



## **CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION AGENDA**

**MONDAY, JUNE 16, 2025**

**SPRING LAKE PARK CITY HALL, 1301 81ST AVE NE at 5:30 PM**

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. DISCUSSION ITEMS**
  - A. 79th Avenue On-Street Parking Discussion
  - B. Terrace Park Tennis Court Striping
  - C. Discussion of Humane Pet Store Ordinance (*Dircks*)
- 3. REPORT**
  - A. Council/Staff Reports
- 4. ADJOURN**



# Memorandum

**To:** Mayor Nelson and Members of the City Council

**From:** Daniel R. Buchholtz, MMC, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer

**Date:** June 10, 2025

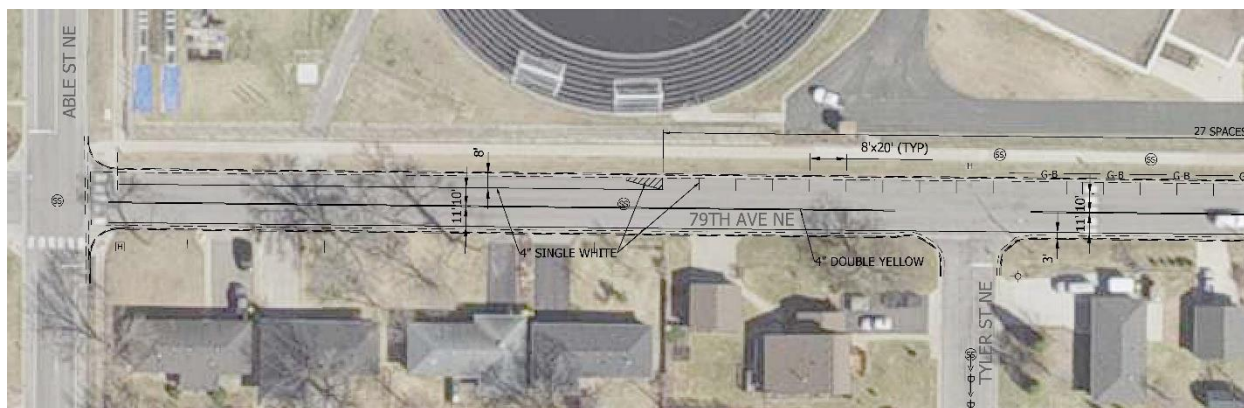
**Subject:** 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue On-Street Parking Discussion

The City Council has received parking complaints from residents of Van Buren Street, between 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 81<sup>st</sup> Avenue. Residents have stated that high school students are parking on this section of roadway, blocking mailboxes and driveways. The residents are requesting “No Parking During School Hours” signs to be placed on this section of roadway.

The City Council took a first step in addressing these parking complaints by adopting an ordinance clarifying that no one shall park within 10 feet of a mailbox. This ordinance will provide the Police Department with the tools to ticket vehicles parked too close to a mailbox. If an illegally parked vehicle is not moved within 4 hours, the Police Department can have it towed at the owner’s expense.

Chief Antoine and I met with Principal Boucher in an attempt to better understand the High School’s parking situation. There are 343 designated parking spaces for full-time student use, which are oversold by 5%. An additional 70 parking spaces in the staff lot are made available for part-time students. Parking permits are issued for school parking, which are sold to students. Permits are limited to juniors and seniors, with very limited exceptions for sophomores.

To help alleviate neighborhood congestion, Chief Antoine and I propose creating a designated on-street parking zone along a portion of 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This zone would accommodate approximately 27 to 37 additional student parking spaces.





The area south of the proposed zone includes commercial uses and side yards, with the parking area intentionally ending before homes that face 79th Avenue to minimize potential residential impacts. Parking would be restricted on the south side of 79th Avenue to ensure adequate roadway width for emergency vehicle access.

We would anticipate the cost of this change to be between \$1,250 - \$1,500, which would include striping the parking zone and the installation of parking signs.

Chief Antoine has shared this proposal with SBM Fire Department and the Fire Department has no objections.

If the City Council finds this to be a favorable solution, staff would prepare a resolution for the City Council to adopt establishing the parking zone. We would also inform the High School of this parking change so they can inform the students on the parking permit wait list of this on-street parking availability. We would also have the School Resource Officer educate students on this parking availability.

In addition to the proposed parking zone, the Metropolitan Council is establishing a pilot program establishing a “Metro micro” zone covering portions of Blaine, Spring Lake Park and Coon Rapids. “Metro micro” provides an on-demand, real-time shared ride service, similar to Uber/Lyft. Riders request a ride on their phone, are picked up and brought to their requested location within the zone. The vehicle may pick up others along the way. The expected launch date is September 2025 with hours of operation between the hours of 5:30am – 10:30pm on weekdays and 7:00am – 10:30pm on weekends. Fares are \$3.25 per trip during rush hour and \$2.50 per trip other times. There are free transfers for 2.5 hours. The Blaine zone map is being finalized by Met Transit. However, this could be a convenient way for Spring Lake Park students to get home after practices or sporting events.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Chief Antoine or me at 763-784-6491.





ABLE ST NE

27 SPACES

8'x20' (TYP)

79TH AVE NE

4" SINGLE WHITE

4" DOUBLE YELLOW

TYLER ST NE



27 SPACES

10 SPACES

79TH AVE NE

TAYLOR ST NE

HWY 65 NE

11' 10"

3'

4" SINGLE WHITE

4" DOUBLE YELLOW

PROPOSED 79TH AVE NE SCHOOL PARKING - OPT 1





ABLE ST NE

27 SPACES

8'x20' (TYP)

79TH AVE NE

4" SINGLE WHITE

4" DOUBLE YELLOW

TYLER ST NE



27 SPACES

10 SPACES

79TH AVE NE

TYLOR ST NE

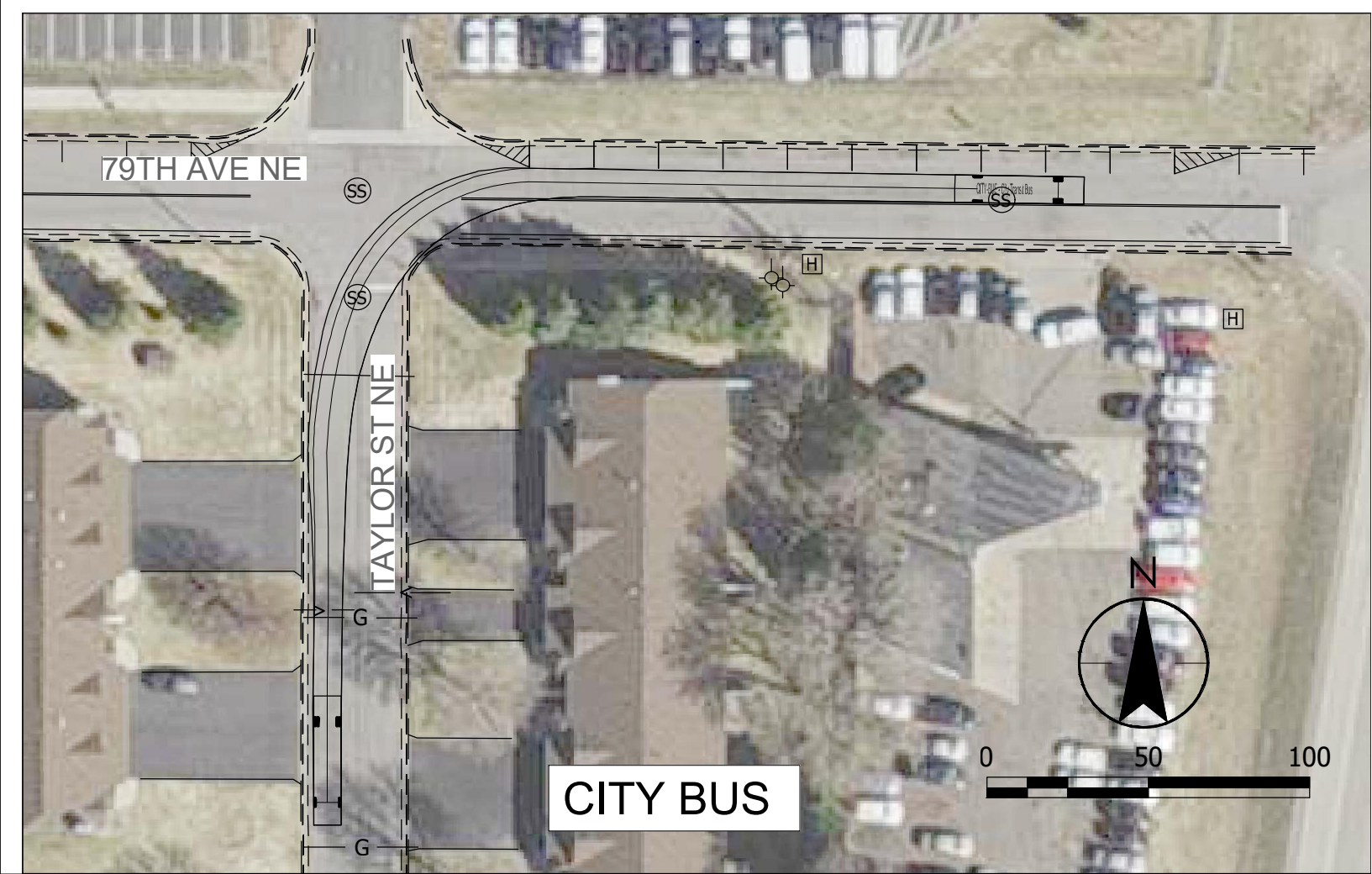
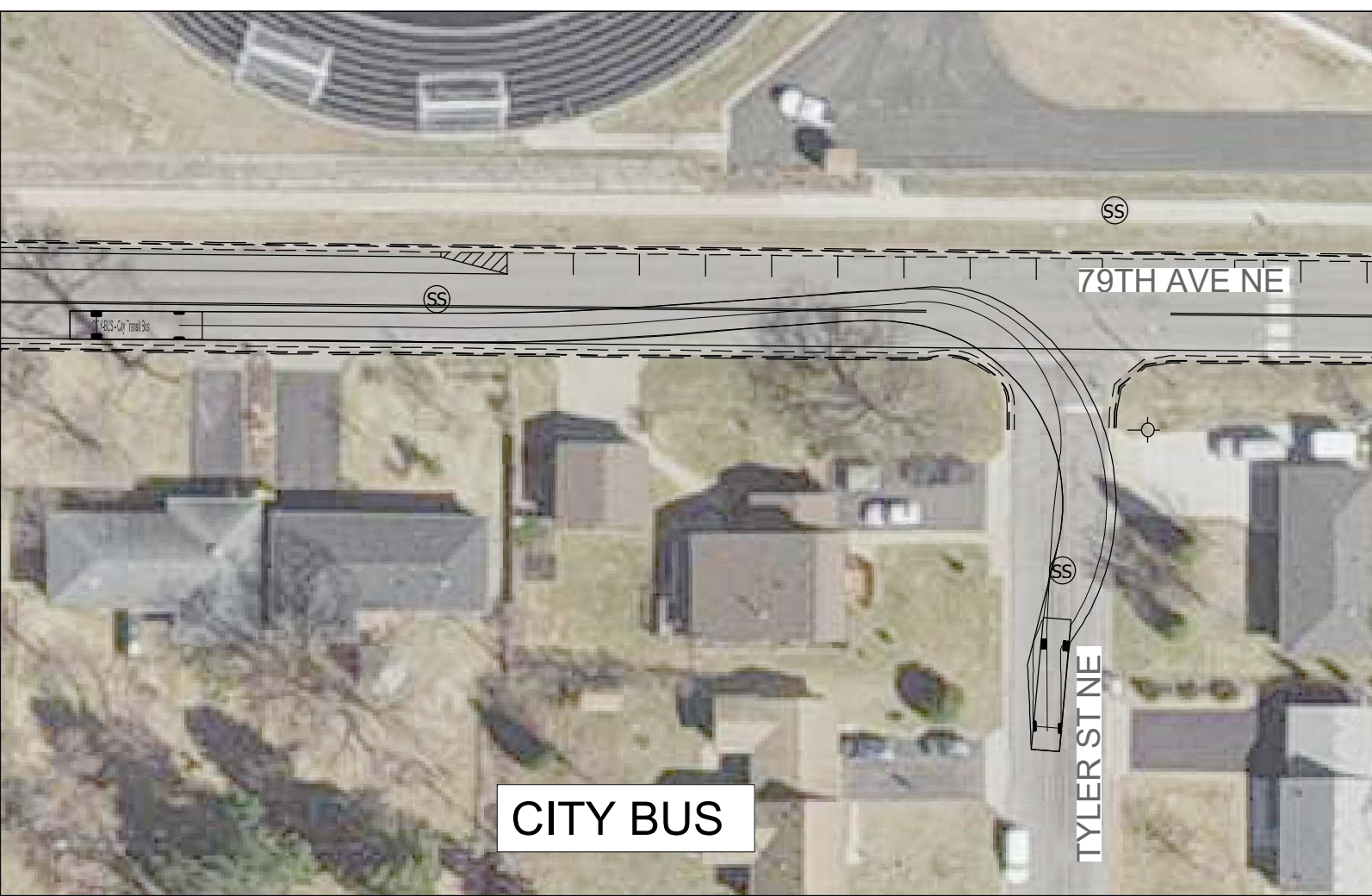
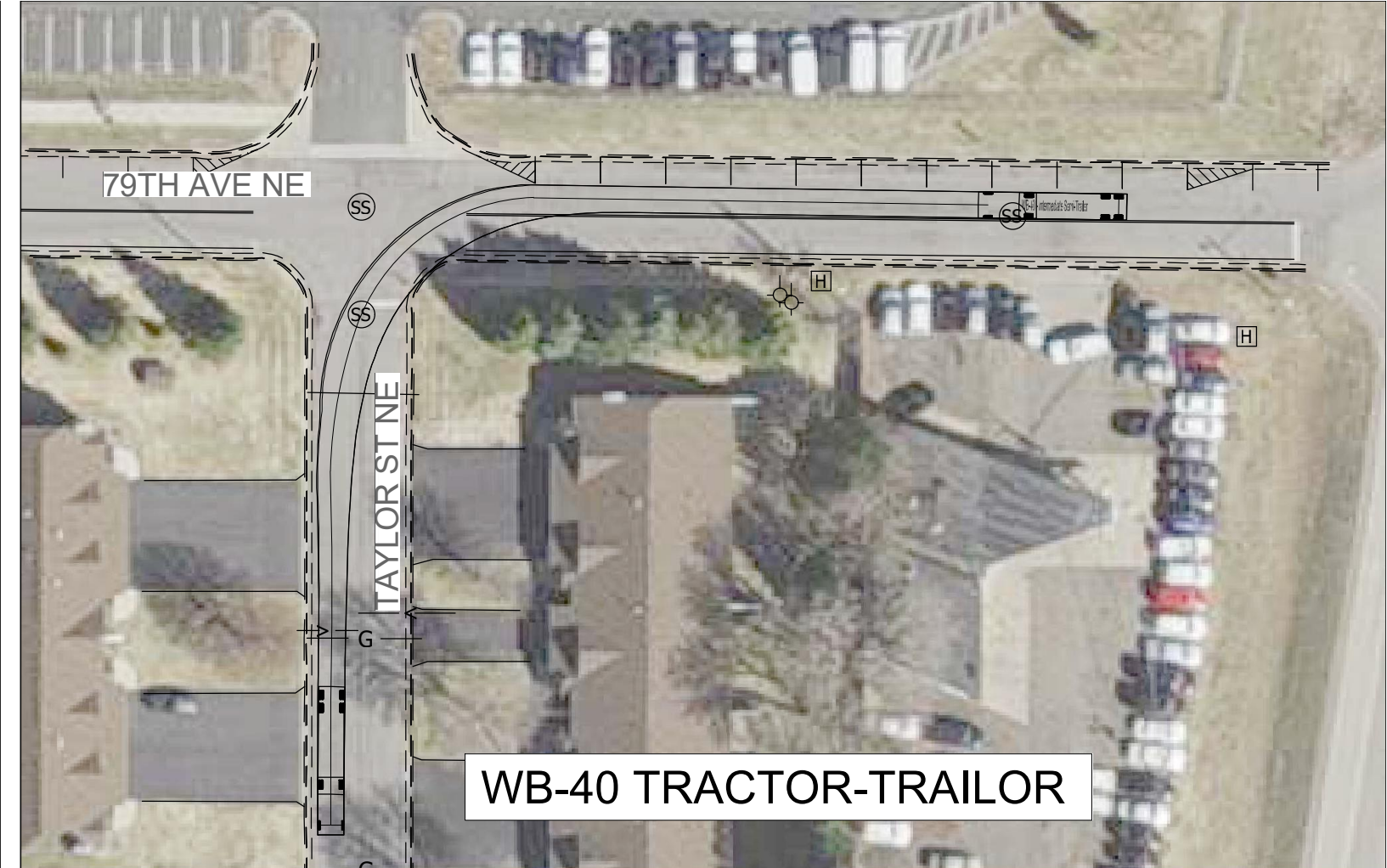
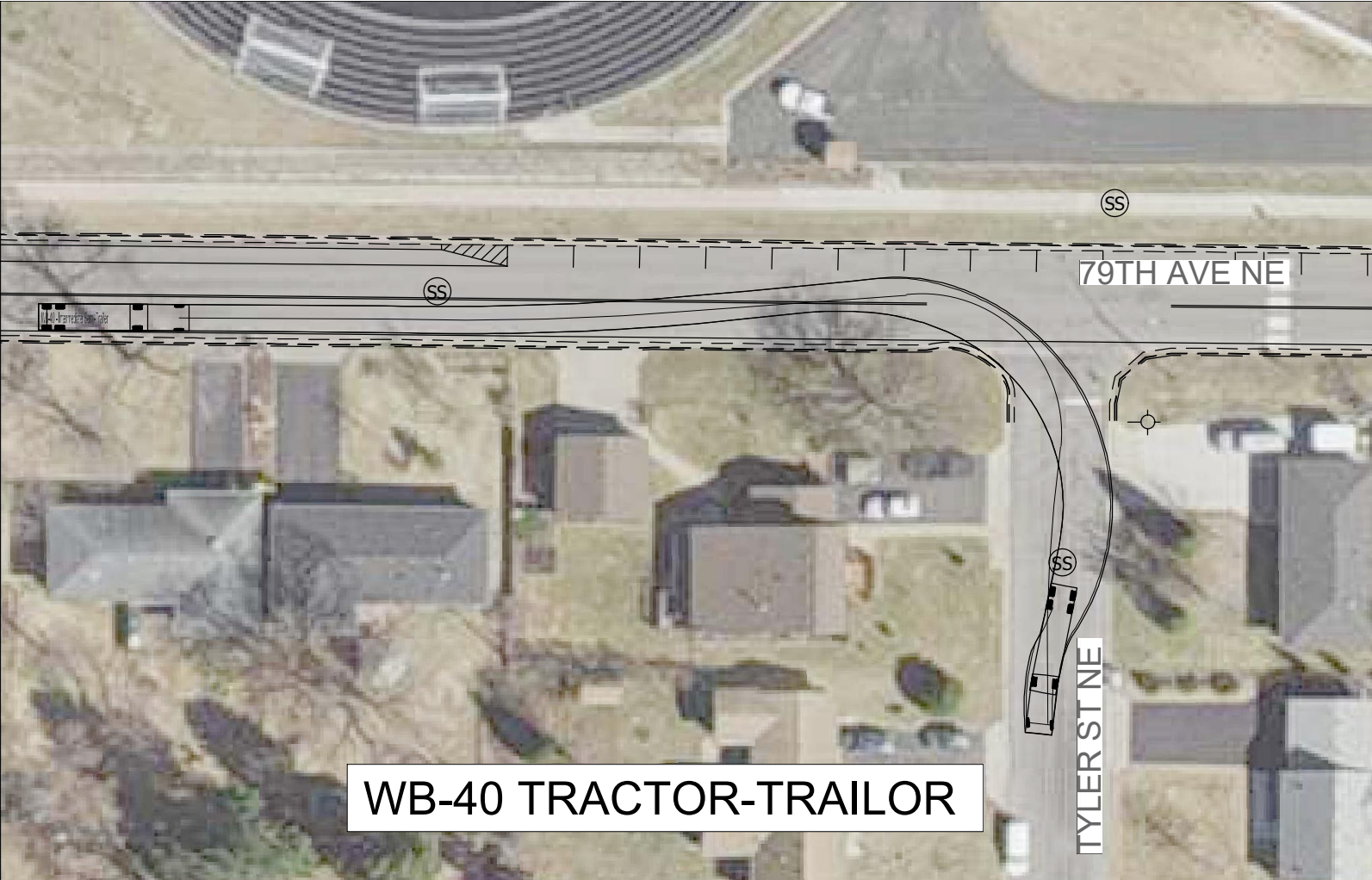
HWY 65 NE

