

RESOLUTION 2026095

RE: ESTABLISHING A DUTCHESS COUNTY LEGISLATURE ANIMAL WELFARE AND COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE (AWCS)

Legislators SHAH, ALEXANDER, MUNN, VALDÉS SMITH, ATKINS, POLASEK, BRENDLI, DARROW, DRAGO, GILES, LAWLER, REDL, RHODES and WINSBY offer the following and move its adoption:

WHEREAS, the Dutchess County Charter establishes a system of government grounded in home rule and the separation of legislative and executive functions, under which the Legislature is responsible for policy-making, lawmaking, and fiscal oversight, while the Executive is responsible for administration; and

WHEREAS, the Dutchess County Legislature serves as the policy-making and appropriating body of County Government, with authority to adopt local laws, approve the County budget, and establish advisory bodies to assist in the discharge of its responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, Section 2.02(m) of the Dutchess County Charter expressly grants the County Legislature the authority to conduct studies and investigations in furtherance of its legislative functions, and in connection therewith to obtain and employ professional and technical advice, appoint citizens' committees, commissions, and boards, and require the production of information necessary or material to such studies or investigations; and

WHEREAS, Rule 5.1 of the Permanent Rules of the Dutchess County Legislature authorizes the Legislature to establish committees by resolution and to define their powers, duties, and membership; and

WHEREAS, Rule 5.2 of the Permanent Rules of the Dutchess County Legislature provides that every committee shall have the authority to undertake such actions as are necessary or reasonably incidental to carrying out its assigned functions, including administrative and investigative activities consistent with its mandate; and

WHEREAS, Rule 5.6 of the Permanent Rules authorizes committees of the Legislature to receive advice and counsel from individuals who are not members of the Legislature, thereby enabling the inclusion of subject-matter expertise from animal welfare professionals, veterinarians, environmental specialists, municipal officials, law enforcement, and other relevant stakeholders; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature retains an ongoing responsibility to review and evaluate County laws, programs, and expenditures to ensure that they are effective, transparent, and consistent with legislative intent; and

WHEREAS, animal welfare and wildlife management in Dutchess County directly implicate public health, public safety, environmental stewardship, municipal coordination,

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humane law enforcement, community advocacy, and the responsible use of public funds and resources; and

WHEREAS, the Dutchess County Legislature has previously acted in this area, including through the enactment of Local Law No. 4 of 2019 establishing the Dutchess County Animal Abuse Registry, which was intended to serve as a public-safety and animal-welfare tool by restricting individuals convicted of certain animal cruelty offenses from owning or harboring animals; and

WHEREAS, the County Executive established an Animal Welfare Advisory Committee in 2024 to advance humane policies, strengthen coordination with municipalities, and develop recommendations relating to animal welfare; and

WHEREAS, such initiatives are strengthened through transparency, communication, and the sharing of information with the Legislature as the County's policy-making and appropriating body; and

WHEREAS, to date, there has been no formal reporting or information provided to the Legislature regarding the activities, discussions, recommendations, or policy considerations of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, which has constrained the Legislature's ability to evaluate its work and consider related policy initiatives; and

WHEREAS, enhanced communication and coordination between the Executive and Legislative branches would support more effective governance and strengthen the County's collective efforts in advancing animal welfare and wildlife management; and

WHEREAS, animal welfare and wildlife management issues in Dutchess County frequently involve the coordinated efforts of multiple County agencies, including but not limited to the Department of Community Health, the Department of Public Works, the Planning Department, the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office, the Office of the District Attorney, and other related departments, each of which plays a distinct role in areas such as public health, infrastructure protection, law enforcement, prosecution of animal welfare offenders, and emergency response; and

WHEREAS, enforcement of animal cruelty laws under Article 26 of the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law requires coordination among law enforcement agencies, municipalities, animal welfare organizations, and veterinary providers; and

WHEREAS, conflicts between human activity and wildlife require balanced responses that protect public safety while minimizing unnecessary environmental harm and promoting long-term ecological stability; and

WHEREAS, lethal wildlife management methods may at times be necessary, but benefit from consideration of humane, sustainable, and cost-effective alternatives where appropriate; and

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WHEREAS, wildlife management activities undertaken or supported by the County involve public resources and therefore benefit from transparency, consistency, and alignment with humane, and environmentally responsible practices; and

WHEREAS, Dutchess County is home to the Medical Reserve Corps Dutchess County Animal Response Team (“DCART”), a volunteer emergency response organization that provides training, preparedness, and support relating to companion animals and livestock during emergencies and disasters; and

WHEREAS, DCART conducts ongoing training and public education throughout Dutchess County on topics including pet preparedness, emergency planning, animal first aid, animal CPR, evacuation planning, and disaster response involving animals and livestock; and

WHEREAS, the work of DCART demonstrates the importance of coordinated countywide planning, training, and public outreach relating to animal welfare, emergency preparedness, and humane response efforts; and

