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## **VIDEO: Doggie downer: Animals' lives hinge on county budget cuts**

By **MATT CLARK** ([Contact](#))

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COLLIER COUNTY — The green eyes peer out hopefully.

A sign on the black-and-white short hair domestic cat's cage says she is curious about everything, but the former stray has been behind the thin, black bars for two months.

One-year-old Clara needs a bailout. Her chances of being adopted may soon plummet:

Collier County Domestic Animal Services' (DAS) adoption program is on the chopping block.

If Collier homeowners don't pay the same in taxes as they did last year, they won't just lose Clara. Ambulance crews, library branches, county employees and road median upkeep are some of the services requiring a "tax neutral" budget to remain intact, officials say.

"It's more than just animal services. It's the whole thing going right on through," said County Commissioner Jim Coletta. "It has everything to do with the quality of life we've enjoyed for so long, and do we want to pay the price for that quality?"

Commissioners will discuss the options prepared by each county division during budget workshops June 29 and June 30. Coletta encourages the public to attend or contact their commissioners to share concerns.

The commissioners will be looking at a fiscal 2010 budget proposal that has two options: Adopting a rollback rate, which would bring in the same amount of taxes as the previous year, or keeping the tax rate the same, which would bring in much less taxes because of the steep decline in property values.

Without the rollback rate increase, the county's budget would be cut by 15 percent.

"We understand many people are concerned, but this is a commission decision and they are taking this decision very seriously," said public services division spokeswoman Camden Smith. "You can't continue to bleed the budget."

Smith noted that animal services has seen a 25 percent reduction in its staffing levels since the county's budget hurdles began. Several of the department's positions are vacant and frozen.

The adoption program and its associated veterinary clinic, volunteer program and six employees are the only non-state mandated service provided by DAS. In other words, cutting the adoption program was the only option under a 15 percent cut.

"It was not chosen as a cut for wow factor," Smith said. "It was chosen because it is the only thing that can be cut."

During the current fiscal year, animal services has been taking in between 5 and 11 percent fewer animals per month when compared to the same months the previous fiscal year, possibly indicating more families are keeping their pets.

Volunteering, on the other hand, has gone up. Under the leadership of the volunteer coordinator who stands to lose her job, program participation rates have increased over 30 percent per month when compared to the same months of last year.

In all, the department took in 7,834 animals during fiscal 2008, with 58 percent being euthanized. Smith said the department is estimating as much as 72 percent would be euthanized in fiscal 2010 if the adoption program was cut.

The burden would fall on folks like Pam Alvarez, operator of Tiny Paws, Wet Noses rescue shelter in Naples. Rescuers would be the only agencies keeping pets from euthanasia, other than those lost and found by their owners. Right now, rescuers are taking 10 percent of the department's animals, Smith said.

Alvarez felt she may see more families coming her way if the adoption program ended.

"They might, yeah," Alvarez said. "But I'd rather pay what I paid last year for taxes than lose the programs here."

The DAS advisory board got the whole story Tuesday night. An unusual crowd of more than a dozen citizens attended the meeting, many suggesting options other than tax rate changes, like reducing salaries instead of laying people off. Applause erupted from the group periodically.

Naples resident Pamela Rae was strongly opposed to any reduction in services.

"People are not going to bring their animals to DAS. They're going to dump them in the streets," Rae said. "It's going to be totally disastrous."

As the meeting progressed, DAS shelter dogs waited in a nearby building. Walk in, and barks ring out. A 6-month-old rottweiler mix named Nova, who was surrendered by her owner, lays with a toy in her mouth. Piper, a 1-year-old pit bull mix, paws at her water bowl.

The animals' reprieve will be up to commissioners and, as Coletta points out, the public.

"Who do you cut? Who's ox are you going to gore to be able to lower the taxes?" Coletta asked. "We're going to be listening to the public."

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Pave our roads!

#1 Posted by **chickendog** on June 16, 2009 at 9:42 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

How 'bout this: Since we're gonna have a beach parking fee now of \$75, why not just add another tax - to all pet owners. How does \$100 per year per pet sound? Too low? - ok \$200. Sky's the limit here in beautiful Naples.

#2 Posted by **UlettaPile** on June 16, 2009 at 10:35 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Commissioner Coletta, what a STUPID comment!  
Being a parent of an "adoptee" from DAS, I resent your comment! These animals only ask to be loved and taken care of, not disposed of because you "need to make budget".. I have a novel idea..WHY don't you cut a few unneeded, highly over paid people working on Horseshoe Dr.?  
Thank goodness for the dedicated staff members and volunteers that give their time and love to these wonderful creatures. To everyone that opens their home to one of the animals, thank you!  
Shame on you Commisssoners for even considering doing away with this program!

