



COLLETON COUNTY COUNCIL
Public Health and Safety Committee Meeting
Tuesday, June 24, 2025, at 2:00 P.M.

Minutes

Chairman Bubba Trippe called the meeting to order with Council Members Scott Biering and Phillip Taylor in attendance. Included in the panel was Sheriff Buddy Hill, Animal Service Director Laura Clark, and Chet Varnadoe and Heather Spade with Code Enforcement.

Chairman Trippe also thanked everyone for being in attendance.

Others Included: Thomas Higgs, Meagan Utsey, Barry McRoy, KC Campbell, Kay Herndon, Scott Grooms, Kim Walling, Marc Filion, Cathy Hiers, Jeannette Mazur, Pamela Baer, Debbie Dangerfield, Colette Bailey, Royce Herndon, Marsha Johnson, Christina Avery

Councilman Taylor gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Councilman Taylor made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Councilman Biering and the motion carries unanimously.

Citizen Comment Period

Kay Herndon addressed the panel describing a devastating attack her daughters' goats, detailing how two dogs entered a secure pen and killed multiple animals. She also expressed distress over the lack of citations issued to the dog owners despite the severity of the incident and questioned why animal control did not witness the killing. Ms. Herndon shared concerns about the dogs potentially attacking children and sought clarification on the process for seizing and euthanizing dangerous animals.

Marc Filion addressed the panel and recounted a past incident where stray pit bulls attacked their farm, resulting in the loss of 155 turkeys and significant financial damage. Mr. Filion emphasized the economic impact of such animal attacks on farmers and the county, suggesting financial solutions like animal registration, microchipping, leash laws, and breeder licenses. Mr. Filion also advocated stricter penalties for not adhering to animal control regulations.

Jeannette Mazur a volunteer with Colleton County Animal Services, expressed concerns about the conditions at the animal shelter, including overcrowding, understaffing, and lack of air conditioning. Ms. Mazur stated that animals need to be registered, similar to practices in other areas, and questioned the status of a new animal shelter, urging council members to visit the current facility.

Kim Walling addressed the panel explaining that the goats that were killed belonged to her and her family. Ms. Walling expressed an ongoing fear that the same dogs might return and cause further harm, especially if no one is home. Ms. Walling hopes for changes in policies.

Cathy Hiers addressed the panel on two separate incidents involving neighbors allowing their dogs to run loose off their property, causing fear and requiring intervention from animal control and law enforcement. Ms. Hiers described instances of being cussed by irresponsible dog owners and expressed frustration with repeated warnings without significant consequences. Ms. Hiers suggested that the six-month time limit for reporting should be removed from the code for irresponsible dog owners.

Colette Bailey a goat farmer, addressed the panel on an ongoing issue with neighbors' dogs, including Great Pyrenees and Huskies, running loose and posing a threat to livestock. Ms. Bailey mentioned a conversation with an animal control officer who indicated limited resources and laws for confiscating dogs. Ms. Bailey also discussed problems with trespassing hunting dogs and emphasized the vulnerability of farmers and their livelihoods.

Royce Herndon addressed the panel, as being part of the community for 20 years he has noticed the dog nuisance growing more and more of a problem. Mr. Herndon expressed his concern on if someone gets hurt is it the County's responsible.

Marsha Johnson addressed the panel and asserted that current laws may not adequately protect farmers, whose animals represent their business inventory and significant investment. Ms. Johnson suggested farmers' associations lobby for stronger laws that differentiate between harming animals and other forms of property damage. Ms. Johnson also proposed involving insurance companies in holding dog owners accountable for dangerous animals.

Christina Avery addressed the panel and expressed fear for her autistic son's safety due to the same dogs that attacked the goats also coming into her yard and attempting to attack her chickens. Ms. Avery stated that her son, who once enjoyed being outside, is now afraid because of these incidents and echoed concerns about the potential for the dogs to harm a child. Ms. Avery supports the need for stricter measures to prevent further attacks.

Chairman Trippe thanked everyone that took time out of their day to come out to the meeting.

Councilman Biering acknowledged the concerns raised and stated they have experienced similar issues. Councilman Biering assured attendees that they would consult with experts to determine what resources and changes are needed.

