

Boulder City officials knew of pet killings years ago



Former Boulder City Animal Control Supervisor Mary Jo Frazier poses after asking to have her photo taken with a store display outside a Boulder City business. Courtesy photo

By Bethany Barnes and Ben Botkin Las Vegas Review-Journal

December 5, 2015 - 9:35 pm



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A question lingers in Boulder City: How could city officials not notice that the head of the [city's animal shelter was needlessly killing dozens of animals for years?](#)

The answer: They did.

In 2009 — six years before a city police detective investigated former Animal Control Supervisor Mary Jo Frazier and [recommended she face felony and gross misdemeanor charges](#) in connection to the deaths of dozens of animals — then-City Manager Vicki Mayes sent a memo asking why Frazier had such a high kill rate.

In 2010, veterinarian Randy Stanton, whose clinic has a contract with the city, asked Mayes why in one year his clinic hadn't seen any animals. He had been working with the city for 24 years. Things just didn't make sense.

In 2011, questions about Frazier came up again. This time, Frazier had taken it upon herself to quickly kill a resident's dog without consulting a veterinarian, as city code requires. Stanton, who happened to also be the dog's veterinarian, begged the city to investigate, penning a letter to city officials.

It was strange that Frazier wasn't sending sick or injured animals to his clinic, he wrote. It was strange that Frazier was disregarding city code and taking it upon herself to make judgment calls she wasn't authorized to make. And stranger still was that Frazier claimed she put the dog down because it had been hit by a car, but that didn't match the dog's medical records, he said. He wrote that in his opinion Frazier taking the law into her own hands to kill Bo should not be viewed as an "isolated incident." He warned that he felt the Police Department couldn't be trusted to investigate one of its own in this case. "They had full knowledge of this back in 2010 and 2011 and they turned their backs to it, and that angers me,"

Stanton said Thursday. "It infuriates me that they had all the information."

Frazier wouldn't be investigated until April, after an animal control officer placed a frantic phone call to police about her boss's behavior. At that time, Police Chief Bill Conger, who became chief in March 2013, also started a separate personnel investigation into how she was handling shelter money, a serious enough situation that he placed Frazier on administrative leave.

Still, Frazier was allowed to leave on her own terms. Conger shut down the criminal case against her when she resigned. The investigation into how she was handling city funds, which he said was just starting, ceased.

"We could drag this thing through the mud, and it really doesn't accomplish anything. It doesn't accomplish anything. She has no longer any authority to do anything with

animals," Conger told the Review-Journal on Tuesday. "What does it accomplish when she was allowed to do that for several years before I even got here? When we discovered it here, we started to do something about it."

But on Thursday, Conger decided a case against Frazier would serve a purpose: appeasing the public.

"The initial determination was to not pursue charges, but public involvement has caused us to re-evaluate that position," said an unsigned city statement that was passed out Thursday to protesters who had gathered outside of Conger's office. The case will be sent to the Clark County district attorney's office, it said.

Attempts by the Review-Journal to contact Frazier, who sold her house in Las Vegas shortly after resigning, have been unsuccessful.

Why did it take so long?

Margaret Hance, the woman whose dog prompted Stanton to speak out in 2011, doesn't understand why it took so long for people to pay attention to Frazier. Furthermore, she doesn't understand how, when they finally did take notice, they let her retire and possibly leave the state.

In 2011, Hance's yellow labrador Bo escaped. He was always slipping out of his collar, so he didn't wear one, Hance said. The family searched the neighborhood after he got out, and when they couldn't find him, called police. She was told Frazier euthanized Bo because he had been hit by a car.

Frazier hadn't taken him to a veterinarian as required by law, and Stanton said it's possible Frazier confused one of Bo's bloody noses, which he got often and would have been a messy sight, with a major injury.

Hance scheduled for Bo to be cremated, but the city canceled the cremation and sent Bo to be analyzed by a veterinarian in Henderson — without telling Hance. The Henderson veterinarian wrote up a report, which Stanton said showed no indication of a major trauma, such as a car accident. Bo was then cremated, preventing Hance from having her own necropsy done. A necropsy is an examination done after an animal's death.

The Boulder City Review reported on the matter but couldn't question the veterinarian who did Bo's necropsy because he retired the day after he did it.

The necropsy done without Hance's knowledge or permission was defended by then-Police Chief Tom Finn as necessary because the city was faced with an allegation that the dog had been needlessly killed. Finn served as the city's police chief from 2006 until he was fired in April 2013.

For Stanton, that was the moment to take action against a woman who he believed was needlessly killing and would continue to needlessly kill many more animals than just Bo.

"It is my opinion that those city officials and council members who received my letter in November of 2011 and choose not to investigate Ms. Frazier in the face of overwhelming evidence are just as guilty for the unnecessary deaths of the animals that have occurred since then under her care, as she is," Stanton said.

Councilman still outraged

Boulder City Councilman Cam Walker said he was outraged in 2011 when Stanton wrote him and he's outraged now.

"For heaven's sakes this should have been done years ago!" he said Friday. "I wonder even today: What should I have done differently?"

Walker said he met with Mayes after getting Stanton's letter and reading about Bo's death in the Boulder City Review.

"I would have hoped this would have been solved back then with the police chief as well as the city manager," Walker said, noting that while many are mad at Conger, red flags came up under Finn's watch.

