

Margaret Rubio (Pet Paradise)
1003 Harrison Avenue
London, Ontario N5Y 2V1
22nd. November, 2013.

Attention: Community and Protection Services Committee, City of London.

Dear Committee members,

I am aware that there have been meetings and discussions around the topic of animal welfare taking place at City Hall. I was particularly concerned and troubled at the content of the last public meeting since some of the suggestions made would, if instigated, materially affect my business and the jobs of the people I employ. My independent store is the only full-line pet store in London. My husband set up the store in 1994 when his employer, Northern Telecom, left town. I have owned and operated it since October 2000 when my husband died.

My late husband, Jess Rubio, and I brought our young family to London in 1984 when he was hired as an Engineer for Northern Telecom. We settled down in the Old North area where I still reside. When Northern Telecom closed its doors here in London in 1994, we did not go to their plant in Calgary but stayed here since we loved London. I had a permanent teaching position, and our kids were happily attending school and University in London. My husband designed and set up our pet store "Pet Paradise" in 1994 at the First London Place mall located at 1080 Adelaide Street. When he died prematurely in 2000, I retained the store, and took an early retirement from Thames Valley District School Board. I have independently owned and operated Pet Paradise since 2000. Altogether my family has been in business at that location for 18 + years. Pet Paradise has an A+ rating from the Better Business Bureau. I have included a copy of that in another e-mail to Orest Katolyk.

In developing the plans for the store, my husband, taking into account the City's existing bylaws regarding the sale of animals, made the store quite large (5800 square feet), specifically to accommodate the wide variety of animals he planned to sell, including kittens and puppies. [Consequently, my rent, common area maintenance costs and city taxes are considerable.] Proper vet care and proper information on the care and husbandry of these pets is tantamount to the success of my business. All kittens and puppies (as well as all the other animals) sold in the store are examined by an experienced member of my staff before acquisition. Kittens and puppies are checked in store, by a highly respected London veterinarian and given their first set of shots, a flea treatment (Advantage or Revolution) and other treatments they may need before going to a new home. Vaccinated pets are kept in the store for a minimum of 24 hours after their vet check, before they can be handled by the public. Then we insist that anyone handling our pets uses hand sanitiser. Anyone purchasing our pets is given advice on how to care for their pet and when to have the next vaccines. They then go home with vet records and the same food the pet was eating in the store (to avoid digestive upset), along with a health warranty. We strongly discourage impulse purchases, and in fact, have talked people out of a purchase many times.

I sell mostly kittens. Almost all of the kittens sold in my store are domestic kittens that are given to us from London residents. We do not charge a drop off fee and there is usually a waiting list of several weeks. We always record the name, address and phone number of each owner for future reference and also, the name and address of the purchaser. The latter is picked up by Animal Care and Control. In 2012, we sold 182 kittens, almost all domestic, except for 16 Siamese from local private homes. These people preferred to sell to us instead of Kijiji. Since January 1st 2013, we have sold 222 kittens, 213 of whom were domestic and dropped off free of charge by local people. We purchased 9 Siamese from private homes in the area, 6, in fact, from our groomer's daughter. My store has a good reputation in the community so people occasionally leave litters of kittens and other small animals at our front door, knowing that my staff will make sure they are well cared for, which sometimes requires members of staff to take them home for a week or two.

As you know, most puppies purchased in London are bought and sold on Kijiji and through other classified ads where there is no accountability and often no traceability. That is why some people prefer to come to my store. I am extremely selective when purchasing puppies,

which is why I do not sell as many as I could. In 2012 we sold 50, mostly from local homes. This year so far, we have sold 75, again mostly local.