4" SINGLE WHITE

4" DOUBLE YELLOW

PROPOSED 79TH AVE NE SCHOOL PARKING - OPT 2







# Memorandum

**To:** Mayor Nelson and Members of the City Council

**From:** Daniel R. Buchholtz, MMC, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer

**Date:** June 9, 2025

**Subject:** Terrace Park - Court Striping

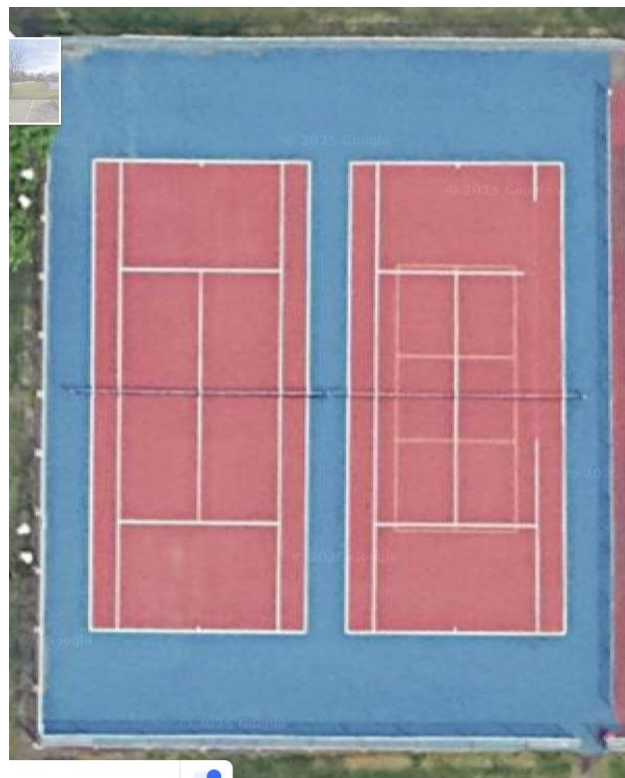
The City Council, at its June 2, 2025 meeting, authorized staff to obtain quotes for the resurfacing of the Terrace Park Tennis Court and Basketball Court. The City Council wished to further discuss striping of the tennis court (tennis court, pickleball court, etc) at a future work session.

Pickleball is a fast-growing sport that blends elements of tennis, badminton and ping pong. It is played with a paddle and a plastic ball with holes, similar to a whiffle ball, on a court about one-third the size of a tennis court. While pickleball started out as a retiree sport, it has exploded in popularity across all age groups. Part of its appeal is that it is easy to learn, highly social and good exercise without being too hard on the body.

Currently, one of the two existing tennis courts at Terrace Park is striped for pickleball, though it utilizes the tennis net rather than a dedicated pickleball net. While this allows for recreational use, it does not provide an ideal playing experience.

The biggest drawback to pickleball is noise. Pickleball generates a distinctive and sharp “pop” sound that is much louder and more percussive than tennis. This is due to the combination of hard paddles hitting a plastic ball with close court proximity. The noise generated from pickleball courts is in the 70-85 decibel range (comparable to a loud conversation or a vacuum cleaner), versus the 58-65 decibel range for tennis.

The City has not received any noise complaints since the East tennis court was restriped to accommodate pickleball.



**FIGURE 1 - TERRACE PARK TENNIS COURT**

The Parks and Recreation Commission discussed the tennis court resurfacing and recommended converting the two tennis courts into four pickleball courts. This recommendation was made with the understanding that twelve tennis courts remain available for public use at Spring Lake Park High School outside of school programming.

Staff is seeking City Council direction on how to stripe the courts – should they retain the tennis striping, be converted to pickleball, or be striped for dual use.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 763-784-6491.





# Memorandum

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**To:** Mayor Nelson and Members of the City Council

**From:** Daniel R. Buchholtz, MMC, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer

**Date:** June 10, 2025

**Subject:** Humane Pet Store Ordinance

Over the past year, the City Council has discussed the potential adoption of a humane pet store ordinance. At the January 21, 2025 work session, the City Council directed staff to bring forward draft language that would prohibit the sale of dogs and cats in pet stores while allowing partnerships with animal rescues and shelters.

Staff has prepared a draft ordinance for City Council review. The ordinance:

- Establishes a definition for pet stores within the City, while specifically exempting hobby breeders not operating commercially, animal shelters, rescue organizations and animal control authorities.
- Prohibits pet stores from selling, bartering, auctioning, giving away or otherwise transferring dogs and cats.
- Allows pet stores to partner with animal shelters, rescue organizations and animal control authorities to showcase adoptable dogs and cats.
- Requires pet stores to post and present certificate of source for dogs and cats.
- Establish penalties for violation of the ordinance.

Staff is seeking City Council direction on the draft ordinance. If there is consensus on the ordinance, staff will send to the City Attorney for formal review and schedule the ordinance for consideration at the July 7, 2025 City Council meeting.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 763-784-6491.

**SPRING LAKE PARK  
ORDINANCE X**

**AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 9 OF THE CITY CODE BY ADDING  
SECTION 9.12.030 CONCERNING PET STORES**

**WHEREAS**, commercial breeding facilities often fail to meet basic animal welfare standards, leading to significant health and behavioral issues in puppies and kittens sold through retail pet stores, which can result in unforeseen financial and emotional burdens on consumers; and

**WHEREAS**, existing federal and state regulations do not sufficiently protect the welfare of animals sold through pet stores, and the City lacks the resources necessary to effectively monitor breeding and sales practices at the local level; and

**WHEREAS**, restricting the retail sale of dogs and cats is a reasonable step toward reducing pet overpopulation and encouraging the adoption of animals from local shelters and rescue organizations, many of which already collaborate with pet supply retailers that do not sell commercially bred animals; and

**WHEREAS**, consumers retain the ability to obtain a pet of their choice from reputable sources, including shelters, breed-specific rescue organizations, and responsible breeders who provide transparency and allow direct interaction with the animals and their living conditions.

**NOW THEREFORE**, be it ordained by the Council of the Spring Lake Park, in the State of Minnesota, as follows:

**SECTION 1:**        **ADOPTION** “9.12.030 Pet Stores” of the Spring Lake Park Municipal Code is hereby *added* as follows:

**ADOPTION**

9.12.030 Pet Stores(*Added*)

**A. Definitions.**

**ANIMAL CONTROL AUTHORITY.** Any governmental entity which is responsible for animal control operations in its jurisdiction.

**ANIMAL RESCUE ORGANIZATION.** Any not-for-profit organization which has tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, whose mission and practice is, in whole or in significant part, the rescue of animals and the placement of those animals in permanent homes, and which does not breed animals.



**ANIMAL SHELTER.** Any not-for-profit organization which has tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, whose mission and practice is, in whole or in significant part, the rescue of animals and the placement of those animals in permanent homes, and which does not breed animals.

**CAT.** A mammal that is wholly or in part of the species *Felis domesticus*.

**CERTIFICATE OF SOURCE.** A document from an animal control authority, animal rescue organization, or animal shelter which shall provide a brief description of the dog or cat, and shall list the name, address, and telephone number of the source (animal control authority, animal rescue organization, or animal shelter) of the dog or cat.

