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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Effort to Change Course on Bishop Kennels Falls Short



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Commissioner Bob McCann

Posted Tuesday, January 27, 2026 4:45 pm

by Mitch Maley

BRADENTON — At Tuesday's meeting, Manatee County Commissioners discussed the animal services kennel situation. District 5 Commissioner Bob McCann added the item to the agenda in response to animal advocates opposed to the prefab kennels the county is adding at the Bishop animal shelter.

In 2023, the previous board approved building a concrete-block kennel on the recently donated Bishop Animal Shelter, as the existing Palmetto shelter was both over capacity and experiencing crippling maintenance issues, and a proposed animal services facility in Lakewood Ranch has been canceled.

Later that year, the board approved a pivot to prefabricated kennels, similar to what they had seen at Nate's Honor Rescue, a private facility in Manatee County, to reduce construction time, as the gap between the Palmetto facility's usability and the time required to build the concrete facility seemed unmanageable.

As the plan came to fruition, animal advocates complained that the shelters were too small and too different from those at Nate's, a smaller facility that typically houses a fraction as many dogs, most of which are puppies rather than the larger, more mature rescues the county often deals with.

Advocates passionately gave public comment on Tuesday, repeating many of the complaints from previous meetings and online groups, hoping the county would pause its current plan and reconsider a concrete block structure. It became clear rather quickly that there was no feasible way to change course, as the prefab kennels had already been purchased and were on site.

"The reason they don't match Nate's is because Nate's don't match our codes," said Commissioner George Kruse. "We're the government; we have different sets of codes. These are hurricane-rated. These are incredibly safe. These can withstand a hurricane. I can't say the same about 'six packs.' So, we decided to spend more money buying larger kennels that were safer for the dogs."

"Nate's is private," added Kruse. "At no point in time should anyone eat their government-issued cheese and say, 'This reminds me of the brie I had when I was touring Paris. I'm sorry, we're the government.'"

Kruse pointed out that funding had increased from \$8 million when he first got on the board in 2020 to \$12 million today, and that the rising cost of construction since 2023 would require \$700-800 per square foot to build a concrete block structure that would take three to five years to complete.

"We're trying to do the best we can for these dogs within the budget we have, because they're tax dollars," said Kruse.

Proposals by Commissioner Bob McCann to utilize a University of Florida Shelter Medicine Program free evaluation of the kennels and prioritizing the RLS and advertisement for the creation of a task force and advisory committee, which commissioners had previously voted to move forward with, each passed unanimously.

Commissioner Kruse was unanimously appointed as the board's task force liaison. A vote not to pursue charges against animal advocates who faced misdemeanor trespassing charges for illegally entering the construction site to document the shelters failed 4-3, with commissioners Ballard, Bearden, Siddique, and Rahn opposed.

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