

Austin City Council Revisits Ordinance Exempting Animal From Cruelty

By Alexis Austin

The subject of animal abuse, cruel devices and procedures was first discussed at a Austin City Council meeting on March 10, 2021. The council re-considered an ordinance that did not include protection of all animals from cruelty involving training devices and procedures. Austin residents expressed their support for the animal community by encouraging law changes to protect livestock and farm animals.

After Austin residents asked for more to be done with farm animals specifically, the council decided to pass the ordinance along to the Animal Advisory Commission, which tabled it at a meeting on March 8, 2021.

“Cruelty is cruelty. They feel pain,” said an Austin resident who called in at the Animal Advisory Commission meeting. The resident listed animals such as horses, mules, pigs, hogs, and swines, then asked why they were exempt from this ordinance.

Chris Fuller-Wigg, co-founder of Austin Farm Sanctuary, was another caller at the meeting who said that, based on his animal experience, any cruel devices or procedures were unnecessary and only encouraged others to use the practices to torture animals.

“Training devices and procedures are not required for these types of animals to work with them,” said Chris Fuller-Wigg.

When asked for alternative training practices, Fuller-Wigg said the sanctuary uses positive reinforcement by giving animals encouragement through food. He compared the training method to giving treats to dogs when learning how to sit. He also said it was a practice that gets animals excited and willing.

Fuller-Wigg said he thinks people use brutal devices and methods as a way of asserting dominance over animals and due to a lack of patience. He said not being able to easily move animals around or go where you want can lead to frustrations in the farming environment.

“People are almost raised or trained at an early age that dogs are companion animals and farm animals are farm animals,” Fuller-Wigg said. He said that the animals are grouped differently, giving many the idea that farm animals are dirty, lazy, and dumb when they are actually intelligent and clever.

Hayley Hudnall, director of Austin Wildlife Rescue, said in an interview, as children, we are given false information about other wildlife that causes fear and misunderstanding.

“Dogs and cats are relatable because you can snuggle them and relate to them, but other animals like raccoons have a bad rep already,” said Hudnall

Hudnall talked about the importance of educating people on wildlife. She gave examples of inaccurate information that has circulated over time, such as you can’t touch an animal if it’s been abandoned, baby birds aren’t supposed to be on the ground, and possums are rabid and carry diseases.

Hudnall said that, before COVID-19, Austin Wildlife Rescue would visit schools, camps, and other events for educational programs. “I even found myself teaching the teachers at times,” she said.

The inclusion of all animals from cruel devices and training methods brought further discussion. The City Council planned to bring up the ordinance again at the next meeting on March 25, 2021.

“All the animals at the farm have a name and a story, farm animals all come together and are each unique to their own with similar experiences,” said Fuller-Wigg.