**DOG.** A mammal that is wholly or in part of the species *Canis familiaris*.

**PET STORE.** A commercial establishment, whether permanent or temporary, in which animals commonly kept as household pets, such as dogs, cats, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians or small mammals, are offered for sale, adoption, barter, exchange or gift to the general public, whether directly or through an agent. **PET STORE** does not include: (1) a hobby breeder who breeds and sells animals exclusively from their residence, produces no more than 2 litters per year across all breeds and does not operate as a commercial enterprise or (2) an animal rescue organization, animal control authority or animal shelter.

**B. Restrictions on the Sale of Dogs and Cats by Pet Stores.**

- 1. No pet store shall sell, deliver, offer for sale, barter, auction, give away or otherwise transfer or dispose of cats and dogs.**
- 2. Nothing in this section shall prohibit pet stores from collaborating with animal shelters, animal rescue organizations and animal control authorities to offer space for such entities to showcase adoptable dogs and cats inside pet stores. Such animals shall not be younger than eight (8) weeks old. Dogs that are showcased for adoption shall not be kept overnight at a pet store.**
- 3. A pet store shall post and maintain a Certificate of Source in a conspicuous place on or within three feet of each dog's or cat's kennel, cage or enclosure.**
  - a. A Certificate of Source shall be provided to the adopter of any dog or cat.**
  - b. Certificate of Source records for each dog or cat shall be maintained by a pet store for at least one (1) year from the last date that a dog or cat appeared in the store.**
  - c. Pet stores shall make Certificates of Source immediately available for review upon the request of a peace officer or animal control authority, or a humane agent pursuant to M.S. § 343.06, as it may be amended from time to time, acting on behalf of the City.**

d. Falsification of a Certificate of Source shall be deemed a violation of this section.

C. Violation. Any violation of this section shall be considered a misdemeanor and is subject to the penalties prescribed in SLPC 1.04.200.

**SECTION 2:**        **EFFECTIVE DATE** This Ordinance shall be in full force and effect upon adoption and publication according to law.

PASSED AND ADOPTED BY THE SPRING LAKE PARK COUNCIL

\_\_\_\_\_.

|                                 | <b>AYE</b> | <b>NAY</b> | <b>ABSENT</b> | <b>ABSTAIN</b> |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------|---------------|----------------|
| Councilmember Wendling          | _____      | _____      | _____         | _____          |
| Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff | _____      | _____      | _____         | _____          |
| Councilmember Dircks            | _____      | _____      | _____         | _____          |
| Councilmember Moran             | _____      | _____      | _____         | _____          |
| Mayor Nelson                    | _____      | _____      | _____         | _____          |

Presiding Officer

Attest

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Nelson, Mayor, Spring Lake Park

\_\_\_\_\_  
Daniel R. Buchholtz, Administrator,  
Clerk/Treasurer, Spring Lake Park



# Animal rights activists, Blaine pet store owner clash as more suburbs ban shops from selling cats or dogs

By Sarah Ritter | Jun. 9th, 2025

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Amy Dixon gets to know Patina through Ruff Start Rescue, a foster-based animal rescue organization that hosted a dog adoption event at Steele & Hops in St. Anthony Village on Sunday. (Richard Tsong-Taatarii/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

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Gift

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A couple of times a month, a group gathers outside Blaine's Northtown Mall to protest one of the last stores in Minnesota that still sells dogs from commercial breeders.

Activists have kept up the demonstrations for more than six years, but they still haven't persuaded the store to change its business model or the city to ban it.

Struggling to gain traction, they're instead turning to neighboring suburbs, where more and more cities now ban pet shops from selling cats or dogs.

That number has doubled over the past year to 12, as officials cite concerns about animal welfare at large-scale breeding operations.

The cities include St. Paul, Minneapolis, Roseville, Columbia Heights, Maple Grove, Coon Rapids and Edina.

Oak Grove and Osseo recently passed pet store ordinances, and Robbinsdale is considering one. The three cities don't have pet stores that sell animals from commercial breeders, but activists hope as more suburbs join in, they can increase pressure on the remaining shops and persuade legislators to pass [a statewide ban](#).

"A lot of these cities have taken action because they want to prevent bad actors from coming in," said Aaron Zellhoefer, Minnesota director of the Humane World for Animals. "Dogs are being sold from puppy mills in pet stores here in Minnesota, and a lot of them don't want to be transparent."

Zellhoefer said just three businesses in the state still sell dogs or cats. Most have closed as online sales rise and other shops, including national chains, have shifted to offering animal adoptions from rescues and shelters.

Michael Swanson, who owns Four Paws and a Tail in Blaine, argued the push for pet retail bans unfairly targets his business, a fixture of the city for 50 years. He said his store's puppies come from breeders licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

“They want us gone, no matter what we do,” Swanson said in an email. “We run our store the right way, and we care about animals and families.”

In many cities, the bans have been an easy sell.

“In Oak Grove, we generally don’t like passing ordinances unless we have to,” Mayor Weston Rolf said. “So I was a little surprised, but the council was passionate about wanting to move forward with this.”



Three dogs get to know each other through Ruff Start Rescue, a foster-based animal rescue organization, at a dog adoption event. (Richard Tsong-Taatarii/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

In 2017, Roseville became the first city in Minnesota to prohibit retail pet sales following news reports describing grim conditions at a pet store in [Har Mar Mall](#).

The shop closed soon after, City Manager Patrick Trudgeon said.

Storefronts with kittens and puppies in the window have since been disappearing. Animal rights activists applaud the shift, citing inhumane practices



at puppy and kitten mills, including over-breeding and keeping animals in confinement.

Sharing stories of customers buying puppies that quickly became sick, activists say retail bans ensure animals and consumers are protected.

Lino Lakes resident Megan Helling said a yellow Labrador she bought from a metro pet store suffered health issues that required \$20,000 in surgeries. The dog, Monte, came from an out-of-state puppy mill, she said.

“I saw this cute little puppy and loved him so much. I was shocked,” Helling said.

“There certainly are reputable breeders. If there’s a certain breed someone wants, that’s great. But there’s a big difference between a small, ethical breeder and the large mass production of puppies. It’s all about profit.”

Eight states and hundreds of cities now ban retail sales of dogs and cats.

Some critics argue that wide-reaching bans can lead to more pet sales moving underground.

“If stores like mine are banned,” Swanson said, “people will just go online and get pets from places with no regulation, no consumer protections, and no taxation.”

The Blaine pet shop owner added that customers deserve an option, especially if seeking out a puppy or specific breed.

Swanson said licensed breeders must follow strict rules. He said every puppy he sells comes with a one-year health guarantee and an examination by a veterinarian.

Activists say state and federal regulations fall short of protecting animals and consumers. They have pushed the USDA to increase its standards.

Zellhoefer said he traced puppies sold at Swanson’s shop and the two others still selling them in Minnesota — in Faribault and Meeker County — to 20 breeders. Since 2021, 17 of the breeders have been cited with about 40 animal welfare violations.

The number could be higher, he said, as Minnesota's inspection reports are not public.

After years of trying to persuade Minnesota lawmakers to advance a statewide pet retail ban, activists pushed for a compromise this session.

The proposal, which did not move forward, grandfathered in existing businesses, while requiring more transparency, including labeling where animals came from before they are purchased.

Swanson opposed the bill, saying it would kill his business because he would be unable to relocate if needed.

He said his shop tells customers about a puppy's breeder when they buy the animal. Posting that information, he said, could lead to the breeders being harassed.

Activists hold onto hope for a statewide change.

"We get calls from people with animals from large-scale breeders that have health issues and can't afford care," said Azure Davis, founder of Ruff Start Rescue, which holds adoption events at PetSmart. "I think [the bans] are long overdue."

To leave a comment, [log in or create an account](#) .

## OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the regularly scheduled meeting of the Spring Lake Park City Council Work Session was held on January 21, 2025 at the Able Park Building, 8200 Able Street NE, at 5:00 PM.

### 1. CALL TO ORDER

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

Councilmember Ken Wendling  
Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff  
Councilmember Lisa Dircks  
Councilmember April Moran  
Mayor Robert Nelson

#### STAFF PRESENT

Public Works Director Linngren, Building Official Baker, Police Chief Antoine, Administrator Buchholtz

#### VISITORS PRESENT

Michael Swanson, Four Paws and a Tail, Blaine  
Megan Helling, Lino Lakes  
Aaron Zellhoefer, Humane Society of the United States  
Ann Olsen, St. Paul  
Jessica Bahr, Blaine

### 2. DISCUSSION ITEMS

#### A. Discussion of Humane Pet Store Ordinance

The Council revisited a proposed humane pet store ordinance, which would prohibit the retail sale of puppies and kittens in pet stores while allowing partnerships with animal shelters and rescues.

Mayor Nelson introduced Michael Swanson, owner of Four Paws and a Tail, who strongly opposed the ordinance. Mr. Swanson argued that banning pet store sales would not address concerns about unethical breeding practices but would instead push sales underground, increasing the risk of unregulated backyard breeding. He emphasized that his business follows all legal requirements and provides high-quality care for animals. He also raised concerns about economic impacts, such as the loss of local tax revenue and business opportunities.

Aaron Zellhoefer, Humane Society of the United States, presented counterarguments, stating that many pet stores source animals from high-volume breeding facilities with documented violations of animal welfare laws. He stated that public records from USDA inspections indicated that a significant percentage of breeders used by pet stores had citations related to veterinary care, enclosures, and overall animal well-being. He advocated for a preventative approach, highlighting that 99% of pet stores in Minnesota already operate under a humane pet store model without selling puppies and kittens.



Councilmembers engaged in a discussion regarding the balance between consumer choice, ethical breeding practices, and the role of government regulation. Some members expressed support for the ordinance as a way to ensure humane treatment of animals, while others questioned whether additional state-level regulations would be a more appropriate approach.

Following deliberation, the Council directed staff to draft an ordinance similar to the Coon Rapids model, which would prohibit the sale of puppies and kittens in pet stores while allowing partnerships with rescues and shelters. Staff will bring forward draft language at a future work session for further review and discussion.

#### B. Discussion of 2025 Appointments and City Councilmember Assignments

Administrator Buchholtz stated that the City Council requested that the annual appointments be placed on a work session agenda.

Administrator Buchholtz asked which City Councilmembers were interested in serving as Acting Mayor. Councilmember Wendling and Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff expressed their interest in serving as Acting Mayor. Administrator Buchholtz asked members for their preference. Councilmembers Wendling, Dircks and Moran expressed support for Councilmember Wendling. Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff and Mayor Nelson expressed support for Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff. Administrator Buchholtz noted that the majority of the Council supported Councilmember Wendling as Acting Mayor.

After discussion, the City Council recommended Councilmembers to serve on the following positions:

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| Acting Mayor                               | Ken Wendling              |
| Parks and Recreation Commission            | April Moran               |
|  | Ken Wendling (alt)        |
| Planning Commission Liaison                | Ken Wendling              |
|  | April Moran (alt)         |
| Anoka County Joint Law Enforcement Council | Bob Nelson                |
|  | Ken Wendling (alt)        |
| Anoka County Fire Protection Council       | Lisa Dircks               |
|  | April Moran (alt)         |
| Beyond the Yellow Ribbon                   | Bob Nelson                |
| SBM Fire Department Liaison                | April Moran               |
| Negotiations – Patrol                      | Ken Wendling              |
|  | Lisa Dircks               |
| Negotiations – Sergeants                   | Bob Nelson                |
|  | Barbara Goodboe-Bisschoff |
| Negotiations – Public Works                | Ken Wendling              |
|  | April Moran               |
| Non-Bargained Personnel Committee          | Lisa Dircks               |
|  | Ken Wendling              |

|  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| N. Metro Cable Communications Commission | Barbara Goodboe-Bisschoff       |
| North Metro Mayor's Association          | April Moran (alt)               |
|  | Bob Nelson                      |
| Tower Days Committee                     | Barbara Goodboe-Bisschoff (alt) |
|  | Lisa Dircks                     |
| Trunk Highway 65 Corridor Coalition      | Ken Wendling (alt)              |
| School Board Liaison                     | Barbara Goodboe-Bisschoff       |
|  | April Moran                     |
|  | Ken Wendling (alt)              |
| Coon Creek Citizen Advisory Committee    | Barbara Goodboe-Bisschoff       |

Administrator Buchholtz noted that these appointments would be on the agenda for the January 21, 2025 meeting.

#### C. Discussion of Code Enforcement Position

Administrator Buchholtz provided a historical overview of the position, noting that before the expansion to full-time, the city had difficulty maintaining adequate enforcement with only a part-time employee. He stated that the Council initially authorized the transition to a full-time role in 2021 following a rental housing study that identified the need for stronger oversight and enforcement. He said the position is primarily funded through rental licensing fees, rather than being a direct burden on taxpayers.

Building Official Jeff Baker provided additional insight, explaining that since the position became full-time, the city has seen significant improvements in the condition of rental properties, a reduction in nuisance complaints, and increased enforcement of property maintenance codes. He highlighted key successes, including:

- A substantial decrease in late rental registrations (from an average of 45 down to 5).
- Enhanced commercial fire inspections, which had previously experienced significant backlogs.
- Increased accountability for property owners with a history of neglecting maintenance.
- The successful abatement of a long-standing nuisance property at 8064 Garfield Street.

Mayor Nelson expressed concerns about long-term staffing needs and budget implications, suggesting that the Council take a broader look at staffing levels across all departments before making additional long-term commitments. He noted the increasing costs of city services and emphasized the importance of ensuring that new positions are financially sustainable.

Councilmembers Dircks and Moran supported maintaining the full-time role, stating that the improvements in rental housing and overall property conditions justified the expense. They also noted that cutting the position back to part-time could lead to decreased enforcement and a return to past issues with substandard housing conditions.

After further discussion, a consensus was reached to proceed with filling the position as a full-time role.

