

NEWS

Animal care focus of debate

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MORNING STAR STAFF

Some North Okanagan residents are demanding changes to how animal care services are provided.

A group of concerned citizens will hold a public meeting today at 7 p.m. at the Schubert Centre to discuss how animal care is currently provided, and its plan to have the North Okanagan Regional District get involved.

"On every level, care for animals is bad," said Pat Peebles, with the group.

"We want to see improved handling of animal care."

Peebles is urging NORD to scrap the lease that allows the B.C. SPCA to use the publicly owned shelter, and for the district to run the facility.

"If it was financed by NORD, a committee of residents could be struck and run it the way it was before — locally," she said.

Peebles has numerous concerns about the Vancouver-based B.C. SPCA, including the number of staff and hours of operation at the Vernon shelter.

"They're running it as a satellite operation of Kelowna and that's wrong."

Peebles and her group also want NORD to not renew the dog control service with K9, a private firm, and to offer the function through its own staff.

However, the regional district doesn't seem willing to take over the shelter.

"There's an iron-clad contract with the SPCA for the site," said Cliff Kanester, BX-Swan Lake director.

The lease agreement, which ends in 2029, doesn't



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— Cliff Kanester

provide an opt-out clause for NORD.

Mike Stambuis, general manager of community services, said the agreement allows NORD to move the dog control pound on to the same site and that's being explored.

"We're looking at the SPCA site and whether it could be a combined area."

B.C. SPCA officials stand by their local operations.

"The Vernon branch is heavily subsidized by the B.C. SPCA, to the tune of \$76,000 last year. As a result, we had to reduce staff and hours," said Bob Bush, general manager of operations.

"There is a new branch manager and we have faith the situation will turn around."

K9 owner Pat Ellis questions why there would be concerns about how dog control is provided.

"NORD already runs dog control. I answer to NORD. This is a bylaw position," she said.

Peebles' plans for a centralization of animal services is being watched closely by the Vernon Animal Care Society, which looks after unwanted cats.

"I'm 100 per cent in support," said Heather Pettit, society president.