



**saving lives**  
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To the community of pet owners and to everyone who trusted in the sanctity of the pet cemetery in Columbus, Indiana:

I would like to begin by offering my heartfelt and sincere apology on behalf of the previous administration for the way the situation involving the pet cemetery was handled. Back when the previous Humane Society was located in the area of the cemetery, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) had formally condemned the property due to the presence of a former landfill buried on the site. As a result, the land has been deemed unsuitable for any future use because there was no ability to make puncture holes in the ground because it would let out the pollution. As a result, IDEM removed grave markers that were deemed to be too deep into the ground. I deeply regret the pain and distress this has caused to so many of you, me included. As someone who has experienced the profound loss of a beloved pet, I am devastated by what has occurred.

This is not a defense of what happened, but an acknowledgment of the grief, betrayal, and anger that many of you must feel. To those of you who placed your faith in the cemetery to care for the memory of your cherished companions, I am profoundly sorry. I cannot undo what has been done, nor can I erase the heartache that has resulted from this insensitivity.

For many of us, our pets are not merely animals; they are family members, confidants, and a source of unconditional love. Their passing leaves a void, and their graves serve as a sacred space to honor and remember them. The decision to remove and demolish the pet cemetery without proper notification to the grave owners was unacceptable. I wish I could restore the cemetery to what it once was or give each of you the opportunity to make a new resting place for your loved ones. While I cannot undo the past, I want to commit to making things better moving forward. Steps will be taken to ensure this type of incident never happens again. This includes implementing policies to protect such sacred spaces, ensuring records are meticulously maintained, and enhancing communication with all stakeholders in the future.

I urge anyone who has been affected to reach out to me and share their stories. I would love to hear them. Together, we can document the lives and memories of the pets who were laid to rest and ensure they are never forgotten. It is my hope that we can create a memorial or dedicate a part of the grounds to honor them properly. Additionally, I am committed to working closely with the Humane Society and other organizations to prevent such actions from recurring and we will continue to maintain the landscaping and preserve the existing markers within the pet cemetery. To include make some beautification changes as well. However, IDEM has informed us that no new additions can be made to the site, as puncturing the ground will release the landfill pollution. Our efforts must remain focused solely on its ongoing upkeep.

Please know that your heartbreak is not ignored. I am grieving alongside you, and my deepest wish is that we can come together to heal from this loss and to build something meaningful in the aftermath. This was a failure of humanity, and I am committed to ensuring it is never repeated. Let us remember and celebrate the lives of our pets who brought us joy, comfort, and unconditional love. Their spirits live on in our hearts, and their stories deserve to be preserved.

Sincerely,

Shawn Bliton

Executive Director

Bartholomew County Humane Society

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