WHEREAS, there is no coordinated county-level oversight of animal welfare issues, including cruelty cases, stray animal and shelter operations, municipal animal control, communication with state and federal agencies, problem-solving around human-animal interfaces, wildlife & habitat management, enforcement of pet-related ordinances, research and educational outreach, disaster planning for evacuation of pets and livestock; and

WHEREAS, the County has no dedicated resource to investigate complaints against shelters or the multitude of independent rescue outfits; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature recognizes the importance of supporting humane, cost-effective, and evidence-based approaches to companion animal population management, including spay and neuter initiatives and Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) programs intended to prevent public health issues while reducing feral and community cat populations, while minimizing shelter overcrowding; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature further recognizes the importance of transparency, accountability, and consistent standards relating to shelters, rescues, and animal welfare organizations operating within Dutchess County, particularly where County resources, contracts, or partnerships may be involved; and

WHEREAS, the establishment of a Legislature-based ANIMAL WELFARE AND COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE (AWCS) would provide an organized and collaborative framework to support policy review, interagency coordination, public education, emergency preparedness, humane wildlife conflict mitigation, and long-term planning relating to animal welfare issues affecting Dutchess County residents and communities; and

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WHEREAS, the Legislature, as the body responsible for appropriations and fiscal accountability, must ensure that County-funded programs and services are effective, coordinated, humane, and consistent with public policy objectives; and

WHEREAS, enhanced data collection, reporting, and evaluation would support informed decision-making and strengthen both legislative oversight and executive program implementation; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature finds it appropriate and necessary to establish a formal advisory body to support coordinated, transparent, and policy-driven review of animal welfare and wildlife management issues affecting Dutchess County;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Dutchess County Legislature hereby establishes the ANIMAL WELFARE AND COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE (hereinafter “the AWCS Committee”) pursuant to Section 2.02(m) of the Dutchess County Charter and Rule 5.1 of the Permanent Rules of the Dutchess County Legislature; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall be advisory in nature and shall support the Legislature in the exercise of its policy-making, oversight, and investigatory functions relating to animal welfare, wildlife management, and environmental stewardship; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall consist of up to nine (9) members appointed by the Chair of the Legislature, including a Chair, Co-Chair, and Vice Chair, each of whom shall be a member of the Dutchess County Legislature; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the remaining members may include representatives from the Legislature’s majority and/or minority caucuses at the discretion of the Chair, County departments, municipalities, law enforcement agencies, veterinary, animal welfare, rescue, and environmental professionals, and members of the public possessing relevant experience or subject matter expertise; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall have the authority to gather information, conduct studies, solicit expert input, and make recommendations to the Legislature consistent with its advisory and oversight role; and be it further

RESOLVED, that in furtherance of its work, the AWCS Committee may request information and data through the Legislature from County departments and agencies, consistent with applicable law; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall advise the Legislature on animal-welfare and wildlife-management policy and support legislative review, coordination, policy development, and oversight relating to humane treatment of animals, animal cruelty prevention, municipal coordination, rabies prevention, TNVR and community-cat management, wildlife conflict mitigation, and environmental considerations; and be it further

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RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall review County laws, programs, and initiatives, including the Animal Abuse Registry and the County Executive's Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, and provide recommendations to support effective implementation, transparency, and alignment with legislative intent; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall review the structure, activities, and outputs of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee and may recommend and implement measures to enhance communication, coordination, and information-sharing with the Legislature; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall identify and recommend potential local laws, policy enhancements, and budgetary priorities to strengthen animal welfare and wildlife management within Dutchess County; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall evaluate opportunities to enhance coordination among municipalities, County departments, law enforcement, and community partners; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee may recommend the development of standard operating procedures to promote consistent, lawful, and humane responses to animal-welfare and wildlife-related incidents; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall promote policies and practices that prioritize humane treatment of animals and the use of non-lethal wildlife management strategies where feasible; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall promote improved data collection and reporting relating to animal welfare and wildlife activities; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall serve in an advisory oversight capacity to the Legislature by reviewing and evaluating County programs, policies, expenditures, and contracting practices relating to animal welfare and wildlife management; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee shall meet regularly and report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature for further action; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AWCS Committee may consult with and solicit input from relevant County departments, including the Department of Community Health, the Department of Public Works, the Planning Department, the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office, the Office of the District Attorney, and other appropriate agencies; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Legislature may request review or audit by the Dutchess County Comptroller as appropriate; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Clerk of the Legislature shall transmit this Resolution to all relevant County departments, municipalities, and the County Executive.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

NO FISCAL IMPACT PROJECTED

APPROPRIATION RESOLUTIONS

(To be completed by the requesting department)

Total Current Year Cost \$ _____

Total Current Year Revenue \$ _____
and Source

Source of County Funds (check one):

- Existing Appropriations Contingency Transfer of Existing
 Additional Appropriations Other (explain) Appropriations

Identify Line Item(s):

Related Expenses: Amount \$ _____
Nature/Reason:

Anticipated Savings to County: _____

Net County Cost (this year): _____
Over Five Years: _____

Additional Comments / Explanation:

Prepared by: _____ Anna Shah _____ Prepared On: _____ 5/6/2026 _____