#3 Posted by **straighttalkingmomma** on June 16, 2009 at 10:57 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

just keep landscaping colletta,such a clown. lets do radio road over another 5 times. they do not know how to budget the books and never will! every time he opens his mouth nonsense comes out.

#4 Posted by **MONKABOY** on June 16, 2009 at 11:49 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

If Collier homeowners don't pay the same in taxes as they did last year, they won't just lose Clara. Ambulance crews, library branches, county employees and road median upkeep are some of the services requiring a "tax neutral" budget to remain intact, officials say.

Wow!! If this isnt just another ploy to bully Collier residents into "paying up or else"! When times are tough, people will steal and cheat and bully and walk on whoever to get

where they need to be. This on top of the new \$75 beach parking that was free? And now innocent animals have to be put on deathrow? Collier residents need to start standing up for themselves instead of being bullied by a corrupt county that fattens their pockets! Mayor Barnett is not hurting, he bought a new jaguar not that long ago.

#5 Posted by **NaplesKahuna76** on June 17, 2009 at 12:30 a.m. (Suggest removal)

Threatening to kill more pets unless they get full funding is about as low as a county agency can go.

#6 Posted by **Bramble** on June 17, 2009 at 4:10 a.m. (Suggest removal)

Let's review.

Houses will burn down if gg fire doesn't get what it wants.

Prisoners will go free and deputies will be laid off turning collier into a shooting gallery if Rambosk gets whatever it is he wants. (we are not sure because he is sitting on the fence because he has no guts)

Books will be forced from the hands of children when libraries close.

And now dogs and cats will be slaughtered.

You county officials and elected officials should be ashamed of yourselves.

Enjoy your short careers.

#7 Posted by **ireadu** on June 17, 2009 at 6:41 a.m. (Suggest removal)

3 Inmates go there 7 days a week and scrub out the cages and feed the animals for 1 dollar an hour. Arent they saving money there? Should they go down to .50 cents an hour? Save the animals.

#8 Posted by **Bubba4Prez** on June 17, 2009 at 7:21 a.m. (Suggest removal)

No one seems to care about the 4,000 babies who will be aborted today across America. Shall we line the street with their corpses...of course we can't show those disgusting pictures it would be to offensive!

#9 Posted by **iryshqueen** on June 17, 2009 at 7:47 a.m. (Suggest removal)

We are failing in the 2nd commandment to Mankind

TO HAVE DOMINION (CONTROL, MANAGEMENT) OF THE EARTH

God created all the animals, seas, skies before God created Mankind.

Mankinds purpose is to manage everything God has created.

Manage it and not destroy it

<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt01...>

'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.'

#10 Posted by **torah101** on June 17, 2009 at 8:07 a.m. (Suggest removal)

#3 and #4 I couldn't agree more. I am an adoptee as well and these pets are the most loyal and loving pets. The budgeting of collier county makes no sense they pave a road spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on landscaping to then 6 months later widen the road and tear out all the brand new landscaping! So lets kill poor innocent animals who are just searching for a great home!

#11 Posted by **CG00013** on June 17, 2009 at 8:10 a.m. (Suggest removal)

penny wise and pound foolish. The county just spent millions on the new EOC building, the landscaping of our roads is over the top, the water park in Noth Naples, it goes on and on..... How about some fiscal reponsibility across the board. And adoption helps reduce the amount of animals that needs to be housed. If anything we should try to increase adoptions not eliminate them. Sometimes I wonder about the logical or (lack of)

thinking of our commissioners.

#12 Posted by **beauregard** on June 17, 2009 at 8:10 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Get rid of Camden Smith. That should save some dogs' lives.

There's no need for PIOs. Middle management or director levels can do the job.

#13 Posted by **believeit** on June 17, 2009 at 8:13 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

I can't even express how disgusted I am at this county. The crap they spend money on - water parks, medians, non-native plants, etc, BUT - let's kill all the animals to save money. I surely hope this is a ploy to get support for a tax increase and that our county isn't been headed up by heartless, soulless, cold-hearted folks who would allow voiceless animals to be sacrificed. Those animals didn't choose to be born and they sure didn't choose to be in DAS. If you can't be responsible enough to spay/neuter or keep an animal you took into your home, THEY sure don't deserve to die for your lack of consideration and compassion. Hello - these are lives, living things, not just trash you can toss aside.

