

7/21/17

Olivia Haselwood

AugustaLeader.com

Ms. Haselwood:

I am writing in response to the article published on the AugustaLeader.com website entitled, "Business Owner Fined for Maintaining 'Cat Colony.'" Before launching into a rebuttal to your article, I want to protest your "Disclaimer" that you attempted to contact us multiple times. Such a statement is patently untrue and you know it. I received a single Facebook message from you requesting a statement with an extremely short deadline. Given that your office is a mere short trip down the block from my shop, you could have come down to have a conversation. However, at the time I did not know you (still don't). I did not know your website (had never heard of it). I trust you can appreciate what a stressful situation this has become, and I was not inclined to correspond to an unknown person, particularly on such notice.

Now for the rebuttal. First of all, there are no cats behind my business at 419 State Street. There were two years ago. They were trapped, spayed/neutered, vaccinated and relocated to a farm outside of Sedgwick, KS. Therefore, I am unclear about your comment that we have been "harboring and amassing cats for years causing a public health hazard." That is factually untrue.

Also, your statement, "what can't be disputed was the overwhelming smell of cat feces that radiated from the 400 block of State Street." Really? I would be curious to know when and where you personally experienced that.

You state I was charged with "harboring" cats. That is not accurate, again factually untrue.

The number of charges you list is also inaccurate. Ray and I were found guilty of "Nuisance" and "Animals Running at Large" for two dates in February. By my count we were found guilty of only four of the 21 original charges, not eight. Multiplying by two is not appropriate and is misleading.

BACKGROUND: Again there are many discrepancies in your reporting.

First of all, the business in Augusta has always been mine. However, more importantly, your comment "Allegedly in addition to feeding cats already downtown in the alley behind the business, Jones would drive around town, capture feral cats, and relocate them downtown" is almost too ludicrous to even address. Are you serious? Obviously, you know nothing about feral cats. One does not simply capture and relocate a feral cat for grins. Feral cats are not socialized to humans and run the opposite direction if approached. There is no interaction. When feral cats are trapped and relocated, they must be secured in a place for at least two weeks (a month is recommended) for them to become habituated to their new location. Failure to do so results in their attempt to return to their point of origin – their

home. That is exactly what transpired when the cats were relocated to Sedgwick, KS – they were locked up in a secure outbuilding for several weeks. But besides the tutorial I just provided, to think I have the time or inclination to run around Augusta picking up feral cats to bring them downtown is beyond stupid.

While on the Council I did lobby for a pilot program to institute TNVR in one downtown location. It was specifically for the purpose of controlling the cat population in that area and to insure the cats were vaccinated against rabies. Countless communities have adopted this practice with good results – Newton just did so recently. The concern about a feral cat jumping out and biting a citizen is ridiculous. Again, a complete lack of knowledge about the behavior of feral cats is lacking and members of the Council were unwilling to become educated and try a program that would work for both the City and the cats.

Your statement that my husband was “charged with destruction of city property because of the mess the cats they had been caring for behind the business had caused downtown.” Again, you fail on the reporting of facts. My husband released a cat from a trap and was charged with, “Destruction of City Property” and “Interfering with the Duties of an Officer” – both misdemeanors. He should have been charged with violation of the City ordinance, “Breaking Pound.” We were successful in correcting this blatant over charging by the City but it resulted in great expense in having an arrest record expunged.

Chief Brewer’s statement, “After the charges were brought the problem went away” is factual only in the sense that the cats were removed (behind my building). However, the only complaint that I am aware of is a business down the street revolved around cat prints on cars and a claim of the cats doing their business on the back porch. A search of that area revealed no evidence of any “business” being done, the ladies simply disliked kitty prints on their cars. Terrible problem!

Again, Chief Brewer is not exactly factual when he states, “over time it developed again. It’s interesting because after with these new counts, the feral cat problem is again basically non-existent downtown.” Where to begin with this one?? First of all, if he is referring the alley across the street you need to be aware there have been cats in that alley for literally decades. My father started his business in 1953 in Augusta and the cats were behind his building at that time. Those cats perform an essential function for the downtown (particularly given we have restaurants at each end of that alley). My father never had a mouse or rat in his building and in talking to a current restaurant owner, neither has he. Do you recall in history the Black Plague of Europe? At that point in time cats were thought to be evil and were killed in large numbers. Without them to control the vermin problem, towns and cities were overwhelmed with rats and mice and because the fleas they carried were infected with the plague, thousands of people died.

Brewer makes the statement, “We received complaints she’d take the cats to be fixed and then return them to the city, which was not the agreement.” First of all, those cats were from the alley across the street (behind my father’s old building). We did contact Friends of Felines in Wichita to trap the cats because they were continuing to multiply and the cycle of reproduction needed to be stopped. They were returned to their original location because that is the “R” in TNVR (Trap/Neuter/(Vaccinate)/Return). While being spayed/neutered the cats were also vaccinated against rabies – something that would not have happened otherwise. We did not introduce any new cats into the City, we only performed TNVR on the existing population. Again, his comment that “the cat problem started piling up again,” cannot be factual as there were no more cats than originally in that location.

He references multiple times the “many, many complaints” the department started receiving. Where might those be found? No more cats are present than before. The only statements ever produced by the City were generated by a couple of people at the behest of the police and animal control officer and none were formally presented at trial.

Regarding the statement, “during the second investigation a public safety officer was bitten by one of cats on his finger and developed an infection.” I know of no cat that would simply wander up to an officer and bite his finger. The only incident I am aware of occurred when a second cat was trapped down the way in the alley behind my business. It was a very cold night, 21 degrees, and the cat was cold and terrified. We called the police department and insisted they come to pick up the cat as it was thrashing violently in the trap. I do recall hearing that in trying to transfer the cat to a cage at the Augusta Animal Clinic the officer was bitten. I truly am sorry that happened, but Augusta does not provide professional training to officers in handling animals and if it did perhaps that would have been avoided. Furthermore, the notion that a feral cat would jump out of hiding to bite a child during a community festival is preposterous. Any self-respecting feral cat will be hunkered down and out of sight during such events. The only possible way a child would be bitten would be if the parents allowed the child to roam the nooks and crannies of the alley ways – and he would have to work diligently to even see, much less have contact with, a cat.

Finally, your interview with the Mayor was of interest. His offer to perhaps consider adoption of a TNVR program would be contingent on available funding by the City and that there would likely be a prohibition by the City to return the cats to their home misses the point. First of all, funding should not be an issue. The City currently pays the Augusta Animal Clinic a tidy sum monthly to house captured animals for three days and then pays for them to be euthanized. Cats in colonies managed through a TNVR process would never end up at the clinic, hence, a savings to the City. There are numerous resources available to support a TNVR program. Therefore, the budget concern should be a non-issue for the Council. Secondly and most importantly, the “R” is an integral part of the TNR process. Cats need to be returned to their home of origin (see previous comments). Research has shown that simply killing the cats will not solve the problem of cats, as new ones will move into vacant territory. However, TNVR solves the problem by controlling population growth, eliminates bad behavior resulting from the mating process, provides a resource for controlling vermin, and discourages the introduction of new cats into the area – it becomes a win-win for both the cats and the City.

I trust this response to your article is useful and serves to correct misleading/simply wrong information and statements. I have put no “spin” on anything within this document – it is fact based.

Thank you for your time and I can only ask that you correct your article.

Sue Jones