
Request to Meet – Animal Advisory Council Restructuring

Gwinnett Animal Advocacy Alliance <gwinnettanimalshelteradvocates@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 13, 2026 at 1:15 PM

To: "Carden, Kirkland" <Kirkland.Carden@gwinnettcounty.com>, Allison Cauthen <Allison.Cauthen@gwinnettcounty.com>

Cc: "Afshar, Arteen" <Arteen.Afshar@gwinnettcounty.com>

Commissioner Carden,

Thank you for your response.

I am copying County Attorney Allison Cauthen on this email since you indicated that County Legal will be included in future correspondence, and because she was present during the Animal Advisory Council meetings when many of these matters were publicly discussed.

I want to clarify an important point in your response. You stated that the ordinance did not grant the Animal Advisory Council authority to "conduct audits, nor does it provide independent oversight or enforcement powers."

To our knowledge, the former Council was not attempting to conduct an audit, exercise enforcement authority, or independently implement any of the initiatives it was discussing.

For example, the Council was not conducting an independent audit of Animal Welfare & Enforcement. It was discussing whether to recommend to the Board of Commissioners that an independent audit be authorized. The initiatives we observed the Council working on were being discussed as recommendations to be presented to the Board for consideration and approval.

In fact, some Council members had been encouraged by the commissioners who appointed them to bring animal welfare concerns and proposed improvements through the Animal Advisory Council. That was what they were doing.

There is an important distinction between an advisory body examining issues, asking questions, discussing potential solutions, and making recommendations to elected officials and an advisory body attempting to exercise governmental authority or independently implement those recommendations.

Since you have now specifically raised audits, independent oversight and enforcement powers in describing the Council's scope, what specific action or actions by the former Council do you believe constituted conducting an audit, exercising enforcement authority, or otherwise acting beyond its advisory role?

Allison, because you were present during the Council meetings when these proposals were publicly discussed, I would appreciate direct clarification from County Legal:

1. Did County Legal believe at the time that the Animal Advisory Council was violating its governing ordinance or otherwise acting outside the scope of its authority by discussing these issues and developing recommendations for the Board of Commissioners?
2. Did County Legal believe the Council was attempting to conduct an audit, exercise enforcement authority, or independently implement actions that required approval by the Board of Commissioners?
3. If so, what specific action or discussion did County Legal believe violated the ordinance or exceeded the Council's authority?
4. Since you were present during these meetings, was the Council advised at the time that County Legal believed it was violating the ordinance or exceeding its authority? If so, when and how was that communicated?
5. If the Council was not advised, why was the issue not raised during the meetings so Council members could understand the limitation and correct their course?
6. Conversely, if County Legal did not believe at the time that the Council was violating its ordinance or exceeding its authority, we would appreciate confirmation of that as well.

This distinction is especially important now because concerns about the former Council's scope and conduct are being cited publicly in defense of the Board's decision to dismantle and restructure it.

Commissioner Carden, your response also leaves unanswered the core questions we originally raised: what information you personally relied upon before casting your vote, what specific conduct by the former Council you believed warranted dismantling and restructuring it, and why you believed that action was necessary at that particular time.

Referring us to Community Services, the future Animal Advisory Council, or previously issued statements does not answer those questions because they concern your decision and your vote as an elected commissioner.

We understand from your responses that you have declined our request to meet. Since you have indicated that County Legal will now be involved in future correspondence, we welcome their participation and look forward to clarification on the questions above.

Thank you,
Melissa

On Thu, Aug 13, 2026 at 12:47 PM Carden, Kirkland <Kirkland.Carden@gwinnettcountry.com> wrote:
Melissa,

My colleagues and I have issued several statements via social media and press releases regarding our decision to reform the board—a move supported by a majority of the Board of Commissioners.

Given the nature of our recent online exchanges, I have determined it is best to direct all future inquiries regarding animal welfare services to the professional county staff responsible for the administration and management of these programs in Gwinnett. The purpose of the Animal Advisory Council is to provide professional expertise, community perspective, and informed recommendations regarding policies, programs, and emerging issues affecting Gwinnett County. Please note that the ordinance governing this board does not grant it the authority to conduct audits, nor does it provide independent oversight or enforcement powers.

Once the new advisory board is established, its members will be available to hear concerns and consider recommendations for improvement.

Due to ongoing concerns regarding the tone of our communications and the nature of the allegations being made, I have decided to involve legal counsel in all future correspondence.

Regards,

Kirkland D. Carden

Sent from my iPhone

On Aug 13, 2026, at 8:37 AM, Gwinnett Animal Advocacy Alliance <gwinnettanimalshelteradvocates@gmail.com> wrote:

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Gwinnett County Government. Maintain caution when opening links, attachments, or responding. When in doubt, contact phishing@gwinnettcountry.com.

Good morning Commissioner Carden -

Thank you for responding. To clarify, my request to meet is specifically regarding the Board of Commissioners' decision to dismantle and restructure the Animal Advisory Council, not simply concerns regarding Animal Welfare & Enforcement operations. County staff and the Legal Department did not vote to restructure the Council.

You and the other members of the Board of Commissioners did.

We are therefore asking to meet with our elected representatives to understand why this decision was made, what information the Board relied upon before voting, and whether the Board will consider restoring independent citizen representation.

I am also confused by your direction that our animal-welfare concerns should now be addressed to County staff. As our elected County Commissioner, do you not believe concerns about animal welfare, shelter operations, and the effectiveness of a taxpayer-funded County department are matters your constituents should be able to bring directly to you?

For the past couple of years, advocates have repeatedly raised concerns with both County and shelter leadership, and many of those emails and concerns have gone unanswered. We also met with Community Services and shelter leadership last year, and those meetings produced no meaningful change on the issues we raised.

That is precisely why independent oversight and access to our elected officials matter. Referring advocates back to the same departments whose operations they have already spent years raising concerns about does not address the accountability problem—and it certainly does not answer questions about a decision made by the Board itself.

We are your constituents. We should be able to ask you about decisions you made as our elected representative and receive answers.

We remain willing to meet with you and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues directly.

Thank you,
Melissa

On Thu, Aug 13, 2026 at 7:52 AM Carden, Kirkland <Kirkland.Carden@gwinnettcountry.com> wrote:
Good morning Melissa,

Based on the recent back-and-forth on social media, I believe it would be best for you and your organization to speak directly with county staff regarding concerns about animal welfare. Going forward, all email correspondence will be forwarded to our Community Services and Legal departments to ensure that all future communication is handled professionally.

Have a nice day,

Kirkland D. Carden

Sent from my iPhone

On Aug 11, 2026, at 4:34 AM, Gwinnett Animal Shelter Advocates <gwinnettanimalshelteradvocates@gmail.com> wrote:

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Commissioner Carden -

I'd like to take you up on your offer to meet and discuss the Animal Advisory Council.

I would like to meet **in person and as soon as possible**. Given everything that has happened over the past week, I want to better understand the **full reasoning behind the decision to dismantle and restructure the former Council**, including the concerns you referenced publicly regarding Council members overstepping their authority, interfering with staff and potential Open Meetings Act issues.

I have a number of questions, and I think a face-to-face conversation would be much more productive than online.

Arteen, can you please let me know Commissioner Carden's earliest availability? I'm happy to work around his schedule.

Thank you,
Melissa