#14 Posted by **edysmom** on June 17, 2009 at 8:48 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

I can't believe DAS would even suggest such a terrible thing. Is everyone there brain dead--or just heartless and incompetent?

#15 Posted by **KarenT** on June 17, 2009 at 9:02 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

How much money is wasted on the medians? Just to keep up the "We're better than you" image. And the EOC building went from 36 million to 58 million? Time for some new blood to take things over.

#16 Posted by **ohyeah143** on June 17, 2009 at 9:14 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

believeit - you're an idiot. The PIO doesn't make \$390,000 which is what DAS would be forced to reduce its budget by with a 15% budget reduction. I have a copy of it. Furthermore if you take away the person who promotes eight departments in one division, just see what happens. This is a bigger issue than a measly PIO.

#17 Posted by **LookOut** on June 17, 2009 at 9:22 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Wake up collier residents: Our money is being wasted to entice the tourist to come to paradise. We are going to be sacrificed for the tourist dollar. What a freaking joke: Even the tourist do not want to pay these outlandish prices anymore!!!!

Who in the hell can even pay the taxes anymore down here.

There are No jobs for those of us you have been laid off, but the medians are planted, the roads are paved.

DO NOT let those in power use the cute little puppy and kitten to frighten you into additional taxes. DAS aka Animal Control, puts down many many animals now!!!!and the practice will continue regardless.

#18 Posted by **fedupwithnaples** on June 17, 2009 at 9:39 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

#3 your absolutely correct there are a lot of unneeded overpaid employees on Horseshoe, they definitely need to clean house, too many chiefs. As for the medians they spend about 10-15 mil. a year

#19 Posted by **chopper** on June 17, 2009 at 9:58 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

I am a volunteer for the county. If the adoption program is terminated, I will resign from my volunteer work. Raise my taxes but, do not abandon the animals. They give unconditional love and they never talk back. It seems to me that that we should give our respect to them as they give to us. Check some of your neighbors and tell me what can we do to tame them.

#20 Posted by **naplesspa** on June 17, 2009 at 10:03 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Horseshoe employees from what I understand although I don't know much are paid out of permit fees etc. not property taxes. Same for roads. You can't use impact fees for programs unless it's an expansion. That's what other new reports show in the archives on here.

#21 Posted by **LookOut** on June 17, 2009 at 10:25 a.m. (Suggest removal)

'Get rid of Camden Smith. That should save some dogs' lives.'

Now that is funny

I say stop paying the commissioners a salary. They have too much fun anyway

#22 Posted by **torah101** on June 17, 2009 at 10:41 a.m. (Suggest removal)

In response to Post#21..ARE you sure? Funds are transfered around to cover their hineys! Whichever dept needs money, they just move it from one cost center to another! It's called a loan..

#23 Posted by **straighttalkingmomma** on June 17, 2009 at 11:14 a.m. (Suggest removal)

UNTIL THIS COUNTY COMES UP WITH A VIABLE SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAM WE WILL ALWAYS HAVE THE PROBLEM OF UNWANTED PETS. I WAS TOLD BY A DAS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER THAT YOU CANNOT EVEN DISCUSS THAT IN THIS COUNTY,,,GUESS WE NEED TO SUPPORT THE VET CLINICS ON EVERY CORNER THAT WE HAVE TODAY WHO CHARGE SUCH OUTRAGEOUS PRICES NO ONE CAN AFFORD THEM. SHAME ON THIS COUNTY FOR EVEN THINKING OF ELIMINATING THE ADOPTION PROGRAM !

#24 Posted by **Donkey** on June 17, 2009 at 11:18 a.m. (Suggest removal)

Euthanize the commissioners and start fresh.

#25 Posted by **native\_at\_heart** on June 17, 2009 at 11:20 a.m. (Suggest removal)

....and teachers still want a raise? Take a 3% pay cut and use money to save the animals.

#26 Posted by **flahill** on June 17, 2009 at 11:24 a.m. (Suggest removal)

why don't the big wigs take a paycut, get all the rich people to give some money, charge snow birds a fee for coming here in the winter months. i lost my job and i am still giving animals and people help. I notice that the middle class people do more than others, Rich people, you need to do more, you live here also.

