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TO: GERALD DAMIANI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
JEREMY APOTHEKER, DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROJECTS  
ROCKLAND GREEN/RGCares

FROM: BARBARA CARR, SHELTER STANDARDS CONSULTANT  
LIBBY POST, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RE: REPORT OF FINDINGS FROM MAY 4, 2023 VISIT TO  
RGCares AND HI-TOR ANIMAL SHELTER

DATE: MAY 15, 2023

Consultants Barbara Carr and Libby Post from the New York State Animal Protection Federation visited Rockland County on May 4<sup>th</sup> to see the new building that will be used for RG Cares Animal Shelter, to tour the existing animal shelter, Hi Tor and to review floor plans for the new building project.

### **First Stop, the new location:**

The 15,000 square foot building to be renovated as an animal shelter for Rockland County was found to be in excellent shape and sufficient in size to adequately be renovated as an animal shelter. Concerns for the new facility were as follows:

- The branding, marketing and publicity surrounding the new operation must be a priority to establish the shelter as a “destination.”
- Dogs and cats are acquired by people very differently. While 60+% of dog owners make a concerted search for the dog they acquire, 62% of all cats find themselves in homes because they were “in front” of people. The cat came to them as a stray, the neighbor’s cat had kittens, and uncle died, and they took over the care of the cat. Marketing cats at the shelter, which is a bit out of the way for most folks will be important, and it is recommended that part of the adoption program should include off-site opportunities for cats to find homes.
- The property that the new building sits on includes two additional structures. This provides for several opportunities for expansion of programming, storage, removal for more parkland areas, a public veterinary clinic, as well as other uses. Plans for these areas should be carefully thought out.

### **Second Stop, Hi Tor:**

When approaching the gate to enter Hi Tor, an open trucking container was seen on the left side. The container appeared to be about a quarter filled with linens, bedding, and towels. On top of the bedding four cats were observed sleeping.

Entering the gate there were many containers and sheds seen around the property as well as several cats that were roaming freely around the property. Strait ahead there appeared to be a very old kennel building. Everywhere there were piles of garbage and trash, many piles of kennels and cages, and other debris.

We entered one trucking container that was the offices for the organization. On entering there were two desks on each side of the door. Piles and racks of paperwork and other office supplies were stacked all over. The director apparently had an office area behind the desk on our right. He could not access us without going outside through another door in the back of the container as there was no room to pass through all the “supplies”.

The executive director toured us around the property through several cat housing units. Some were in containers, others in sheds. In some the odor of cat urine was quite high and in others the air seemed quite clean. Cats were housed in a variety of cages, different sizes, and different materials. None of the cages would pass the inspection under the new law.

We visited one free roaming container that housed a dozen or so cats. The unit was very dark and inhospitable. The cats were extremely stressed in this container.

Outside of that container was an area dedicated to the many feral cats at Hi Tor. However, a number of these cats were certainly not feral. They approached the visitors, rubbed up against our legs and asked for attention. The ED was asked how many feral cats were at the facility and he answered, “about 50” and added that many cats were just dropped off at the facility and they would just join the community. He was asked if that meant there were unvaccinated and unsterilized cats in the mix and his answer was yes.

Leaving that area, the ED was asked what was with the container at the entrance with the linens in it. He replied that they did not have a washer or dryer at the shelter, so they used linens that the public donated and once they were soiled, they were thrown away.

The next stop was to be going into the kennel area, but the ED did not want to go in without a kennel attendant. He was questioned why and eventually agreed that there were several dogs so dangerous inside that he wanted an attendant in case one was to get loose. We decided we should not go into the kennel.

The ED told us of one dog that had recently bitten two staff members so badly they had to go to the hospital. He said that two veterinarians and he had recommended euthanasia for this dangerous dog, but the board would not allow it. Apparently, there are several dogs that are living their lives out at this completely inadequate facility because their behavior is such that they are a threat to humans.

Around the property there were outdoor play yards for dogs and individual makeshift kennels for the dogs to occupy during the day so they would get fresh air and sunlight. When asked how they were cleaned the answer was not satisfactory, as basically they cannot be disinfected properly due to a lack of water and drainage at the facility.

- Hi Tor in its entirety is an unacceptable shelter to house companion animals.
- The linens stored outside, with cats lying on them, and then being used as bedding for caged cats is a recipe for medical disaster. The linens are not washed prior to being used so any fomites, bacteria, virus, or parasites deposited on them by the feral cats sleeping on them or any wild animal that goes into the container will be directly exposing the resident cats who are housed on these linens. While there are no animals with ringworm at the facility currently, it is just a matter of time until it presents itself again.
- The tour of the facility was well after noon and many of the animals housing units were not yet cleaned. Presumably this means that they are either fed in a dirty cage or are not yet fed. Either is unacceptable.

- Allowing unvaccinated and unsterilized cats to wander the property is not only unacceptable, it is ethically horrifying at an organization that has struggled with overpopulation and disease for its entire history.
- The Board of RG Cares should be made aware of the fact that dangerous dogs are being warehoused at the Hi Tor facility due to a very uninformed No-Kill policy.

Hi Tor is the worst example of animal sheltering that the consultants have ever seen. It appears to be like visiting a large cruelty case in process. It was a very wise move for Rockland County to make plans to eradicate the current organization and practices and establish a new state-of-the-art shelter with state-of-the-art practices.

### **Last stop, offices of RG Cares :**

The consultants went over the floor plans with the RG Cares staff and made several recommendations for changes. Notes were taken and passed on to BDA.

There was a conversation concerning an RFP to find a group that would run the new operation, RG Cares. The consultants are adamant that this is not the way to move forward, suggesting hiring an Executive Director well ahead of opening, to build a program that will work going into the future. There are several reasons why the consultants feel this way:

- There are no animal welfare corporations that do this kind of work.
- There are certainly no organizations locally that could fit the bill. Local animal welfare organizations, with the exception of Hudson Valley Humane Society, are volunteer led groups that are well meaning, but have no professional animal welfare staff. To allow one of these organizations to try to run a state-of-the-art operation would no doubt end in practices similar to Hi Tor.
- To the consultants' knowledge there is no shelter in the US that has contracted out this work to another organization.
- Good and great shelters are led by good and great CEO leaders that report to a good or great board of directors. The directors hire and fire their CEO and set major policy and have fiduciary responsibility.
- A nationwide search can be conducted to find the CEO RG Cares will need. There are Search Firms that can be hired, NYSAPF is more than happy to identify candidates, and other national organizations such as The Association of Animal Welfare Administrators, and the Humane Society of the US, both have a Jobs page on their websites to advertise positions.