**3. REPORT**

A. City Council and Staff Reports - None

**4. ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40pm.

APPROVED BY

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Robert Nelson, Mayor

Attest:

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Daniel R. Buchholtz, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer

## OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the regularly scheduled meeting of the Spring Lake Park City Council Work Session was held on November 18, 2024 at the Able Park Building, 8200 Able Street NE, at 5:30 PM.

### 1. CALL TO ORDER

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

Councilmember Ken Wendling  
Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff  
Councilmember Lisa Dircks  
Councilmember April Moran  
Mayor Robert Nelson

#### STAFF PRESENT

Public Works Director Linngren, Administrator Buchholtz

#### VISITORS PRESENT

Megan Helling, Ashley Riddle, Ann Olson, Nick Coughlin, Aaron Zellhoefer

### 2. DISCUSSION ITEMS

#### A. Discussion of Humane Pet Store Ordinance (Dircks)

Administrator Buchholtz initiated the discussion, noting that the proposed ordinance aims to prohibit the sale of dogs and cats sourced from puppy and kitten mills. He acknowledged that not all scheduled speakers could attend due to unforeseen circumstances and suggested listening to the speakers who were able to attend and then continuing the discussion in a future session to ensure input from all perspectives.

Councilmember Dircks noted that she initially brought this proposed ordinance in July. She stated the consensus of the Council at that time was to schedule the issue for a future City Council work session where all viewpoints on this issue could be presented.

Nick Coughlin, a local advocate and marketing professional, stated that this is not a partisan issue and that both conservative and liberal voices agree on the need to address the cruelty of puppy mills. He shared data from the World Pet Association indicating that pet stores operating under humane models outperform those selling animals.

Megan Helling, an impacted consumer and former business owner, recounted her experience purchasing a sick puppy from a pet store. She also relayed the story of a Wisconsin pet store owner who transitioned to a humane model, emphasizing how this shift increased customer support and reduced business risks.

Aaron Zellhoefer, representing the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), addressed the Council regarding consumer protection issues related to pet stores sourcing animals from



puppy mills. He highlighted deceptive sales practices, such as misleading claims about breeders and withholding breeder information from consumers. Zellhoefer also discussed violations found in breeding facilities supplying Minnesota pet stores, including inadequate veterinary care and poor living conditions for animals. He emphasized that even USDA-licensed breeders often fail to meet humane standards, advocating for the enactment of a humane pet store ordinance to protect both consumers and animals.

Ann Olson, Executive Director of Animal Folks, highlighted the physical and psychological harm endured by animals in breeding facilities. She shared examples of inadequate veterinary care and poor living conditions in puppy mills, stressing the need for stricter regulations.

Ashley Riddell, with the Animal Rights Coalition, discussed the lack of transparency in pet store operations and the financial and emotional burdens placed on consumers purchasing unhealthy animals.

Mayor Nelson shared his personal perspective on the issue of pet sales and humane practices. While he expressed strong opposition to puppy mills, calling for strict accountability and enforcement against unethical breeders, he also raised concerns about limiting consumer choice. He emphasized the importance of creating safe spaces where seniors and families could interact with pets before purchasing, rather than relying on unregulated or unsafe transactions.

Mayor Nelson highlighted issues such as fraudulent pet sales, recounting his own experience of being threatened during an attempted purchase. He advocated for stronger governmental oversight and enforcement to hold unethical breeders accountable, suggesting jail time for those who mistreat animals. While supportive of efforts to address puppy mills, he cautioned against sweeping regulations that might negatively impact responsible breeders or limit legitimate consumer options. His comments reflected a nuanced stance, balancing animal welfare with practical considerations for residents.

Councilmember Moran supported the ordinance, stating that the ordinance is a proactive step to prevent unethical practices from taking root in our community. Councilmember Dircks noted that the proposed ordinance does not prohibit pet stores; it ensures that any pets sold come from humane sources.

Mayor Nelson thanked everyone who came to speak and noted this item will be scheduled for a future work session.

#### B. 2025 Public Utilities Budget Proposal (Buchholtz)

Administrator Buchholtz presented the proposed 2025 Public Utilities Budget proposal, which addresses water, sanitary sewer, and stormwater utility operations. He stated that a 5.75% increase in revenues was driven by rate adjustments. He stated the 5.75% increase in expenditures is due to wage and benefit increases and increases in Metropolitan Council Environmental Services wastewater treatment charges. He said the budget also reallocates a Public Works employee's role to focus on utility maintenance, freeing up funds for contracted

custodial services at City Hall. He noted that the budget continues contributions to the Utilities Renewal and Replacement Fund to support long-term capital improvements.

Mayor Nelson inquired about the financial impact of the salary shift of the Public Works employee to the General Fund. Buchholtz stated that the shift will be cost-neutral, as funds from the General Fund will offset the custodial contract.

Councilmember Wendling stated that he appreciates the budget's investment in the utility infrastructure while keeping rates competitive.

CONSENSUS of the City Council was to review and approve the proposed budget in an upcoming regular meeting.

### **3. REPORT**

#### A. City Council and Staff Reports

Administrator Buchholtz provided an update on upcoming public hearings including the 2025 Fee Schedule ordinance, 2025 Truth in Taxation, the 2025 Street Improvement Project Hearing, and the MS4 Permit Annual Meeting. He stated that public hearings are scheduled for two ordinances, the Cannabis Business Registration ordinance and the Sight Triangle ordinance, in front of the Planning Commission on November 25, 2024.

### **4. ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:35pm.

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Robert Nelson, Mayor

Attest:

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Daniel R. Buchholtz, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer

## OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the regularly scheduled meeting of the Spring Lake Park City Council Worksession was held on July 15, 2024 at the Able Park Building, 8200 Able Street, at 5:30 PM

### 1. CALL TO ORDER

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

Councilmember Ken Wendling  
Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff  
Councilmember Lisa Dircks  
Mayor Robert Nelson

#### MEMBERS ABSENT

Councilmember April Moran

#### STAFF PRESENT

Administrator Buchholtz

### 2. DISCUSSION ITEMS

#### A. Discussion of Humane Pet Store Ordinance (Dircks)

Councilmember Dircks stated that she had been approached by the Animal Humane Society of Minnesota to see if the City Council would consider adopting a humane pet store ordinance to prohibit sale of pets from puppy and kitten mills. She stated that the goal would be to reduce demand for animals from inhumane breeding facilities, thereby decreasing the risk of zoonotic diseases and other health issues associated with poorly bred animals. She stated that seven cities in Minnesota and 400 cities nationwide have adopted a similar ordinance

Mayor Nelson expressed his opposition to a humane pet store ordinance. He stated that it was beyond the scope of local authority to regulate pet stores. He stated that pet regulation should be a state responsibility. He proposed further discussions where representatives from both sides of the issue can educate the City Council.

CONSENSUS of the City Council was to add this item to a future work session agenda and to invite representatives from both sides of the issue to attend and present their position to the City Council.

#### B. Minnesota Cannabis Store Mandate (Goodboe-Bisschoff)

Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff expressed her opposition to the State mandate that the city be required to allow at least one cannabis licensee to register for operation in the city. She inquired if it was legal for the City to become a silent partner with the successful licensee to ensure greater control over the sale of cannabis in the City. Administrator Buchholtz stated

that the State has preempted local control when it comes to the licensing of cannabis. He stated that M.S. § 342.13 gives the city the authority to regulate the time, place and manner of cannabis business operations within its boundaries. He stated that he is drafting an amendment to the zoning code establishing performance standards for adult use cannabis businesses that he hopes to present to the City Council in September for feedback.

No further action was taken on this item.

C. Discussion on Racially Restrictive Covenants in Spring Lake Park (Buchholtz)

Administrator Buchholtz explained that racially restrictive covenants are clauses in property deeds that were used to prevent people of certain races from purchasing, leasing or occupying properties. He noted that while these covenants are no longer enforceable, their presence in property records serves as a painful reminder of past discrimination and segregation. He stated that a recent review of property records shows that there are 53 properties in the city that have a racially restrictive covenant recorded with the property. He requested authority from the City Council to send letters to these property owners and provide them with the form to facilitate the discharge.

Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff expressed her concern about stirring up controversy by sending out letters regarding racially restrictive covenants. She stated that she would prefer to implement a point of sale ordinance to address the discharge of these covenants during the selling process. She stated that she did not support allocating funds to pay the document recording cost. Administrator Buchholtz stated that he was only seeking a voluntary solution but noted that the City Council could address this through a point of sale ordinance.

CONSENSUS of the City Council was to ask Administrator Buchholtz to draft a letter informing the property owners with a racially restrictive covenant for review by the City Council and to draft a point-of-sale ordinance for review by the City Council.

**3. REPORT**

A. City Council / Staff Reports – None.

**4. ADJOURN**

Mayor Nelson declared the meeting adjourned at 6:35pm.

---

Robert Nelson, Mayor

Attest:

---

Daniel R. Buchholtz, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer



## Daniel Buchholtz

---

**From:** Lisa Dircks  
**Sent:** Saturday, July 6, 2024 9:00 AM  
**To:** Daniel Buchholtz  
**Subject:** Fwd: Humane Pet Store Policy in Spring Lake Park

Good morning Dan,

I'd like to add a discussion for an ordinance banning the sale of puppies and kittens to an upcoming work session.

Let me know when it is going on the calendar, and I will start gathering data for the packet. We could also invite Mr. Zellhoefer to that meeting in case council has any questions.

Happy Saturday!

Lisa

Sent from Android device

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Aaron Zellhoefer <azellhoefer@humanesociety.org>  
Date: Jul 6, 2024 7:41 AM  
Subject: Humane Pet Store Policy in Spring Lake Park  
To: Lisa Dircks <ldircks@slpmn.org>  
Cc:

This message was sent from outside of the organization. Please do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the source of this email and know the content is safe.

Hello Council Member Lisa Dircks,

My name is Aaron Zellhoefer and I'm the Minnesota State Director for the Humane Society of the United States. I'm reaching out to introduce myself and ask whether you'd consider an ordinance that prohibits the retail sale of cats and dogs in pet stores in Spring Lake Park.

A humane pet store ordinance like this is a policy that nearly 500 localities across 32 states have enacted, including 8 communities in Minnesota. Most recently Coon Rapids, MN. These laws are enacted, primarily, because puppy-selling stores enable inhumane puppy mills, which are large-scale commercial breeders who put profits far ahead of animal welfare. These puppies are often sick because of the conditions they come from, which can cost unsuspecting consumers hundreds or thousands of dollars. But there are also many localities who have taken action because they want to protect their communities from the predatory lending practices that go hand in hand with the pet store sales pitch.

Now is an ideal time for Spring Lake Park to enact this policy since there currently aren't any puppy-selling pet stores in the city. It would simply prevent bad actors, such as Petland, from opening stores in

Spring Lake Park and adding to the pet issues the city is already facing, such as overwhelmed shelters, stray animals, etc.

I would be happy to talk more with you about this issue, if you are interested in pursuing a humane pet store ordinance in Spring Lake Park. Hope we can connect and go over any questions you may have and more information!

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Aaron Zellhoefer

**Aaron J Zellhoefer**

Minnesota State Director, State Affairs

*Pronouns: he/him/his*

[azellhoefer@humanesociety.org](mailto:azellhoefer@humanesociety.org)

P 612-910-6241

[humanesociety.org](http://humanesociety.org)



The Humane Society of the United States is the nation's most effective animal protection organization, fighting for all animals for more than 60 years. To support our work, please make a [monthly donation](#), give in [another way](#) or [volunteer](#).



**ORDINANCE NO. 2303**

**A REGULATION OF PET STORES AND THEREBY AMENDING  
REVISED CITY CODE - 1982 BY ADDING CHAPTER 6-900,  
REGULATION OF PET STORES**

**The City of Coon Rapids does ordain:**

Section 1. Revised City Code - 1982 is hereby amended by adding Chapter 6-900,  
Completion of Exterior work as follows: (additions double underlined)

**CITY OF COON RAPIDS, MINNESOTA**

**CHAPTER 6-900**

**REGULATION OF PET STORES**

6-901 Policy

The City Council finds that in accordance with the power granted to it by Minnesota Statutes Section 412.221, Subdivision 21 to regulate the keeping of animals, and to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community, the City Council it is appropriate to adopt the regulations set forth below regarding the sale of dogs and cats at pet stores.

6-902 Definitions. Except where the term is expressly defined by other provisions or sections within this chapter, the following words and terms shall have the meanings ascribed to them in this section:

(1) Animal Control Authority. Any governmental entity which is responsible for animal control operations in its jurisdiction.

(2) Animal Rescue Organization. Any not-for-profit organization which has tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, whose mission and practice is, in whole or in significant part, the rescue of animals and the placement of those animals in permanent homes, and which does not breed animals.

(3) Animal shelter. Any not-for-profit organization which has tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, which (1) accepts animals into a physical facility; (2) is devoted to the rescue, care, and adoption of stray, abandoned, unwanted or surrendered animals; (3) places animals in permanent homes or with animal rescue organizations; and (4) does not breed animals.

(4) Cat. A mammal that is wholly or in part the species *Felis domesticus*.

(5) Pet store. Any retail establishment, or operator thereof, which displays, sells, delivers, offers for sale, barters, auctions, gives away, or otherwise transfers companion animals in the City of Coon Rapids. This definition does not apply to animal control authorities, animal shelters, or animal rescue organizations.

(6) Pet store operator. A person or business entity who owns or operates a pet store.

6-903 Prohibition on Sales.

(1) No pet store shall sell, deliver, offer for sale, barter, auction, give away, or otherwise transfer or dispose of cats or dogs.

(2) Nothing in this section shall prohibit pet stores from collaborating with animal shelters, animal rescue organizations, and animal control authorities to offer space for such entities to showcase adoptable dogs and cats inside pet stores. Such animals shall not be younger than 8 weeks old. Dogs that are showcased for adoption shall not be kept overnight at a pet store.

6-904 Certificate of Source.

(1) A pet store shall post and maintain a Certificate of Source in a conspicuous place on or within three feet of each dog's or cat's kennel, cage, or enclosure.

(2) A Certificate of Source shall be provided to the adopter of any dog or cat.

