

Manatee agrees to Bishop Animal Shelter consultation after expansion backlash

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Manatee County's Bishop Animal shelter is expanding



The Bishop Animal Shelter in Bradenton is soon to unveil its expanded shelter, featuring new pet amenities and enhanced security measures designed to improve animal adoption rates. By Tiffany Tompkins

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After taking heat from animal advocates in recent weeks, Manatee County commissioners voted to have an outside organization review changes at Bishop Animal Shelter.

The Bishop shelter, located at 5718 21st Ave. W., Bradenton, recently completed the first phase of a [\\$12 million expansion](#) that added eight prefabricated kennel buildings, increasing its maximum capacity by about 120 dogs. Phase two of the expansion will include the addition of a new concrete adoption and administration building later this year.

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The board's decision to have the University of Florida's Shelter Medicine Program do a consultation on Bishop comes after several Manatee County animal activists [criticized the shelter's expansion](#), arguing that they have concerns with the kennels' durability, impact on animal welfare and other struggles they believe staff and volunteers will face.

Loud noise levels, small kennel sizes and the structures' possible inability to survive hurricanes and strong storms were brought up as issues these activists saw with the newly expanded Bishop Animal Shelter.

As board members debated what to do about the shelter, Commissioner Bob McCann motioned to pause the expansion, reevaluate the site to include a "single, integrated, concrete block facility that is hurricane resilient and truly functional," receive advice from local animal experts and drop trespassing charges against animal activists.



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Advocates ask to pause Bishop expansion

During the meeting, residents said a concrete building would be much better suited for housing dogs and allowing staff and volunteers to work properly, as opposed to the recently installed prefabricated kennels.

Several speakers urged the board to approve McCann's suggestion to pause the construction at Bishop and reconsider the expansion.

"I'm asking you to support Commissioner McCann's motion to pause construction of the prefab kennels at Bishop," said Linda Werner, an active volunteer with Manatee County Animal Welfare.

Julie Madison, a dog trainer and animal activist, expressed similar concerns. Madison also created an [online petition](#), pushing for the board to reconsider the prefabricated kennels.

The petition, as of Monday evening, has over 2,000 signatures.

“What the community is asking for is a pause in the current construction,” Madison said. “To put to budget for a... single concrete block integrated facility. To properly staff this facility, especially given the level of risk and skill associated with this type of job.”

Carrie Westphal, an animal advocate and Manatee resident, also pushed to stop construction and reevaluate site plans.

“I ask you to vote to stop the current construction of the prefabricated kennel,” Westphal said. “Reevaluate the best options for a single concrete block building with properly sized kennels to reduce the stress on animals, staff and volunteers, and invest in a long-term facility that will withstand the turbulent weather and conditions we have and make our community proud.”



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Manatee officials seek animal shelter consultation

Westphal also suggested bringing in University of Florida Shelter Medicine Program specialists to do a free consultation on how the new Bishop expansion could be improved and best utilized to ensure animal safety and welfare.

County commissioners did not decide to halt construction, but a motion to consult with the University of Florida specialists passed unanimously.

“I will have University of Florida come down here, and we will get a full report. We will figure out how best to manage this,” said Commissioner George Kruse, who added that pausing construction is “not practical.”

“I hear people over and over and over today, say the word pause...” Kruse said. “In reality, it’s done. So you’re not pausing, you’re just not using what we’ve already built with your tax dollars.”

Commissioner Amanda Ballard spoke of the financial restrictions limiting the public’s suggestions, and expressed her primary concern.

“At this point, we still don’t have the money for a brick and mortar shelter,” Ballard said. “So, if the priority is getting the animals out of the Palmetto shelter, this is the option that we have right now.”

Motions were also passed to prioritize the finalization of both a task force and an advisory committee for the Bishop Animal Shelter. Felts was nominated as liaison for the task force and Kruse as liaison for the advisory board.

3 face charges in animal shelter fiasco

At least three advocates are in hot water over entering the shelter without permission, officials say. Following a sheriff’s office investigation, charges have been sent to the State Attorney’s Office for review regarding an alleged trespassing by three individuals involving the Bishop property.

During the meeting, Commissioner McCann motioned to drop these charges, but the motion failed. Commissioners Felts, Kruse and McCann voted for the motion, with Commissioners Tal Siddique, Mike Rahn, Jason Bearden and Ballard voting against.

“There are a couple of parties involved. So even if we did (drop the charges), the other party who pressed charges or was involved may not choose to,” Ballard said. “Also, it’s ultimately up to the state attorney and the sheriff’s office whether or not this goes forth. So our board saying, ‘We don’t want to do this anymore,’ isn’t the be-all end-all of this discussion.”

“My other concern is that this kind of creates license for people to do this kind of thing in the future,” Ballard continued. “I don’t want situations where people who are potentially unhappy with something the county is doing think that they can trespass onto an active construction site and that the county will just say nothing or do nothing...”

Commissioner Bearden says that this issue is “very black and white” for him.

“Whether it be passion, whether it be whatever it is... it still doesn’t give them the right to just do things freely as they feel they can do,” said Bearden.

Although the motion was not passed, the favoring commissioners made comments in support of the individuals facing the possible trespassing charges.

“I hate to punish people for a passion, maybe matched with ignorance of the law and a lack of understanding,” Felts said.

“At the end of the day, this is a person. Right or wrong about their means of doing it, (they) tried to get onto Bishop because they had to be on site to do a video to try and explain... why their arguments about safety with these kennels and the width of the walkways were valid,” Kruse said.

Commissioners plan next steps at Bishop

The commissioners concluded their discussion regarding the Bishop Animal Shelter by motioning to direct staff to present their progress on the kennels.

“We gave the people a chance to talk,” McCann said. “Now, I want the staff to come back to us and actually explain where they are in the construction, what’s going on.”

McCann continued to say that he wants to see statistics behind how storm-proof the kennels are, and that he believes the county should consider secondary sources of support for the shelter.

“I would also like to look for public-private partnerships here as alternate sources of funding, because this is not something that we should be doing alone,” McCann said.