

Feud builds over trapping in Red Bluff

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Red Bluff >> An incident that began as an animal trapping job in Red Bluff raised questions about what is and isn't legal when handling area cats.

During the March 20 City Council meeting, three residents spoken during the public comment, voicing concerns that pet cats were being trapped and killed by a local man named Dennis Conner who owns a tractor and weed control business.

The residents said their neighbor hired Conner to trap stray cats in the area.

Laura Novach was the first to speak on the topic.

"These are not feral cats," Novach said, tearfully. "They were house cats."

Joining her was fellow resident Jerry Amergian, who pushed for action from the city.

"We don't have any way to protect our cats," Amergian said. "We are asking you to make an ordinance so this isn't allowed."

Conner, who had not previously trapped cats before this job, said none of the cats he collected had collars or tags and the person who hired him said cats had been destroying the outdoor furniture in her backyard.

Conner said his method to put down the animals was use of a firearm.

Shortly after the incident, which happened through President's Day weekend in February, the matter found its way into local Facebook groups, making it public.

Conner said he has since been receiving threats.

"People were saying they were going to come to my house and bust my windows and pour acid on my truck," he said.

Before taking this job, Conner's license was used for trapping gophers and squirrels as part of his standard business practice. He said he will no longer trap cats.

"I don't go out in life to be a miserable person," Conner said. "Having people out there saying these things about me doesn't feel good."

One of the concerns posed by Novach's group was the response from the Red Bluff Police Department — that it was a civil matter.

Police Chief Kyle Sanders confirmed that there was little that could be done because Conner did not break any laws. He said there are two penal codes on the books that address circumstances like these.

The first regards cruelty to animals. For an act to violate that law, there must be malicious intent, which Sanders said there was not.

“The bottom line is this,” Sanders said. “We don’t believe this gentleman is in violation of any law. It requires malicious intent. While it was maybe intentional, it was not malicious.”

The second relevant code, Sanders said, describes banned methods of killing animals. Outlawed methods include carbon monoxide gas, intracardiac injection of a euthanasia agent on a conscious animal, high-altitude decompression chamber, nitrogen gas and carbon dioxide gas.

Use of firearm is not part of the code.

Mayor Daniele Eyestone said from this point City Manager Richard Crabtree will have to research the issue and make a suggestion. She said as early as Tuesday’s meeting the council could be presented with potential solutions.

“Unfortunately, it’s on hold until then,” Eyestone said.

Animal Care Center Manger Christine McClintock gave some alternatives in euthanizing feral cats in the area.

“Haven Humane does feral cat spaying and neutering every day of the week,” McClintock said. “Mill Creek Vet does feral cat Fridays on the last Friday of every month and Red Bluff Veterinary Clinic does one on the first Wednesday of every month.”

McClintock said other counties have ordinances in place that say trappers must provide notice that they will be catching cats to give owners time to get their pets indoors.

Organizations such as Alley Cat Allies offer resources for identifying feral cats and where they can be taken to be spayed or neutered.