(3) Certificate of Source records for each dog or cat shall be maintained by a pet store for at least one year from the last date that a dog or cat appeared in the store.

(4) Pet Stores shall make Certificates of Source immediately available for review upon the request of a peace officer or animal control authority, or a humane agent pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Section 343.06 acting on behalf of the City.

6-905 Inspection. Upon prior notice to the owner or occupant of a pet store, a City employee is authorized hereby to inspect the pet store for the purpose of ensuring compliance with this section.

6-906 Violation. It shall be deemed a violation of this section for any person to:

(1) Falsify a Certificate of Source.

(2) Resist, impede or hinder a City employee in the performance of his or her duties in inspecting any pet store.

(3) Violate any provisions of this section.

(4) The first violation by a person of this Chapter 6-900 is a petty misdemeanor and subsequent violations of this Chapter 6-900 within one year of a prior violation is a misdemeanor with the penalties for petty misdemeanors and misdemeanors determined by Minnesota Statutes.

Introduced this 2nd day of April, 2024

Adopted this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2024

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jerry Koch, Mayor

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Joan Lenzmeier, City Clerk



[IMPACT](#) [COLORADO](#) [DOG RESCUE](#) [ANIMAL WELFARE](#)

## When 'Puppy Mill Rescue' Blurs The Line Between Saving And Selling Dogs

Questionable practices inside the high-profile nonprofit National Mill Dog Rescue are not what most people expect "rescuing" to be.

By Kim Gavin

Jul 14, 2019, 08:00 AM EDT

Updated Sep 4, 2019



LEAVE A COMMENT



ILLUSTRATION: DAMON DAHLEN/HUFFPOST; PHOTOS: GETTY



One Saturday in 2014, a woman named Theresa Strader stepped onto a TEDx event stage in Colorado Springs and waited quietly to speak. On a large screen, a video played of her reading a letter she had written, but never sent, to the breeder of her Italian greyhound Lily. In the video, Strader wiped tears from her cheeks and repeatedly paused to catch her breath, as she described dogs like Lily being imprisoned in cages their whole lives — sadness and fear in their eyes, lower jaws rotted away, never once able to run or play — all because the breeder was solely interested in producing puppies at any expense. Photos of Lily, deformed and painfully thin, flashed across the screen. In one, the dog stood in a wire cage, a tag with her auction lot number, 251, hanging around her neck.

After the video played, Strader walked to center stage and talked about how her visit to the dog auction where she bought Lily seven years earlier had changed her life. She described her first sight of Lily and dozens of other dogs, how she was left speechless at their living conditions, how she sank to the ground in tears. During those first moments at the auction, she said, she decided to found a new kind of dog rescue organization — one that would take dogs from “puppy mill” breeders like Lily’s and offer them for adoption to loving homes.

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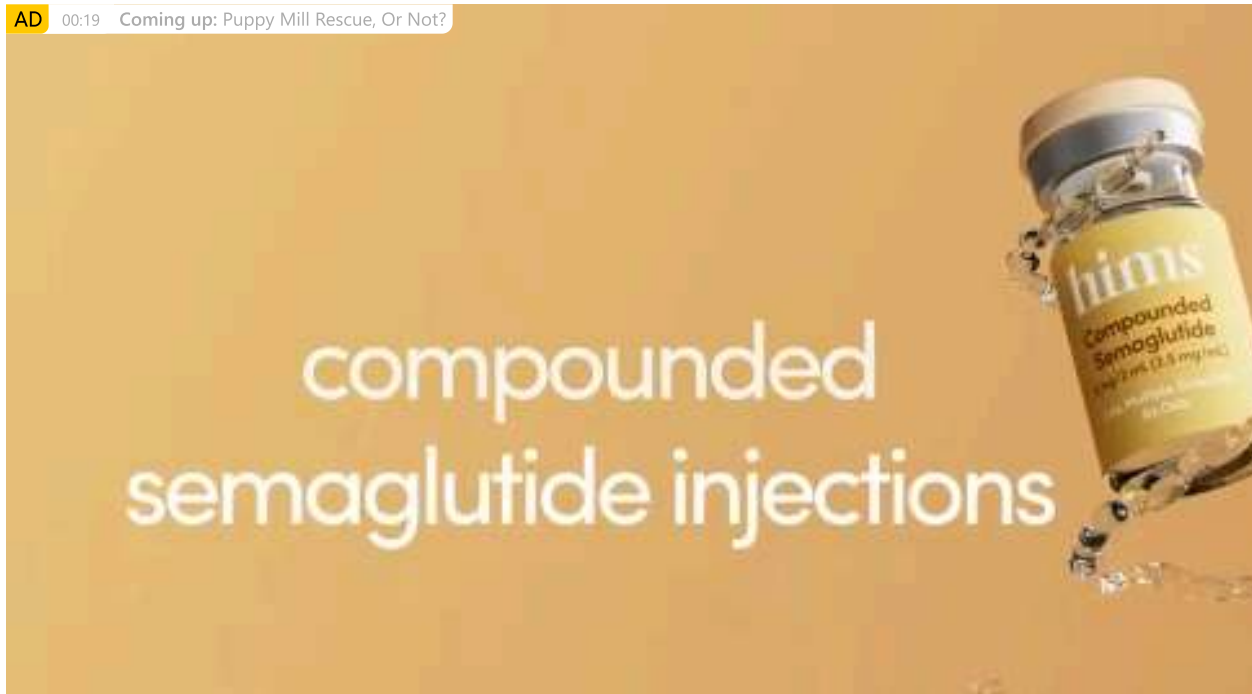


The audience cheered.

In the 12 years since she attended the Missouri auction, Strader has built a nonprofit empire. The organization she founded, National Mill Dog Rescue, now brings in nearly \$3 million a year, according to its most recent available tax return. The nonprofit has nearly [670,000 followers on Facebook](#), with another [56,000 on Instagram](#) and [25,000 on Twitter](#). National Mill’s website says it has “rescued and placed” more than 14,000 dogs as pets in homes, and it has become a regular supplier of dogs and puppies to at least a dozen other nonprofits and shelters from New York to California. Strader has been publicly lauded by everyone from the American Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), which [gave her an award](#) named for its esteemed founder, to People magazine, which designated her “[a hero among us](#).” Her nonprofit has [spawned multiple copycat organizations](#), some run by former National Mill volunteers, spreading Strader’s version of the “puppy mill rescue” cause all across the United States.

It should be a story to make us all feel good. But “puppy mill rescue” as National Mill has come to embody it is not what most Americans understand “rescue” to be.

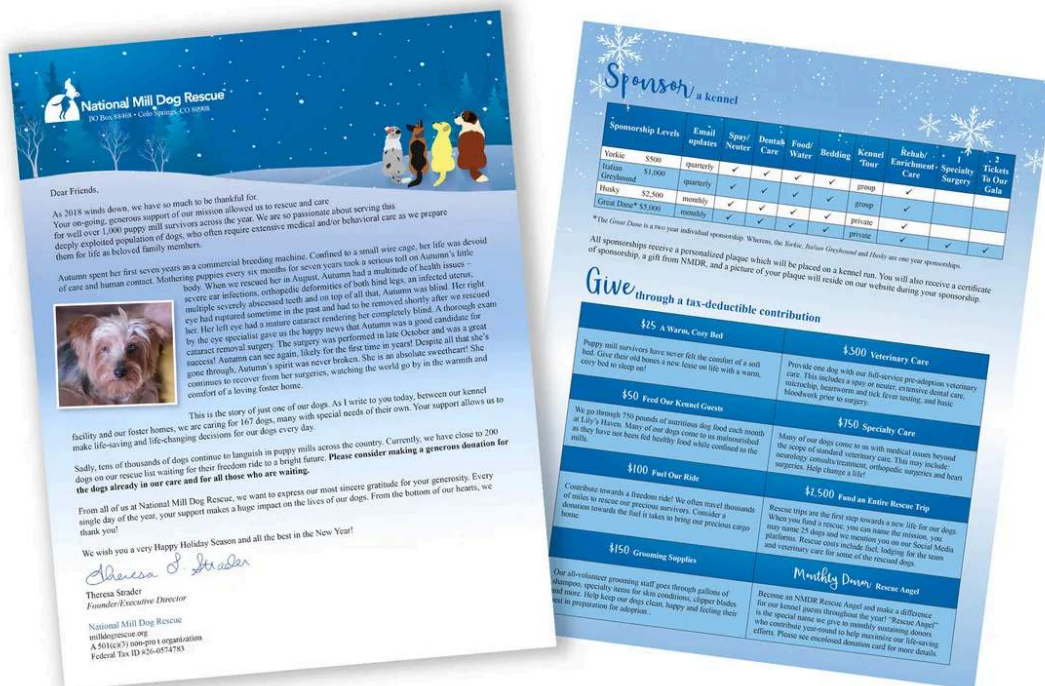


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According to experts in the dog trade, “puppy mill rescue” should encompass two basic elements — a bad breeder shutting down and

the one-time removal of dogs from that breeder. But National Mill's business model doesn't focus on breeding kennels that are shutting down. The nonprofit's version of "rescue" actually helps kennels that stay in business, National Mill insiders said.

National Mill often works hand-in-glove with commercial kennels — including at least three breeders on the "Horrible Hundred" lists from the Humane Society of the United States. Behind the scenes, many of the "rescue missions" in which Strader collects dogs from breeders — promoted online with rousing music and promises that the dogs are finally free from a life of cruelty — resemble the kind of brokering that has linked kennels and retail pet stores for generations.



An example of a marketing letter from National Mill Dog Rescue.

During the past decade, the success of "puppy mill rescue" nonprofits like National Mill has dovetailed with a burgeoning nationwide campaign against "puppy mills." Some 300 jurisdictions, including California and Maryland, have enacted pet store laws aimed at driving bad breeders out of the retail game, with versions now being debated in New York, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wisconsin. Celebrities like actress [Edie Falco back the "puppy mill" bans in the media](#), declaring it "an exciting time that we can actually be close to putting an end to this

cruelty.” On May 1, federal lawmakers introduced the bipartisan [Puppy Protection Act](#), targeting conditions in commercial breeding kennels. Heartrending images of dirty, shivering, frightened dogs in rusty outdoor cages are in constant rotation on TV, helping just the top welfare organizations alone to generate hundreds of millions of dollars a year in donations. Americans, who bring home an estimated 8 million pet dogs a year, are encouraged to “adopt, don’t shop.” And more people than ever are choosing shelter dogs and “puppy mill survivors” instead of buying a pooch from a breeder.

The virtue signaling around shelters and dog rescue is loud and clear.

But when it comes to “puppy mill rescue,” that’s not the whole story. National Mill has a network of suppliers, including at least 30 it has returned to more than once to collect dogs. Some of them are federally or state-regulated breeders and brokers, and some are tied to pet stores and the American Kennel Club, the country’s best-known registry of purebred dogs. National Mill takes puppies the breeders haven’t sold, along with adult dogs the breeders want to retire. Often, National Mill gets the dogs straight from the kennels; the group also has [paid to buy dogs from breeders](#) through middlemen such as dog auctioneers.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture requires a federal license for commercial brokers that buy puppies from breeders for sale to pet stores. As of early 2019, National Mill was being inspected under the same license — a regulatory acknowledgment that its operations function more like the business of brokers than the nonprofit charity of rescues and shelters.

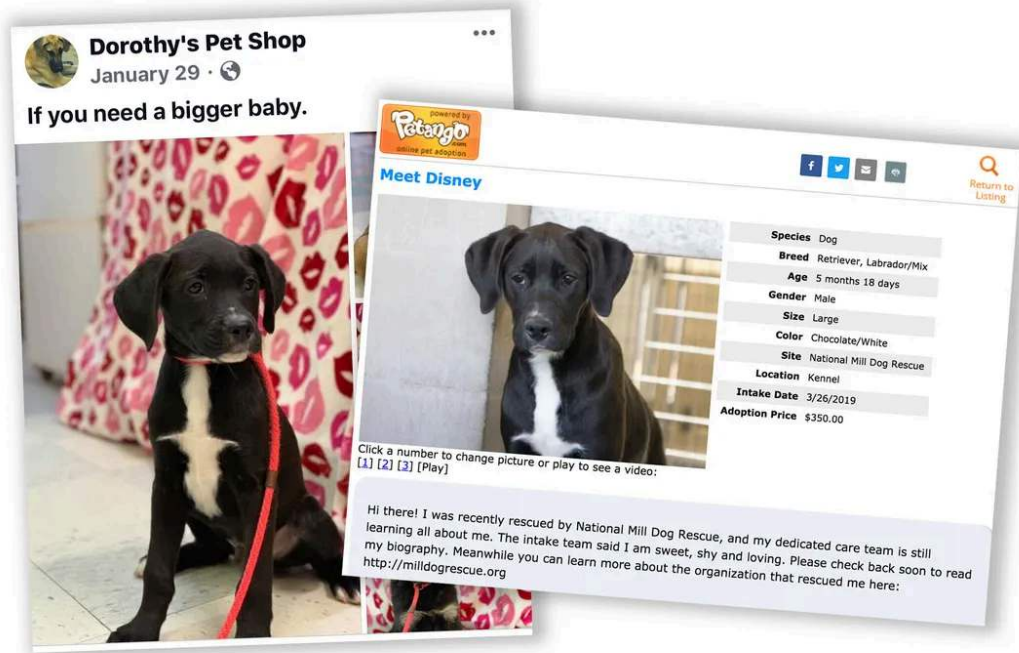
Meanwhile, marketing that looks and sounds a lot like Strader’s TEDx Talk tells the public that these “rescued” dogs are receiving proper veterinary care and basic human compassion for the first time in their lives, and that they’re being saved from a cruel and heartless industry that nobody with a shred of sanity would do anything to support.

According to documents that HuffPost obtained from inside National Mill, however, the dogs coming from breeders throughout 2017 and 2018 were far younger, and healthier, than multiple commercial breeding experts and activists suggest they would be in a “rescue” situation. Numerous former National Mill staff and volunteers said the majority of dogs have arrived at the nonprofit in pretty good shape going back more than a half-dozen years.

