



R-18

Memorandum

Date: May 8, 2007

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Suja Lowenthal, Second District (S)
Gary DeLong, Third District (D)

Subject: Low-Income Pet Spay/Neuter Program

RECOMMENDATION

Direct the City Manager to create a low-income spay/neuter program that may include but is not limited to: (1) low co-pay vouchers covering pre- and post-surgical expenses (i.e., shots/vaccinations required to perform spay/neuter surgery); (2) developing more public-private partnerships to expand low-income services; (3) an efficient administrative means of determining voucher eligibility (i.e., based on state or federal assistance programs' qualifications); (4) explore mandatory microchips for licensed pets (5) research additional sources of funding including administrative fees to be earmarked for spay/neuter programs; (6) mandatory spay/neuter (at owner/guardian's expense) of all animals that have been captured for biting/attacking; (7) mandatory stray spay/neuter (at the owner/guardian's expense) if an animal is impounded more than certain number of times to be determined by appropriate City Staff; (8) establishing an Advisory Committee for Domestic Animal Management and Welfare.

BACKGROUND

Across the United States, cities, counties and states have established targeted spay/neuter programs to great success. These programs prevent unwanted animal pregnancies and reduce the number of animals entering shelters every year, ultimately saving taxpayer dollars and preventing animal euthanasia.

According to the Minnesota State Legislature's 1989 Animal Population Control Study Commission, for every dollar invested in municipally operated spay/neuter clinics, taxpayers will save \$18.72 in future animal control costs over a ten-year period.

New Hampshire's low-income spay/neuter veterinary partnership program reduced euthanasia statewide by 75% over six years (1996-2000) and saved \$2.2 million dollars statewide in animal control costs during that same period. Huron Valley, Michigan's low-income spay/neuter program reduced pet overpopulation and euthanasia by half over 10 years. Santa Barbara, California's targeted spay/neuter program reduced euthanasia by

nearly 80% over 10 years. Charlotte, North Carolina saved 39% in animal control costs over five years and reduced euthanasia by 40% after instituting a spay/neuter clinic in 1980.

Currently, the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services works with a non-profit partner, Friends of Long Beach Animals, to issue \$80 vouchers for spaying and neutering. However, the current voucher amount is only accepted by five veterinary clinics in Long Beach (potentially creating a transportation barrier for low-income residents). This also creates a backlog of requests, forcing residents to wait months before filling an appointment. Furthermore, spaying/neutering can cost as much as \$150 for larger pets, not including pre-surgery shots and medical care, making the co-pay quite costly for low- and very low-income residents. Nearly one third of New Hampshire's low-income spay/neuter incentive program voucher recipients could not use the vouchers because they could not cover the expense for pre-surgery shots.

By educating the public and issuing vouchers requiring lower co-pay, the City of Long Beach creates a viable incentive program to help low-income residents safely spay and neuter their pets. Furthermore, by targeting high-risk owners who repeatedly have stray pets, the City can reduce the likelihood of unintended pregnancies and offspring that cannot be cared for.