



Legislation Text

File #: 10-0423, **Version:** 1

Recommendation to initiate a multi-year expansion of low-cost spay and neuter resources for both owned and free-roaming animals beginning with vouchers supported by local veterinarians, and working towards a City-run clinic under the direction of a full-time State Licensed Veterinarian, provided that costs can be fully off-set;

Provide direction to staff if cat licensing should be required in the City of Long Beach;

Develop a funding and implementation plan for regular adoption, microchip, and licensing clinics under the direction of a State Licensed Veterinarian; and

Develop a plan to implement a formal Animal Care Ambassador program to support adoptions, special events, license canvassing and humane education citywide. (Citywide)

The City Council approved a motion on October 20, 2009 requesting the City Manager to recommend strategies for reducing euthanasia and increasing redemption of healthy animals at the City's shelter. The following recommendations were crafted with significant feedback from residents and animal owners from the City of Long Beach. In addition to conducting an online survey of community feedback which generated 82 responses, Animal Care Services staff discussed the City Council's direction with approximately 425 residents, at 20 community meetings held between October 2009 and March 2010.

For purposes of clarity, the following recommendations are organized by four related goals as defined in the original motion.

1. **Goal One:** *Reduce the number of unwanted animals through the promotion of low cost spay and neuter procedures at local veterinary hospitals and clinics.*

Consensus opinion is that too many healthy animals are euthanized each year at the City shelter. Reducing euthanasia of healthy animals is by far the highest priority of those participating in the survey and community meetings. Feedback clearly indicates that there is significant support for expanded spay and neuter resources as the strategy for reducing impounds and euthanasia of healthy animals, particularly cats.

While a City-sponsored clinic for low-cost spay and neuter services (mobile or otherwise) is desired, the City currently lacks a full-time State-Licensed Veterinarian to oversee its development and medical procedures (the Department uses a part time contract veterinarian to fulfill basic State requirements to operate). Lack of a full-time Licensed Veterinarian also makes it difficult for the City to attract grant funding from private and non-profit organizations.

Legislative strategies including mandatory spay and neuter for all animals were also a point of

discussion at community meetings. Mandatory spay and neuter for cats, and licenses for unaltered dogs, are already required by the Long Beach Municipal Code (LBMC). Further legislative changes are not recommended until the City can provide more affordable options for spay and neuter services to those residents in need.

Recommendation One: Provided that costs can be fully off-set, initiate a multi-year expansion of low-cost spay and neuter resources for both owned and free-roaming animals with continued vouchers supported by local veterinarians, and working towards a City-run clinic under the direction of a full-time State Licensed Veterinarian.

2. **Goal Two:** *Reduce the number of animals impounded at the City shelter through the promotion of a citywide licensing program that includes all animals (e.g., cats, dogs and other).*

Through extensive outreach, staff received both positive and negative feedback for expanding licensing and rabies requirements to include cats, as a strategy for reducing animal impounds and improving public health and safety.

As a result of the online community survey, approximately 78 percent of respondents indicate support for expanding licensing requirements to include cats, and over 80 percent support mandatory microchipping of pets to improve return-to-owner rates.

Providing similar standards for all animal owners in the City is a priority for residents and the basis for a more equitable public policy. The proposal under consideration will require cat owners to annually license and vaccinate cats. In order to license a cat, the owner must show proof that the animal has been vaccinated for rabies.

Existing law requires that all cats must be spayed or neutered in the City of Long Beach. Therefore, unaltered cat licenses will not be available. Vaccinations may be obtained through low-cost clinics or by private veterinarians and spay and neutering could occur through vouchers or private veterinarians. While rabies is the required vaccination, typically other vaccinations such as FVRCP will often be given to address the most common communicable diseases including Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calici Virus, and Panleukopeni. The owner will be responsible for obtaining the vaccination and incurring the costs. However, the health benefits from vaccinations are a significant benefit to the animal. While fees are established by the City Council, similar fees for cat licensing in the region are approximately \$10.

The vaccination costs to the owner will be approximately \$10, and spay and neuter costs average from \$29.50 to \$120 per animal. In the first three years, license fees are projected to generate \$80,000 in annual revenue to the City if only 8,000 of a total estimated 123,000 (6 percent) household cats are registered.

Based on projections from the American Veterinary Medical Association (A VMA), it is estimated that there are approximately 123,000 domesticated cats under the care of residents, and an unknown number of feral cats in Long Beach. The program under consideration would apply to all domesticated cats in the City. A cat licensing program will utilize the same staffing resources of the current animal licensing program. Since this program would be a General Fund expense, investments in new staffing would only occur if new revenues fully offset the proposed program staffing and implementation costs. .

There are pros and cons to licensing cats in Long Beach. The pros consist of:

- Licensing will help to identify lost cats and reunite them with their owners, decreasing impound rates.
- Vaccinations will help maintain a cat's health and reduce the spread of disease and outbreaks such as upper respiratory infection, herpes, and feline distemper.
- Owners will be held accountable for local laws requiring mandatory spay and neuter of their cats thereby reducing feral cat populations.

The cons consist of:

- Increases cost to cat owners, particularly the elderly and low-income residents.
- Indoor cats would be required to be licensed and vaccinated even though they don't pose the same public health threat as outdoor cats.
- Creates a disincentive towards the adoption and ownership of cats.
- Increases regulations and costs to the City for implementation and enforcement of the program.