They're also not the kinds of overlooked pups and scruffy mutts that shelters have often encouraged people to take home. Many of the dogs that National Mill adopts out are among the most popular purebreds, including beagles, Chihuahuas, dachshunds, Siberian huskies, poodles, Shih Tzus and Yorkshire terriers, as well as some of the most desired designer cross-breeds, like goldendoodles and labradoodles. In other words, they are exactly the kind of dogs that commercial breeders are in the business of selling.

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In purely retail terms, if pet stores are the top-dollar Nordstrom or Saks Fifth Avenue of the commercial breeding industry, taking the pick of the litter from the breeders and offering those pups for sale at sky-high retail prices, then National Mill's version of "puppy mill rescue" is the TJMaxx or Marshalls, scooping up what might be damaged, imperfect or simply unsold "brand-name" product and marketing it to consumers at a lower price — like a black pup that Dorothy's Pet Shop in Junction City, Kansas, advertised on [Facebook](#) on Jan. 29. The same dog showed up in a "rescue mission" video being offloaded at National Mill on March 27, by then too old for typical pet store shoppers. He was being marketed by the name Disney, at a bargain price of \$350, as of mid-April on the National Mill website.



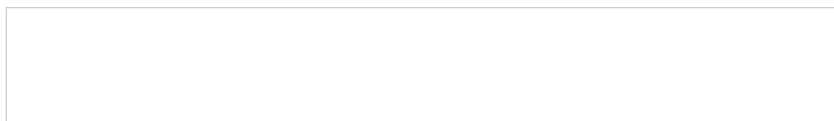
A black puppy named "Disney" for sale at Dorothy's Pet Shop on the left and then available through National Mill's website for \$350 on the right.

FACEBOOK/NMDR.ORG

The social media images of that dog are among many that HuffPost reviewed during a six-month investigation of National Mill. We interviewed more than 35 people, including more than a dozen current and former National Mill staffers, volunteers and directors. HuffPost also looked at National Mill's inspection reports in Colorado going back to early 2017; a slew of documents, photos and videos from inside the nonprofit; and more than 7,500 documents received through open-records requests in seven states where the nonprofit sources dogs it tells the public it's "rescuing" from breeders.

When HuffPost reached out to Strader with detailed questions, she declined to address them. "The questions and comments you have provided are so thoroughly riddled with flagrant lies, bias and inaccuracies, a response is simply not warranted. Your agenda is, and always has been, quite clear," she said via email.

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The reporting shows that questionable practices at National Mill aren't limited to marketing. Two agencies in Colorado — the state Department of Regulatory Agencies and a division of the state Department of Agriculture — have opened investigations into the nonprofit following complaints that Jene Nelson, National Mill's former marketing director-turned-whistleblower, filed with the state in early 2019. Those complaints allege that National Mill has trafficked dogs across state lines without legally required veterinary paperwork, falsified rabies certificates prior to dogs being offered for adoption or transferred to other shelters, and more than once delayed or failed to provide needed veterinary treatment.

HuffPost's reporting supports those allegations and points to a damning conclusion: that National Mill's version of "puppy mill rescue" simply normalizes another retail pipeline, with a side helping of virtue, from the commercial breeding industry to the public. Iowa's attorney general, in an action filed this past March against other rescue nonprofits, defined a similar operation as "[puppy laundering](#)" intended to sidestep the pet store bans lawmakers have been enacting.

"This is a dog-buying and distributing company that is posing as a rescue," said Cindy McKeon, who served as National Mill's facilities manager from 2011 to 2013. "It's possible that some of them [breeders] aren't being paid, but she's making room for them to breed more, and she's making a fortune by assisting these breeders."

Several of the breeders HuffPost spoke with agreed about the impact that Strader's concept of "puppy mill rescue" is having on their kennels.

"She has been a godsend to me," said Debbie Snyder of [D&D Kennels](#) in Kansas. "It's very nice."

## **Most Common Problem: Needs A Bath**

Snyder's kennel is in Clifton, Kansas, population 554. That's the type of rural area where a lot of National Mill's dogs originate, as well as

the more than 100,000 purebred puppies that end up in pet stores nationwide each year. Breeding kennels with 10, 15 or more dogs tend to be located in the American heartland in areas also known for raising cows, pigs and crops, the kinds of places that often have struggling downtowns.

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HuffPost interviewed about a dozen dog breeders in rural areas. Some said they've been driven to kill dogs in the past, because there simply weren't enough local adopters for the retired breeding adults or the puppies that were, say, born the "wrong color" for their breed or with a genetic problem that made them hard to sell. Other breeders said they've always found homes for their dogs, but doing so required a lot of time spent on marketing, which isn't their primary skill set. National Mill can reach far more potential adopters through its vast social media network and by delivering dogs to shelters such as North Shore Animal League America, a \$40 million nonprofit in the New York City area with A-list celebrity boosters that sometimes showcases dogs on radio and TV, [including "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert."](#)

"These dogs aren't being rescued. She's rehoming them," said breeder Amy Noland of [Dog Blessed Bullies](#) in Maple Hill, Kansas, population 620. "We've sent some 3- and 4-year-olds to her that have never bred. Sometimes a female just won't breed." Noland said she's also given National Mill older dogs. "Most of them, they're retired, French bulldogs, maybe 6 or 7 years old. To me, they're a lifesaver for us, to help with that."

When asked for comment, National Mill staffer Helen Freeman — who as of 2017 was listed on the nonprofit's tax returns as an officer on the board of directors — called HuffPost's questions a "witch hunt" while acknowledging that National Mill and the breeders are indeed a symbiotic entity.

“The relationship is one of, we’re grateful to them for giving the dogs a second chance, and they’re grateful for having a place to turn to and give their dogs a second chance,” Freeman said. “We’re helping them to retire their breeding dogs in a humane way.”

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Of course, describing the dogs as “retired breeders” or “too old to be a pet store puppy” doesn’t have the same fundraising cachet as “puppy mill survivors.” National Mill’s mission statement is to “rescue, rehabilitate and rehome discarded breeding dogs and to educate the general public about the cruel realities of a commercial dog breeding industry.” Its fundraising and marketing have long highlighted some of the worst-case animals it receives, who are portrayed as representative of the whole industry. The message focuses on how they’re sick, genetically deformed, psychologically and physically battered, or overbred well into their elderly years.

Current and former volunteers for National Mill told HuffPost that its messaging has been a combination of truth and exaggeration, going back to at least 2011. Several said Strader had personally instructed volunteers to promote the worst-case dogs because, as one former volunteer put it, “that’s how you get the donations, quite honestly.”

HuffPost obtained National Mill’s internal assessments of 919 dogs received from breeders from March 2017 to December 2018.

According to the volunteers who described the incoming dogs, less than 1 in 10 were sick, injured or genetically deformed, or appeared scared or terrified. Two-thirds of the dogs were described positively with words that ranged from “sweet” and “friendly” to “gives kisses,” “playful” and “outgoing.” About 1 in 5 were described as timid, shy or nervous, despite being in new surroundings and handled by unfamiliar people after a long ride in a travel crate. A few of the dogs arrived from breeders already housebroken, leash-trained, and spayed or neutered, according to the documents. One 5-year-old Shih Tzu entered the program able to give high fives on command.



According to National Mill's Animal Care Program report for the first 11 months of 2018, which covered 1,133 dogs, by far the most common "procedure" that incoming pups required before being put up for adoption was bathing. While 193 dogs were listed as needing "severe dental surgeries" and 206 dogs were sent to outside veterinarians, the nonprofit logged some 1,880 sessions in the bath (some dogs need more than one). And 352 dogs went to the in-house grooming stands for de-matting, trims, clips and fluffs.

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Nevertheless, according to unofficial minutes taken at a November 2018 meeting of National Mill's directors, the nonprofit decided to focus its year-end fundraising letter on dogs' medical needs. At the same meeting, outside veterinary bills were described as being low, at just over \$5,000. The appeal letter that went out to thousands of National Mill supporters opened with an update signed by Strader. The first paragraph reads: "Your on-going, generous support of our mission allowed us to rescue and care for well over 1,000 puppy mill survivors across the year. We are so passionate about serving this deeply exploited population of dogs, who often require extensive

medical and/or behavioral care as we prepare them for life as beloved family members.”

Freeman and Dr. Debbie St. Louis, who worked at National Mill for two and a half years as a veterinarian (and left this year), said the internal documents that HuffPost obtained didn’t necessarily reflect the true condition of the dogs. Both women said that vets may find additional problems after the initial assessments are complete, although St. Louis confirmed that volunteers do tend to note anything “really bad.”

“We put that the dog is sweet or timid or shy or gives kisses. We just rescue dogs that have probably never seen a brush or anything,” she said. “They were just unbelievably matted dogs, but they were still happy little things. We’ve had dogs that have lost every tooth in their mouth, but they’re giving you kisses. Dogs are incredibly resilient.”

Connie Bouchard, who volunteered with National Mill during its earliest days before starting her own nonprofit called [Breeder Release Adoption Service](#), said the dogs coming into nonprofit “rescues” from breeders used to be in much worse shape than they are today.

“That’s not a bad thing — these people needed to clean up their acts,” she said. “In that respect, this has been a good thing, but to continue to lead the public to believe that every single dog is a train wreck — they’re just not.”

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The data set that HuffPost obtained from inside National Mill appears to be the first to be made public about the actual health and temperament of dogs coming into nonprofit rescue from the kinds of kennels often labeled “puppy mills.” Another, larger data set about commercial breeding conditions — which has yet to be published — is being collected at Purdue University in Indiana. Candace Croney,

director of Purdue's Center for Animal Welfare Science, has spent the past four and a half years getting about 100 commercial breeders to let her team into their kennels to research standards of care on what dogs actually need, how success can be measured, and how to determine scientifically whether dogs are in good shape physically and psychologically.

Croney was not surprised by what National Mill's internal reports showed. She said the Purdue data, which is based on different breeding kennels than the ones National Mill frequents, is finding much the same thing so far.

"Now, the caveat is that we're working with breeders who open their doors to us," Croney said. "We know that we are working with a skewed population, but some of the ones who we see where there are problems — that's starting to happen because they realize we're not there to do them harm, we're really just there to measure the welfare of the dogs — we don't see many or serious health problems."

"The internet tells me that I should see dogs living in squalor, that are living in cages, that are thin from not being fed properly, that are matted in their coats, that get no dental care, that never see a veterinarian, that have wounds and injuries that are unattended," she added. "That's what I was expecting to see, and we don't see that. Of all the kennels we've been to, I can count less than a handful of places where we've seen any dogs that we have any concerns about their physical health or physical condition."

What Croney's team has seen, she said, is animals that seem fearful, especially of strangers, much as National Mill's internal reports listed 20% of dogs as shy, timid or nervous.

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### Dog Welfare Research - With Caretaker



### Dog Welfare Research - With Strangers



ABOVE:

*While “puppy mill rescuers” often look into the camera and say the dogs seem shy or fearful because they’ve lived their whole lives without meaningful human contact or have been caged and never set foot on the ground, Candace Croney’s research, in conjunction with Purdue University, shows that the dogs are sometimes simply afraid of the rescuers because the rescuers are strangers. The top video shows dogs with the breeder they know. The bottom video shows the same dogs in the same place with an unfamiliar person, such as a rescuer.*

“What’s sort of interesting is that there’s this idea that these dogs are fearful because they’re mistreated or because they’re only handled when they’re being fed and watered,” Croney said. “But what we’re seeing is that in many of these places, not only are the dogs getting regular interactions, but they’re getting positive interaction. What they’re not getting is socialization: exposing the dogs to new sights, sounds and other people. What we have found, at least in the preliminary study, is that when we test the dogs with their people, they know those folks and have a positive relationship with them. Their body language and other things tell us this. It just doesn’t manifest with other people.”

In other words, it’s possible that some dogs are showing signs of nervousness when they reach National Mill simply because they’ve

never known anything but the kennel where they were raised. The very act of “rescuing” them may be what’s making them afraid that day — which is “not a horrific welfare situation,” Croney noted.

Overall, she said, “I’m floored by what I’m seeing. I’m under no illusion that everybody operates at a high standard, or that every outcome for every dog is good. But the data is far too good from far too many of these kennels not to take a hard step back and ask: Where is the information coming from that these dogs are all coming from horrible kennels?”

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Equally noteworthy are the ages of dogs that National Mill collects from breeders. According to records HuffPost obtained documenting 942 dogs picked up between February 2017 and December 2018, most of National Mill’s “rescues” were not elderly dogs who were bred well into their senior years. Instead, 64% of the dogs were 5 or younger, 22% were 6 months or younger, and 84% were 7 or younger. Senior-age dogs, those 10 and older that could have been overbred for years past their prime, represented just 5% of the dogs taken in during that nearly two-year period, the documents show.

The “quick facts” section of National Mill’s website, as of April, said the average age of dogs it rescued was 7 years old. But the dogs collected between February 2017 and December 2018 were actually only 4.4 years old on average.



Becky Weaver, who said she volunteered with National Mill from about 2012 through 2018, saw a change over time in the ages of the dogs coming in through “rescue missions” at breeding kennels.

“You know, we get all ages now,” she said. “It used to be older dogs — 7, 8 years old and up. Now we get a lot of younger dogs, too. I’d say maybe a year and a half ago, two years ago, it changed.”

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Patrick Desjardins, who said he volunteered with National Mill for several months about four years ago, described being stunned that most of the Australian shepherds “rescued” from breeder Karey Marrs of [Mockingbird Hill Kennel](#) in Bolivar, Missouri, were in fine shape.

“I was there and helped unload them,” he recalled. “Out of the six we took off, five were fine. One was shell-shocked, but hey, he’d just spent a day and a half in a van. The vast majority of those dogs, there’s not a whole lot wrong with them at all.”

Marrs is an American Kennel Club Breeder of Merit who has produced 15 show ring champions. She said she relinquishes retired breeding dogs to National Mill when they're about 6 years old because it's easier for the nonprofit to find them homes.