Councilman Taylor recognized the hardship faced by families and expressed hope that working with experts and considering input from associations could lead to solutions. Councilman Taylor noted that this is also a state-level issue and that they would work together with staff. Councilman Taylor also asked the County Administrator Thomas Higgs for an update on the capital project sales tax in relation to the animal shelter. Mr. Higgs explained that the County is currently in the design phase, working to create a long-serving plan that addresses the County's growth and increasing animal-related issues. Mr. Higgs assured that while visible progress isn't immediate, significant work is underway, and the ground will be broken in the future.

Departmental 2024-2025 Update Discussion

Animal Control

Laura Clark, Director of Colleton County Animal Services, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak and provide insight into the department's operations. Laura Clark explained the three branches of government and the role of magistrate's court in their cases, encouraging citizens to communicate their concerns. Laura Clark acknowledged the painful nature of the stories shared and stated that outdated ordinances and the need to consider state laws make changes a complex process. Laura Clark detailed the responsibilities of animal control, the animal shelter,

and mosquito abatement. Laura Clark highlighted the limited staffing of animal control compared to law enforcement and the 24/7 coverage they provide. Laura Clark presented data showing the volume of unique cases they handle, indicating the scope of the problem. Laura Clark emphasized the importance of using the proper channels for reporting animal control issues, stating that personal Facebook messages or texts to staff are not acceptable for law enforcement purposes. She provided the phone number (843-893-2651) for non-emergency calls during business hours and advised contacting the sheriff's dispatch after hours for urgent matters, cautioning against calling 911 for non-emergencies. Laura Clark stressed the value of photographic and video evidence but noted that the person who captured the evidence must be willing to appear in court for it to be admissible. Laura Clark shared statistics about the animal shelter, which has five full-time and five part-time staff and took in 1,871 animals since January 1st, maintaining an average daily population of 300 pets and a live release rate of 86%. She highlighted the free trap-neuter-release program for cats, which has spayed and neutered over a thousand cats annually, and the recent addition of Sunday operating hours. The process of updating animal control ordinances is underway, with several working versions being reviewed by a community committee before going to Administrative Staff, the County Attorney, and finally the County Council for a vote.

Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Hill provided an update on the Sheriff's Office, reporting 18,626 calls for service from the beginning of the year, encompassing a wide range of incidents. They noted 30 weapons seized and 79 illegal weapons confiscated, along with five homicides, three of which have been closed by arrest. Sheriff Hill also reported 146 drug cases and the seizure of significant quantities of marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and fentanyl. Sheriff Hill highlighted partnerships with various law enforcement agencies and the installation of license plate reader cameras to help curb crime, and emphasized the importance of the "see something, say something" approach and urges the public to cooperate with law enforcement to address issues like drive-by shooting. Sheriff Hill reiterated the Sheriff's Office's open-door policy and highlighted their close work with school systems, including having an SRO in every school. He also mentioned programs for active attacker training and Community Crime Watch, with James Brown as the lead contact. Lastly, Sheriff Hill mentioned that the Sheriff's Office is currently understaffed in law enforcement, detention, and dispatch, and encouraged anyone interested in applying.

Planning and Development (Code Enforcement)

Heather Spade and Chet Varnadoe provided an update, reporting receiving 148 formal complaints since the beginning of 2025 related to property nuisance. They stated that their department prioritizes meeting with property owners to educate them and work towards compliance, noting that over half of the complaints were resolved after initial contact. Heather Spade mentioned that out of the 148 only 25 were still showing pending, and emphasized the importance of interdepartmental coordination, particularly between zoning and animal control, to ensure that updated ordinances are consistent.

Chairman Trippe acknowledged the information shared and assured attendees that the County has been actively working on many of the issues raised. They expressed gratitude to Sheriff Buddy Hill, Animal Service Director Laura Clark, and Chet Varnadoe and Heather Spade with Code Enforcement, and others for their work. Chairman Trippe announced plans for more public safety meeting between now and the end of the year to discuss various issues beyond animal control.

Adjournment

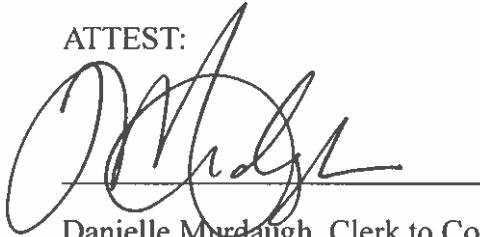
Councilman Biering moved to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Taylor seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

This 24th day of June, 2025.



Bubba Trippe, Chairman

ATTEST:



Danielle Murdaugh, Clerk to Council