The initiation of such a program is a significant commitment on the part of the City requiring substantial outreach and resident education throughout the City. All costs of a cat licensing program would be completely supported by new revenue and staff from the existing animal licensing program. Therefore there would be no new costs to the General Fund. The initiation of a licensing program is a City Council policy decision, therefore staff is requesting direction from the Council on whether or not to embark on such a program.

Should the City Council decide to implement a cat licensing regulation, staff would recommend that residents be provided with a reasonable grace period to get animals vaccinated and licensed before the fees are applied. To increase compliance, residents should be provided with a reasonable time period (6-12 months) where licensing is free and spay and neuter vouchers are provided before the regulations are enforced. Finally a "free ride home program" has been implemented in some locations as an incentive to microchip and license animals. Long Beach could provide a similar program for cats should funding become available.

Recommendation Two: Provide direction to staff if cat licensing should be required in the City of Long Beach;

3. **Goal Three:** *Increase the number of animals returned to their owners (and reduce euthanasia of unclaimed animals) by increasing access to education, licensing and microchipping services in hard-to-reach communities, particularly those where animal populations have been difficult to manage.*

Community feedback indicates that the City is not doing enough to make opportunities for adoption, microchipping and licensing accessible to residents, particularly in the hardest to reach areas. A current license and microchip remains the most effective tool to help return animals to their owners. There is significant support among community members for regular mobile clinics providing convenient adoption, microchipping and licensing services, particularly in areas farthest from the shelter. These mobile clinics should be provided in high profile areas such as the dog parks, and rotate throughout each of the Council Districts.

Additionally, online licensing and the use of technology to provide email alerts is another suggestion from the community survey. The City has recently implemented www.petharbor.com which provides updated pictures of impounded animals for redemption or adoption every 60 minutes, and we will work toward web-licensing when online payment processing becomes available.

Currently, the City works with non-profit rescue groups such as the spcaLA, Friends of Long Beach Animals, and Animal Match Rescue Team to provide adoptions due to the lack of staffing for its own direct adoptions program. A full-time State Licensed Veterinarian is recommended if the City expands in-house adoption opportunities, along with the enhanced spay and neutering services, to ensure healthy adoptions, exit exams, and rabies shots consistent with State law. Increased microchipping and licensing will reduce the City's impound costs, increase revenue from annual licensing and ultimately increase return rates and lower total euthanasia's performed.

Recommendation Three: Develop a funding and implementation plan for regular adoption, microchip, and licensing clinics under the direction of a State Licensed Veterinarian.

4. **Goal Four:** *Expand education and volunteer training programs to support the mission of Animal Care Services and enforcement of the municipal code, particularly in those areas of the City where animal populations have become difficult to manage.*

Community feedback indicates that Animal Care Services does not provide enough opportunity for volunteers, and is thereby missing an important opportunity to expand services. Through the online community survey, over 20 residents indicated that they would be willing to volunteer for license canvassing, special events, and humane education. Additionally, residents wish to see more strategic promotion of animal laws through media placement and multi-lingual mailers (e.g., utility billing, corridor signage, advertisements in local papers).

There are a number of models in the City of Long Beach of successful volunteer programs that provide valuable services to residents at little or no cost (e.g., Fire Ambassadors, Senior Police Volunteers). However, these programs indicate that successful implementation requires a structured program for screening, selecting, training and managing volunteers, and a dedication of resources to maintaining the program over time.

Recommendation Four: Develop a plan to implement a formal Animal Care Ambassador program to support adoptions, special events, license canvassing and humane education citywide.

This matter was reviewed by Deputy City Attorney Cristyl Meyers on March 22, 2010 and by Budget and Performance Management Bureau Manager David Wodynski on April 20, 2010.

City Council action on this item is not time critical.

It is the goal of all of the recommended actions to add no new net costs to the General Fund. Successfully expanding low-cost spay and neuter, vaccination, adoption and microchip clinics, will legally require oversight from a full-time State Licensed Veterinarian. The approximate salary range for this position at similar agencies is between \$130,000 - \$160,000 per year (fully loaded). However, these costs are largely offset by new and expanded revenue-generating activities (e.g., sheltering

fees, onsite medical care, walk-in clinics, mobile vaccination, adoption and microchipping clinics) made available through full-time support provided. Through the establishment of walk-in hours at the Shelter and up to ten mobile clinics in locations throughout the City per year, staff estimates that a full-time veterinarian will help to directly generate approximately \$81,700 of new revenue per year. Also, it is anticipated that the City will become eligible for privately-funded grant opportunities. Revenue is expected to grow over time as new programs are initiated, ultimately offsetting the costs of the recommended position. Providing a full-time State Licensed Veterinarian will also provide immediate savings from the cost of contract veterinarians, spay/neuter vouchers and outside medical support. Staff will continue to seek private funding, partnerships, and grants for one-time investments in medical equipment and vehicles, while revenues from fee-based services will support ongoing costs for these programs. While expanded enforcement and administration of cat licensing will create an additional workload, this work will be absorbed by the current animal licensing program

Approve recommendation.

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DIRECTOR
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

NAME
TITLE

APPROVED:

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