"To tell you the truth, there aren't that many good rehoming services out there," Marrs said. "So, if you are kind of stuck in that situation where you have to use what's available, you know — you want your puppies or your adults to go ... to homes, and that's the most important thing. What they call us is a sales pitch to the public."

"I've told them several times they need to change their name," she added. "I don't like it. But, in that instance, you have to do what you have to do."

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## **Is It About The Dogs Or The Money?**

In summer 2013, the Black Forest fire ravaged more than 14,000 acres in Colorado and destroyed more than 500 homes, including Theresa Strader's. Because the nonprofit had been started in her home, it still had office space where National Mill business was conducted.

National Mill sought donations to help the Strader family, and the nonprofit's 2014 tax return shows a personal loan of \$57,798 to Strader and her husband, Rich, who is National Mill's treasurer — with \$32,376 still owed at the end of that year. There is no mention of the loan's repayment on the nonprofit's publicly available 2015, 2016 and 2017 tax forms.

None of the members of the 2014 board of directors who spoke to HuffPost about the personal loan could recall why, specifically, the board approved it or if the total sum was ever paid back.

Freeman, one of those board members, said she's "literally just guessing" at what happened with the nonprofit's cash five years ago: "I know that their [the Straders'] expenses were pretty severe, trying to wait for insurances and stuff like that so, um, you know, to get things going again for them and the rescue."

Chris Thornton, who was National Mill's secretary at the time of the loan and is now chairman of the board, did not respond to email or phone requests for comment. Kim Lehmann, who was on the board at the time and is now National Mill's director of kennel operations, hung up when reached by phone for comment on this and other matters.

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Jim Klever, who spent 45 years as a YMCA executive before retiring and becoming a National Mill volunteer, served for a brief period as the nonprofit's executive director. Based on what he saw when he attempted to exert financial controls at National Mill and how Strader took back power, he said the nonprofit suffers from "founder syndrome." That's when a nonprofit's founder resists change and holds onto a disproportionate share of power, leading to numerous problems as the organization grows.

"It may last a number of years, but it's surviving on the personality of the founder, as opposed to good organization with a good board of directors, financial accountability, legal systems, things like that," Klever said. "Almost without exception, small nonprofits all have issues if they're still run by founders and people are trying to exert controls."



A half-dozen past staffers and volunteers also questioned the way Strader has handled the nonprofit's "rescue mission" expenses. She increased the number of dogs collected from breeders and then transferred to other shelters, according to numerous former volunteers. Sometimes, those shelters were in resort areas such as Missouri's Lake of the Ozarks and Aspen, Colorado. Strader, they said, would take a select group of National Mill insiders, and sometimes family members, along for the doggie deliveries, paying for hotel rooms, meals and other expenses on the nonprofit's dime and making a vacation of it. The wasteful spending gnawed at their consciences, they said.

"We've eaten in fancy Italian restaurants, we've stayed in Hyatts, Marriotts — it's never the no-tell motel," McKeon, the former facilities manager, said.

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Desjardins said he was shocked by the spending he saw when Strader asked him to help deliver 30 dogs from National Mill's Colorado facility to a shelter in Phoenix. At one point on that trip,

Desjardins said he was driving down the highway with Strader and Jenny Whitt, who is now National Mill's director of adoption programs, when the subject of their hotel reservations came up. "Jenny went online and saw that somebody had complained about bedbugs, so Theresa got on the phone and canceled the reservation, and she made a reservation at the nicest hotel in Phoenix," he said. "I had my own suite — it had two rooms, a sitting room, and a bedroom — and they shared one. We went to dinner that night and probably dropped \$300 or \$400 on wine and food. It wasn't a cheap restaurant. It was filet mignons, red wine, before-dinner drinks, dessert. It was a good bill."

"What I'm used to in dog rescue is you go to Denny's and get whatever's on special," he added. "This seemed standard to them, as long as it was a certain group of closed people involved. When it's in public where all the volunteers can see, it's something else."

Not all the former volunteers who spoke to HuffPost recall extravagant spending. Some remember staying in roadside motels, grabbing hot dogs at gas stations and, on good nights, having a meal at a chain restaurant such as Olive Garden or Applebee's.

Desjardins also said he'd seen Strader use the nonprofit's imprimatur for her personal benefit when she asked him to collect an adjustable bed that she could use at home after having knee replacement surgery. Strader told him to pretend they were driving somewhere on National Mill business, he said.

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"I went over to her house, and we were getting ready to leave, and she handed me those magnetic [National Mill] stickers and said, 'Put them on the [vehicle] door. That way, it's company business,'" Desjardins said. "But it wasn't."



Weaver, the volunteer from about 2012 to 2018, said her antenna went up about how money was being spent after an incident with a cocker spaniel one Friday afternoon a couple of years ago. The dog arrived at National Mill in pain. “All she could do was squat all the time, and we didn’t know what was wrong,” Weaver said. She and other volunteers said they told Kim Lehmann that the dog needed to see a vet.

“Kim said no, it would cost too much,” Weaver recalled, noting that the nonprofit was bringing in well over a million dollars a year at that time. “The volunteers that were there, and I was one of them, I said, ‘I’ll even pay for it.’ She got very upset over it. Well, they did take the dog the next morning. She had the most horrible stones in her bladder. She was in horrible pain. She was in that pain for hours that she didn’t need to be in it.”

The incident bothered Weaver so much, she said, that she invited Strader to her home for a talk.

“I thought, when she finds out that all this is going on beneath her, she’s going to be upset,” Weaver said. “I said, ‘Is it about the dogs or is it about the money?’ She got very, very uncomfortable. She started squirming and moving around in her chair. I was expecting her to say it was about the dogs, but she said, ‘You know, all of our financial stuff is online.’ They’re making a lot — a lot — of money off this place. I didn’t like that answer, so I waited until later and asked her again, and I got the same response.”

At least five other former volunteers and employees recalled challenging Strader on money issues and getting similarly unsatisfactory answers.

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“I was pushing for financial controls of the organization, making sure the taxes were being paid, they were filing the 501(c)(3) paperwork

on time and the 990s, and I think I was probably trespassing into territory where they didn't want me to go," said Klever, the former executive director.

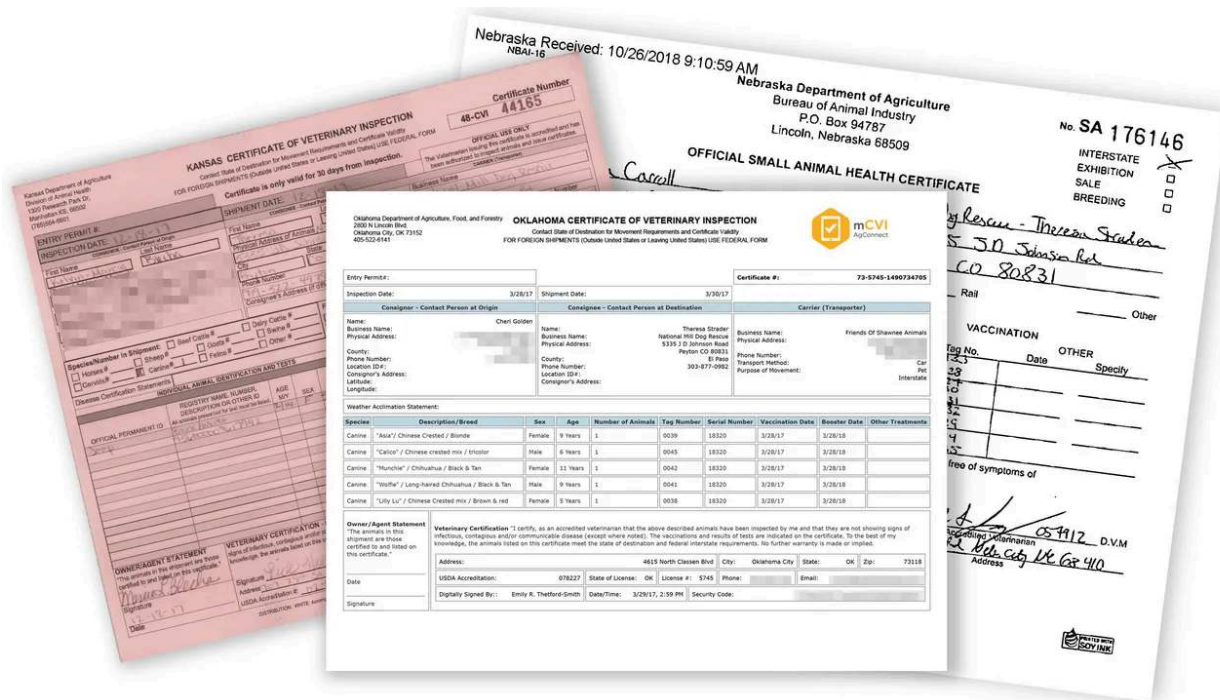
## Acting Like A Vet

Prior to the recently launched Colorado investigations, National Mill faced regulatory scrutiny at least once before, in March 2017. An inspector from Colorado's Pet Animal Care Facilities Act (PACFA) program cited the nonprofit for failing to comply with nine different state regulations. The violations ranged from housing intact male and female dogs together to having kennels with rusty sharp-edged panels that could injure a dog. One of the most serious "direct" violations cited National Mill for transferring 62 dogs from Kansas to Colorado without first obtaining the required certificates of veterinary inspection, or CVIs, stating that the dogs were healthy and did not pose a risk of spreading disease in Colorado.

The state thought that was a one-off mistake, according to Hollis Glenn, director of the Colorado Department of Agriculture division that oversees the PACFA program. Colorado officials "read Kansas the riot act," he said, demanding that Kansas officials never again encourage National Mill to move to Colorado dogs that didn't have veterinary certificates. In October 2017, the state considered the case closed after Strader said all the CVI-related violations had been corrected.

But according to numerous interviews and open-records requests in seven states, National Mill regularly took dogs across state lines without the required certificates. Although emails obtained by HuffPost show that Colorado's inspector took Strader's word that National Mill was following the rules on CVIs, the nonprofit was routinely doing the opposite.

The state where a dog originates and the state where it ends up are each supposed to have a CVI on file for that dog. That way, if a newly transported dog shows up with a contagious disease, state officials can trace the animal back to its place of origin and hopefully nip an outbreak in the bud.



Examples of certificates of veterinary inspection from Kansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska.

Using National Mill's internal documents to determine where its dogs were originating, HuffPost filed open-records requests for every canine that left Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma — and was bound for Colorado — between January 2017 and December 2018. We looked through the more than 7,500 documents for any that contained the names Theresa Strader or National Mill Dog Rescue, or National Mill's address in Peyton, Colorado. There should have been about 2,000 CVIs on file: In 2017, according to state records, National Mill imported 1,032 dogs into Colorado, and in 2018, according to National Mill's year-end fundraising appeal, the nonprofit dealt with "well more than 1,000 dogs."

But HuffPost's research turned up fewer than 100 CVIs for those two years combined in the six states other than Colorado. In Colorado, there were CVIs for only 168 dogs brought in by National Mill, and

the state veterinarian's office sent them with a warning that some were probably duplicates.

The lack of CVIs, and thus the possible importation of sick dogs into the state, is a serious health and welfare concern that can lead to any nonprofit being forced to cease operations, Glenn said.

"This is a big issue for me," said the Colorado official, who noted that he cannot discuss open investigations, including the ongoing inquiry into National Mill. "If we can prove that there is imminent harm to the public, I believe that importation of sick dogs, if they're knowingly doing it, would rise to a summary suspension."

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According to National Mill's own data from the first 11 months of 2018, nearly 1 in 5 dogs that came through its facility required outside veterinary care. The complaint that Nelson, the nonprofit's former marketing director, filed with the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies states that National Mill imported some dogs with diseases including parvovirus and distemper, and then sometimes moved them into proximity with other dogs before resolving the veterinary issues. For instance, Nelson told the state, out of 21 dogs that arrived at National Mill in March 2018 from Arkansas, at least 11 died. She reported that some of the dogs were transferred to the Second Chance Humane Society in Ridgway, Colorado, before a diagnosis had been made. "There was no protocol in place for the staff, and frankly, no notification about the distemper issue," she wrote.

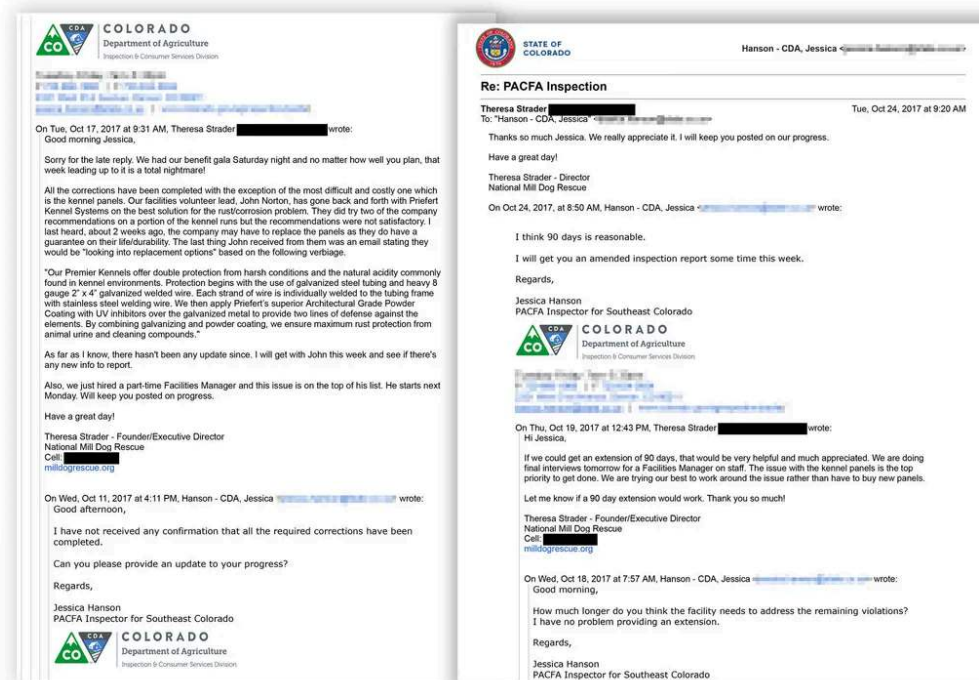
St. Louis, the veterinarian, disputed that allegation. "There's an isolation room with gowns. Only one person is treating them — we don't have the volunteers go in and feed them; there's only a few people who know what you should do," she said. "There's a sign on the door that says these dogs are quarantined. There definitely is a plan."