#27 Posted by **kingkoby** on June 17, 2009 at 11:24 a.m. (Suggest removal)

Camden,please. (No. 17)

The quite competent John Torre and the rest of his cronies at the director level can absolutely do your job.

No one is sure what you do. I would hope it would save taxpayers at least \$50,000 to get rid of you.

Happy Tails is over!

Oh, and let that Troy guy loose, too. He's creepy on that lame Donna Fiala TV show.

#28 Posted by **believeit** on June 17, 2009 at 11:43 a.m. (Suggest removal)

DAS may have some great volunteers, but I have been very unimpressed by the folks who come out on complaints about risks to animals in distress or even aggressive ones.

LOL believeit. I think you make a great point. Not that Torre is all that together, at least he tries hard. Camden seems to want to get by on other attributes.

The threats to euthanize these innocent animals are just plain outrageous. The overbuilt Sun and "Fun(d)" Lagoon, etc. needs to be sold to an outside contractor to run it right. The proceeds could help fund DAS and perhaps assure well trained staff be available to interact with the public. Sun and Fun(d) Lagoon (the North Naples water park) never should have been built! It was and is a huge boondoggle.

#29 Posted by [BlueTonguedVole](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:16 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Of course I was referring to Ms. Smith's smile.

;-D

#30 Posted by [BlueTonguedVole](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:17 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Amen #9. When are people going to care about each other, the way they care about animals????

#31 Posted by [Pigsaw](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:17 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Yea sure Camden. No wow factor here! Lets see? How can we propose a cut that will tug at peoples hearts.hummm... If Coletta wants to listen to the public?Post the budget online so everyone can see the public trough. After some polical pork is cut, I'm sure we can find some animal cabbage.

#32 Posted by [Sergeant\\_O\\_Rourke](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:18 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

This is absolutely ludicrous! Many, many shelters operate with less money than DAS, take in the same number of animals (or more), and do more adoptions. This has nothing to do with budget but with how much the individuals within the County and within DAS care. Adoptions cost little and can be handled mostly by competent and trained volunteers. How disgusting would it be for Collier County's DAS to become a slaughter house? How many more employees would leave? Who would work in such an environment?

#33 Posted by [dglenn](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:22 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Remember when National Lampoon had an album called "Buy This or We'll Shoot this Dog"? At least that was done in jest, no matter how poor the taste was. "Pay your taxes or we'll kill 100's of animals"??? That's just sick. Any other place I've been to the medians are simply raised, paved areas with yellow painted around them. And there is NOTHING wrong with that! Here, we have to replant the medians every two months with new flowers so they look 'pretty'. IT'S A MEDIAN, FOLKS! Pave them over, get over the hoity-toity attitude that we're Naples, therefore better than everyone else, and then count how much money you have left over. I'm SURE there are other ways to save a few bucks (payout, Mr. Coletta?), and in turn save more than a few lives. This is blackmail, pure and simple. Jim Coletta, after your statement, I'm disappointed to say you are my district's commisioner. Camden Smith, to think that we have to rely on you after YOUR statement to protect animals lives, is even more disgusting.

#34 Posted by [hockeyfreak](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:30 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

The County can also think of innovative solutions to help the problem here. (If our course they are capable of doing so). For example, what about a "Friends of the Shelter" group set up as a nonprofit that can solicit donations for the animals (both food and monetary). The Humane Society brings in millions each year so the money is out there.

#35 Posted by [dglenn](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:36 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

hockeyfreak. Yep, the medians don't need the kind of theme park treatment they get. Why not plant them with native wildflowers or other very low maintenance plants? We have a yard that is landscaped with very low maintenance native plants. We don't have to use pesticides or fertilizers on our property. The County could follow suit. If they want to know how, they can consult with the local branch of the Native Plant Society, the Botanical Garden, the Extension Service, etc.



Too bad that the last opportunity we had to replace Commissioner Coletta offered an opposition candidate who didn't appear to think he would need to quit his day job. We need someone like this pharmacist to step up and run next time. I believe that most of our currently sitting elected officials do not listen to their constituents. I see only one who seems really tuned into reducing waste and hearing us: Tom Henning. Commissioner Henning is in a different district from mine, but he is attuned to the entire county and seems to be the most fiscally responsible Commissioner.



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#36 Posted by [BlueTonguedVole](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:43 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Other than the two budget workshops that they have written down, is there going to be a vote on this? I couldn't see anything listed. I sure want to put my 2 cents in on this one!

#37 Posted by [hockeyfreak](#) on June 17, 2009 at 2:51 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

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