My staff and I are well aware of the abuses that can be found in this area and our purchase protocols have been developed to deter and avoid them. On the recommendation of my London vet, I post-date all my cheques for seven days in order to ascertain that the puppies are in good health. If someone calls me and has more than one or two adult females, I ask to be able to speak to their vet for further information. For those customers looking for a particular breed, we refer them to the "Dogs Annual" magazine which lists all the breeders in Canada. If we have a copy in the store, they are invited to copy names and addresses of kennels from it at their leisure. If not, we send the client to Chapters. If someone is planning a Kijiji purchase, and there are many in London, we advise them to ask for a vet reference from the seller and advise them not to purchase without that reference.

In addition to being accountable to my customers, my store plays an important role in the community. Being independently owned and operated, we are able to support the local economy. The large corporate stores, U.S. based, are unable to do this since they receive their supplies from the U.S. etc. I buy many of my products such as cat toys, cat posts, doggie biscuits, dog toys, etc., from small entrepreneurs in London. I encourage the ideas of small independent local suppliers by stocking their products when they are starting up. Most of my animals, fish, and tropical plants are purchased locally, many from within the city boundaries or close by. We quite often have guinea pigs, and other small animals born in-store. Secondly, my store serves as a friendly neighbourhood hub that attracts people to the mall. Families come in frequently to browse and chat, often bringing in pets previously purchased at the store. We welcome school and daycare tours and also make presentations e.g. Cross Cultural Children's Centre. Many local high schools such as Beal, Thames, Youth Opportunities, Alternative High School, Robarts School for the Deaf, Montcalm and Mother Teresa express gratitude for the care and effort my staff make with the numerous co-op students they place with us, some of whom are hired for part time work after their placements. I have asked a few of their teachers to write quick e-mails to you. Hopefully some of them will do that. They are in and out of the building quite frequently and have a sense of how the store operates. I also generally make donations to local charities when asked.

I am, and have been for 13 years, a reputable, responsible and accountable pet store owner independently operating here in my home town, paying taxes to the City of London. I currently have 13 employees, both full- and part-time. These employees rely on these jobs for their livelihood and that of their families. Some are putting themselves through school either at Fanshawe College or the University of Western Ontario with their earnings. Obviously, I would like to be consulted on any issue which might affect my reputation and that of my employees. Imagine my dismay when I saw the recent public meeting on line, suggesting that the selling of pets through the store was somehow promoting and encouraging their ill treatment.

All at Pet Paradise consider the welfare of all our animals as the highest priority. Not just for the time they are with us but also before and after. We are not a franchise or a "big box" store and have found over the years that word of mouth is the best way of building a reputation. It would make no business sense to be associated with a disreputable supply-chain or to sell pets to unsuitable homes or for simply spurious reasons.

As you know, the recent recession and the downturn in our London economy have been a challenge but, fortunately, we have weathered it all so far. I have recently signed a new five year lease. Due to my very knowledgeable staff and my very loyal client base I have been able to avoid laying anyone off. Any negative comments, however well intentioned they may be, will adversely affect my business and the morale of my employees.

I really think that the citizens of London have the right to explore as many sources as they like, including my store. If someone wants an 8 week old kitten and cannot find one in London, I can assure you that they will simply go to another town such as Stratford, Strathroy, Sarnia or Chatham. This would move business out of London and does nothing to educate consumers on how to make good choices. Banning the sale of kittens and puppies in my retail store would do nothing to improve their welfare and, would, in fact, remove a legitimate source of advice and guidance, where the residents of London can choose to buy a healthy pet.

Commenting on other points raised at your meeting, perhaps empowering Londoners to make good decisions will help cut down on unwanted and abandoned pets. Pets give unconditional love and having a pet can actually improve a person's mental and physical health. Many people are not familiar with city initiatives in spaying and neutering. We often have customers tell us they simply cannot afford spaying and neutering costs.

In conclusion, my best wishes to the City of London on improving the welfare of cats and dogs in the city. Please be assured that I and all the staff at Pet Paradise will continue to work with you to achieve this common objective. If anyone in your committee would like to meet me at my store, I will be happy to show you around and answer further questions.

Sincerely,

Margaret Rubio