However, St. Louis and Freeman, the former board member who remains a staffer, did confirm that the nonprofit hasn't always obtained CVIs for imported dogs, including as recently as six months ago. Both women said that during the past six months — the timeframe in which Nelson's complaints were filed and HuffPost began reporting this article — National Mill started getting the required vaccinations and paperwork before bringing dogs into Colorado. "I can tell you right now that all the rescues this year have been 100% health certificates," Freeman said.

In April 2019, a federal inspection report showed National Mill in compliance with all requirements under the Animal Welfare Act.

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But this is not the first time National Mill has appeared to resolve the issue. After Colorado regulators cited the nonprofit in March 2017 for transporting dogs across state lines without CVIs, Strader told the inspector in an Oct. 17, 2017, email that "all the corrections have been completed" for documented violations.



An email exchange about certificates of veterinary inspection between Theresa Schrader and Colorado state regulators.

And HuffPost's research turned up numerous other Colorado-based nonprofits that were obtaining CVIs for the dogs they imported. It's clearly possible to do it, even for organizations with less funding and fewer staffers than National Mill.

Bouchard, the former National Mill volunteer who now runs her own nonprofit, said the breeders in Arkansas, Missouri and Kansas who give her dogs have CVIs in place from their own vets before she even arrives to pick up the pups, save for random exceptions.

"I'm not going to tell you we don't ever bring a dog into the state without a health certificate. That would be a lie," Bouchard said. "But 99% of the dogs we bring in have a health certificate."

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While Colorado's PACFA program is investigating CVIs and other issues that it oversees, the Department of Regulatory Agencies is looking into a separate claim by Nelson that Strader has been practicing veterinary medicine without a license and falsifying rabies certificates. In Colorado, practicing veterinary medicine without a license is a misdemeanor on the first offense and a felony on second and subsequent offenses.

"Conservatively, hundreds of dogs have been given their rabies vaccine by Ms. Strader," Nelson wrote in her complaint to the Department of Regulatory Agencies. "Realistically, the number is in the thousands."

A person without a veterinary license giving rabies vaccines to dogs risks public health and safety — not just that of the dogs, but also of human beings, since rabies can spread from animals to people.

According to Nick Striegel, the assistant state veterinarian for Colorado, if a dog receives a rabies vaccine from someone other than a licensed vet, officials can't assume that the vaccine was properly handled or that the injection was correctly administered. "If a dog that was adopted is exposed to a rabid skunk or another animal, that dog may have to be quarantined for six months at a facility, or it could need to be euthanized," Striegel said. "If that's not recognized by public health as a certified vaccination, they do have the ability to say they are putting that dog to sleep."

Numerous former National Mill volunteers said that for years, Strader, who is a registered nurse, has been giving rabies and other vaccines to the dogs before they're adopted. Videos that HuffPost obtained from inside National Mill show Strader giving vaccines, including for rabies. Then the vaccination paperwork has routinely been filled in with the names of two licensed vets: Drs. St. Louis and Traci Duncanson.

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Duncanson did not respond to requests for comment. St. Louis told HuffPost that she never signed rabies paperwork without giving the vaccine herself, but also noted that if the dogs had to wait for their shots until a vet was available to conduct a full medical exam, “it could take weeks.” St. Louis also said the state veterinarian’s office told her it was OK for Strader to administer the vaccines under her direction. A spokesperson for the Colorado Department of Agriculture, which oversees that office, told HuffPost that it has no record or recollection of any such conversation with St. Louis.

Weaver and others said the vets routinely were not present when Strader administered the vaccines. “It’s just her,” the former volunteer said. “There might be a vet, if she happens to be working that day, over in the other building, but Theresa does all of that — and she has no veterinary degree. ... She just does what she wants to do.”

Rabies vaccinations are not the only area in which National Mill appears to have engaged in questionable medical practices. According to text messages that HuffPost obtained, National Mill staffer Christi Pate reached out to Freeman on Sept. 6, 2018, to say that a medical sheet was never created for a dog that had been spayed and was now heading home with an adopter, and that all the pain medication and antibiotics the dog was supposed to have received after the surgery were “still in her bag. She never got any of the post surgical meds.”

Freeman replied, “This has happened with a couple of other dogs.”

Pate did not respond to a request for comment. Freeman told HuffPost that she has “created medical delivery sheets to ensure medications were accurately delivered, annotated and tracked.”

## **It’s Only Wrong When Pet Stores Do It**

The business model and practices of National Mill Dog Rescue, besides raising serious questions about the whole concept of “puppy mill rescue,” show how easy it is for breeders and nonprofits to subvert the laws often described as “puppy mill bans” that have been spreading across the nation for more than a decade.

National Mill regularly transfers dogs from breeders to at least another dozen shelters and nonprofit rescues, including some in California, New York state and Phoenix, according to records HuffPost obtained. California and Phoenix are among the 300 or so jurisdictions that, since 2006, have enacted “puppy mill bans.” [New York lawmakers](#) recently introduced what could become the third statewide version of such a ban, and [Arizona state legislators](#) are taking on the issue right now, too.

“Puppy mill bans” do not, in fact, ban the breeding of puppies in mill-like facilities. Instead, they make it illegal for retail pet stores to buy puppies or older dogs from breeders. The idea, voters are told, is to choke off the “puppy mill” supply chain by forcing pet stores to shift over to what is regularly described as the “humane” alternative: sourcing dogs only from shelters and nonprofit rescues. If “puppy mills” can’t reach consumers through pet stores, lawmakers promise, then these breeding kennels will go out of business altogether.

In places where the pet sale bans have been enacted or are being debated, leading voices in the rescue community often publicly push for them — sometimes while receiving deliveries of National Mill’s “puppy mill rescue” dogs, according to the documents that HuffPost obtained. It’s always that support for the pet sale bans that the media highlights, not the fact that shelters are receiving dogs from the same sort of kennels they don’t want pet stores to rely on.

In July 2014, for example, when Phoenix’s retail pet sale ban was being challenged in court, Judith Gardner, director and CEO of the Arizona Animal Welfare League & SPCA, [told The Arizona Republic](#) that during the past year, her organization had “taken in nearly 100 castoffs from breeders the league considers puppy mills.” Unreported was the fact that at least three deliveries of dogs came from National Mill, as Gardner acknowledged in a September 2014 deposition in a case challenging the Phoenix ban.

“The only way we’re helping the breeder is by taking their problems off of their hands. They don’t have to then kill the dogs or euthanize them; they can give them to someone and wipe their hands of it,” Gardner told HuffPost. She added that she didn’t actually know which breeders had relinquished the dogs, but that the physical and psychological condition of the dogs her shelter received from National Mill “brought everybody in this organization to tears.” She said many were older dogs, one was a frightened puppy, and one was “younger, a really beautiful male golden retriever” that could not produce puppies.

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Gardner noted that her shelter no longer receives regular drop-offs of dogs from National Mill. She also said she supports the nonprofit and its founder.

“I know, if you break the rules, it’s not a good thing, but I truly believe in Theresa’s heart,” Gardner said. “I like her and admire her so much. I truly believe she cares about what I care about, and that’s the animal itself.”

In September 2018, the senior vice president of operations at North Shore Animal League America argued for a similar pet sale ban in New York City. “We have seen firsthand the abuse and neglect these animals have endured,” Joanne Yohannan [told the New York Post](#) — which did not report that North Shore is a regular receiver of shipments from breeding kennels via National Mill. North Shore even charges adopters more for those animals: It gets [\\$100 for generic adult dogs, \\$250 for “puppy mill rescues” and \\$350 for puppies](#).

Yohannan did not respond to a request for comment.

The primary supporters of retail pet sale bans across the nation have long been the ASPCA — which honored Strader with its coveted [Henry Bergh Award](#) in 2013 and gave National Mill a \$5,500 grant

the next year — and the Humane Society of the United States, which featured Strader in its [Animal Sheltering](#) magazine in 2013 and gave National Mill a \$2,500 grant two years later.

When HuffPost sent detailed questions about National Mill to the ASPCA's CEO, who has been quoted saying that pet sale bans break the “puppy mill supply chain,” the organization responded with a general statement about “the cruel practices inherent” in commercial dog breeding. The ASPCA reiterated its support for “rescues and shelters committed to rehabilitating and rehoming animals churned out by the commercial dog breeding industry.”

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Also after receiving detailed information about HuffPost's reporting, John Goodwin, senior director of the Humane Society's Stop Puppy Mills Campaign, simply stated, “As many as 50,000 commercially raised puppies are shipped to New York pet stores each year, and any legislation that stems that flow is going to be helpful in reducing the number of puppy mill dogs sold to unsuspecting New York families.”

The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council lobbies against the pet sale bans that the ASPCA and Humane Society support. Mike Bober, president and CEO of the council, called National Mill a frustrating example of the “underground market” for commercially bred puppies that his organization has argued would result from such bans.

“Cases like this make it clear that banning the sale of dogs in pet stores is not a solution to concerns about commercial breeding,” Bober said in a statement to HuffPost.



A photo of Lilly, the dog that Strader highlighted in her TEDx Talk, with the allegedly custom-ordered auction tag.

## **And About That Dog Lily ...**

On National Mill's Facebook page and elsewhere online, donors and adopters can still see those heartbreaking photos of Lily that Strader showed at her TEDx Talk when she described buying the dog at auction. A ray of sunlight pierces through one image of the Italian greyhound as if to symbolize hope entering the cage.

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The photos were “totally staged,” said a former volunteer, one of three who said the same thing. Strader and Clay Myers, a prominent animal welfare photographer who did not respond to requests for comment, took them in Strader’s backyard — more than a year after she brought Lily home.

Strader, the former volunteers said, custom-ordered the No. 251 auction tag to look authentic for the marketing campaign.

*Kim Kavin’s most recent book is “[The Dog Merchants: Inside the Big Business of Breeders, Pet Stores, and Rescuers](#),” which won two national awards. In May, she was awarded the 2019 Donald Robinson Prize for Investigative Journalism, for [this article about dog auctions](#) in The Washington Post. She lives in New Jersey with her two adopted shelter mutts.*

*Top illustration: Damon Dahlen/HuffPost; Photos: Getty. Video: Kiara Alfonseca/HuffPost. Infographics: Heather Jones for HuffPost.*

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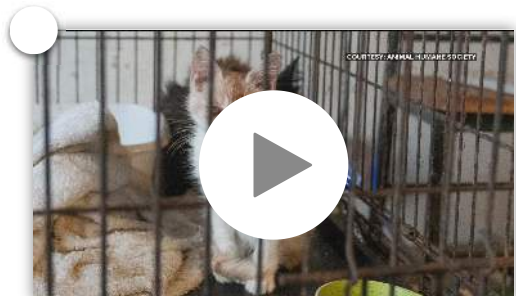
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LOCAL NEWS

## AHS rescues dozens of dogs and cats from horrific conditions in northern Minnesota

The animals were confiscated from a property in the town of Hines in Beltrami County on Dec. 6. The owners face multiple charges involving animal mistreatment.

Author: Dana Thiede





GOLDEN VALLEY, Minnesota — More than 60 dogs and cats are in the first days of their new lives after being rescued from deplorable conditions on a property in northern Minnesota.

Animal Humane Society (AHS) Chief Medical Officer Dr. Graham Brayshaw met with reporters on Friday to update the situation with the [animals that were rescued](#) from "dire, unsanitary conditions" on the problem property. He said 35 dogs and 29 cats are living in temporary housing that is clean and safe, eating substantial food, drinking clean water, and receiving much-needed medication.

Investigative agents and critical response team members had been assisting the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office with the case in recent weeks, chronicling the horrific conditions that more than 250 companion animals were living in. There was no food or water for the animals, and the outbuildings and shelters they were living in were overrun with urine and feces.

The team had been to the property multiple times and on Friday, Dec. 6, Brayshaw was among those who arrived in Hines expecting to transport all those animals back to AHS headquarters in Golden Valley for emergency lifesaving care.

Instead, Brayshaw told reporters, they discovered more than 170 dogs and cats they had previously seen were unaccounted for and that those still on the property were in worse shape than they had been in three previous visits. Sheriff's investigators recovered a large number of animals that were dead and found a wood stove filled with the remains of animals and a number of bone fragments consistent with small animals.

"This is obviously not the outcome we were hoping for," Dr. Brayshaw said.

Property owners Douglas Ray Erickson and Debra Kay Marshall told reporters they were running an animal rescue. Each stands charged with 10 felony counts of animal cruelty.



mistreatment/torture.



*Credit: Beltrami County Sheriff's Office*

Douglas Erickson, left, Debra Marshall, right.

The critical response team rounded up most of the animals and transported them back to Golden Valley, where they are being treated for respiratory ailments, infections, broken bones, fleas and other medical ailments. After living in a clean, safe environment with food and water for just four days, Brayshaw says he is already seeing significant improvement in most of the dogs and cats.

In fact, some of the rescues could be placed up for adoption sometime next week or the week after for people willing to provide the special physical and behavioral care these animals need. Others have a longer road to recovery, and due to a lack of human interaction and socialization, some may not ever be adoptable. Brayshaw says being in a safe and loving place for a week or two will reveal which of the animals exhibiting anti-social or dangerous behavior can be saved.

**New York Times vs. OpenAI & Microsoft a  
BATTLE for Truth! (NEWS WARS)**



Brayson says humane investigators remain on the case, helping the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office with forensic expertise in the processing of the ash and bone fragments found on the property in Hines. He told reporters there were also horses, mules and mini ponies found on the property that are being cared for on a local level.



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