced that he will be forming an Animal Shelter working group chaired by Amy Chaitoff, the chairperson of the Suffolk County Bar Association's Animal Law Committee, to focus on combating animal abuse. In addition, Supervisor Lesko said the Town will offer literature for those facing the crisis of foreclosure with information on how to take care of their pets or find new homes for them.

"Foreclosures close the door on family pets. During these tough economic times, it is often the animals in Brookhaven that suffer the most. Our goal should be to reduce the number of abandoned animals and continue the fight to keep our pets free from abuse and neglect," said Councilwoman Constance Kepert.

"Animal abuse and neglect is a cruelty committed against defenseless pets, and we are stepping up our prosecution of these crimes - whether it is through neglect, abandonment, or illegal animal fights," said Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld. "Pet ownership is a serious responsibility, and if financial or other circumstances make it difficult to maintain that commitment, call our animal shelter, and we will be able to help you, or help find a new home for your pet."

This year, a charitable, not-for-profit organization called the "Help the Animals Fund, Inc." was formed to promote the education of the citizens of Brookhaven with regard to the prevention of cruelty to animals.

"Help the Animals Fund helps our Town Animal Shelter provide top-level medical service to cats and dogs in need, at no cost to taxpayers," said Councilman Timothy Mazzei. "By working together with this active non-profit partner, animals at our shelter are receiving superior, humane care without increasing Town spending."

The Brookhaven Animal Shelter is undergoing a \$1 million renovation, with funds dedicated in this year's budget to expand the facility, replace windows and skylights, make roof repairs, and make upgrades to the facility's air purification, heating and septic systems.

