

September 30, 2009

My View: Let director do his job

By Warren G. Patitz

Since my recent attempts to meet with Mayor Greg Ballard have gone unanswered, I am writing this letter. I want to thank the mayor for the privilege of my appointment to the Indianapolis Animal Care and Control Advisory Board. I want to thank him too for my removal from the board: It has alerted the public to the problems within the public safety administration.

Since 2004, Animal Control has had five administrators. If the mayor dismisses Doug Rae and hires another director, that will make six -- three during Greg Ballard's administration. Given the numerous changes, the failure would appear to lie not with them, but with public safety management and ultimately with the mayor.

Despite recent public comment from the mayor's office about public safety being a priority, actions speak loudest. While the Public Safety Department budget has increased 9 percent, Animal Control's already-strapped budget has been cut another 5 percent. This leaves Animal Control officers undertrained and ill-equipped, without in-truck GPS and without computers that interface with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department to enable expedited response and investigation.

Animal Control pays \$136,350 supporting the Mayor's Action Center. The MAC is a waste of taxpayer money, keeping banker's hours while strays run loose around the clock. It should be replaced with a system that truly assists Animal Control and the police. Even with these constraints, Animal Control's data show improvement over last year and no negative impact on public safety.

We do not need another personnel change at Animal Control. The mayor needs to let someone experienced in the management of a municipal animal shelter (Doug Rae) do the job he was hired to do. Give him administrative support -- not obstruction, interference and harassment.

Animal Control pays the city more than \$224,000 a year for a building with a heating and ventilation system that fails federal standards, putting people and animals at risk. Public safety officials must budget for basic health standards for staff and animals alike. Procuring food, basic medical care and necessary supplies should not be an everyday ordeal. A facility that receives 18,000 animals a year needs a full-time veterinarian and clinic. Animal Control needs a dedicated grant writer; it has never had one. Finally, I urge the mayor to let Rae administrate. Let him deal with union issues, and stop encouraging disgruntled workers doing an end run around the chief to political higher-ups. Rae is working on each and every one of these critical issues.

The advisory board should be composed of people with knowledge of the laws and history of animal welfare issues in our community, and public safety should use the board's advisory contributions instead of silencing it, as is current policy.

Most important, the hardworking management and care team at Animal Control would welcome the mayor's acknowledgement and support. We can have safe streets and humane treatment of animals in our city's shelter. Remember, each night more than 40 animals are killed with the support of our tax dollars on the mayor's watch.