Walker said he wished he knew more about what happened, if anything, in response to Frazier's killing of Bo. Walker said the city charter prevents him from getting involved in personnel matters. All he can do is hold the city manager accountable, and he tried to do that, he said.

Attempts to reach Mayes were unsuccessful.

Finn, who wanted Frazier's story to come out — he gave the Review-Journal copies of the public records from the detective's April investigation into Frazier — wasn't so keen about Hance telling her story.

Finn called Hance an "irresponsible and disingenuous pet owner" and argued that Frazier took Bo to the shelter after he was struck by a car and that she "hoped the owner would call to report the dog missing."

"Mary Jo should have taken Beau (sic) to an animal hospital for treatment, and corrective action was taken to ensure that in the future, but she didn't and she eventually euthanized Beau to end his suffering," Finn wrote in an email.

Finn said there was "appropriate action" taken toward Frazier after she euthanized Bo without getting a veterinarian checkup. He wouldn't detail the action, as it's a personnel matter.

He also blamed Hance for not having a collar on Bo.

Many animals don't have collars

According to Boulder City Animal Control, at least a quarter of the animals that come in do not have collars.

"Just because an animal isn't wearing a collar doesn't mean it isn't an owned animal," Animal Control Supervisor Ann Inabnitt said. City code requires that animals be held for five days — 10 days if licensed — and see a veterinarian exam before being euthanized.

Finn stressed that if the information in the investigation developed by a detective this year had been presented to him as chief, he would have pursued charges.

"The fact remains, no one called me and said she was killing dogs and cats left and right," Finn said.

As for the 2009 memo from Mayes asking why Frazier seemed to be killing a lot of animals, Finn said it was his understanding that the high number stemmed from Frazier having concerns about large, potentially aggressive dogs going out to families with children.

Hance said she was shocked to learn Mayes had questioned Frazier's kill rate as far back as 2009, considering Mayes had defended Frazier.

At the time of Bo's death, Mayes told the Boulder City Review: "The dog was, in (Frazier's) opinion, literally bleeding to death in front of her and in extreme pain. It was like a mercy thing."

Hance said since Frazier's behavior has come to light, it has been shocking to meet other pet owners who say Frazier killed their animals.

For the Kissel family, who say Mary Jo Frazier bullied them into euthanizing their puppy in 2006, hearing Hance's story was stunning. The Review-Journal showed Rob Kissel Stanton's letter, and he said he couldn't understand how Frazier was allowed to continue on in her position.

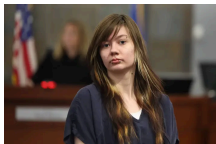
"That's crazy," said Rob Kissel, whose puppy was killed by Frazier, after reading Stanton's letter. "That's proof (that they knew) right there."

Hance said she tried everything she could after Bo's death to get someone to look into Frazier. She wanted her fired, and she can't help but wonder how many animals' lives might have been spared if only someone had listened.

"We didn't know what to do or where to go," Hance said. "I felt like I talked to the mayor, I talked to Vicki Mayes. I felt like she just got a slap on the wrist, Mary Jo. We couldn't fight politics, I guess. Small-town politics."

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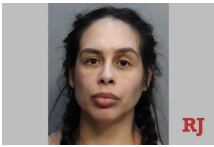
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Timeline of events

2006: Mary Jo Frazier becomes animal control supervisor and starts a log book that details what happens to animals, which are euthanized or adopted. Euthanized animals are documented in red ink, adoptions in black.

2009: A memo written by then-City Manager Vicki Mayes questions "Why Mary Jo was killing so many animals at the shelter."

2010: Randy Stanton, a veterinarian, talks to city officials about concerns. Despite having a city contract to provide medical services for animal control, the clinic doesn't see a single injured or ill animal from animal control in a more than one-year period.

Oct. 25, 2011: An owner's yellow lab, Bo, escapes and is euthanized the same day without seeing a veterinarian. The owner complains to the city after trying to collect it from the shelter the same day it got loose.

Nov. 17, 2011: Stanton writes a letter outlining concerns about Frazier to Boulder City Council members, Mayes and City Attorney David Olsen. Stanton notes Bo's case, saying Frazier is in "direct violation" of city ordinance. He says there are wider issues, with hardly any animals coming to the clinic.

April 4, 2015: A Boulder City detective gets a phone call from animal control officer Ann Inabnitt, who is concerned about Frazier's unwillingness to get medical care for an injured pit bull puppy.

April 18, 2015:The detective completes an affidavit seeking an arrest on felony charges of killing animals and gross misdemeanor charges of unlawful poisoning of animals.

In the most recent year period, 91 questionable animal euthanasia deaths are uncovered in the log book. Frazier also is put in administrative leave in part because of concerns about handling money.

April 20, 2015:Frazier, 61, resigns and goes into retirement after a nearly 20-year career in Boulder City. The case isn't sent to the Clark County district attorney's office.

Dec. 1, 2015: Boulder Police Chief Bill Conger defends the decision to not pursue charges, saying felony charges wouldn't stick and he didn't want to drag it through the mud.

Dec. 3, 2015: Boulder City reverses course after public outcry, agrees to send felony and gross misdemeanor charges to district attorney for evaluation.

Sources: Police affidavit, public records