



Memorandum

To: Mayor and City Council

October 20, 2009

From: Suja Lowenthal, Second District
Gary DeLong, Third District
Patrick O'Donnell, Fourth District

Subject: Animal Care Services

REQUESTED ACTION:

Respectfully request the City Manager work with the City Attorney to review the Long Beach Municipal Code for necessary changes related to spay/neutering, cat licensing, mobile unit education, enabling Long Beach Animal Care Services to better manage animal populations throughout the city.

Request the City Manager develop recommendations for council review within the next 60 days that achieves the following goals:

1. Reduce the number of unwanted animals through the promotion of low cost spay and neuter procedures at local veterinary hospitals and clinics.
2. Reduce the number of animals impounded at the local shelter through the promotion of a citywide licensing program that includes all animals (e.g. cats, dogs and other)
3. 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)
4. 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.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In May 2007, the City Council asked the City Manager to develop a proposal for controlling our animal population with elements that included mandatory microchipping, cat licensing and mandatory spay/neutering for biting animals or those impounded more than a certain number of times (see attached report). In January 2008, staff returned with a report detailing strategies aimed at reducing the number of homeless pets in our city in an effort to reduce the number of animals euthanized annually.

In March 2008 the City Council's Public Safety Committee discussed similar issues related to vicious dog biting, administrative fines, mandatory microchipping and a linkage between mandatory education and fines. The committee's policy recommendations were approved,

the City Council in April 2008 and the ensuing municipal code changes were adopted on July 21, 2009.

However, there are still significant public policy elements that need to be addressed to reduce the number of unclaimed animals euthanized each year at the local shelter. This includes targeted legislative changes by the City Council, operational changes by Animal Care Services, and an increased level of awareness and engagement with the community around the issues of responsible pet ownership.

Reducing Unwanted Animals: Spay and Neuter

A key component in reducing the number of animals impounded and euthanized each year is to encourage pet owners to spay & neuter their pets. Animal Care Services works with non-profit partners such as Friends of Long Beach Animals to distribute vouchers for spay/neuter services at local veterinary hospitals. These community groups have done a tremendous job of reducing spay/neutering costs to residents, while increasing the number of spay/neuter procedures for cats and dogs by 15,100 over the past 11 years. Still, 6,167 unclaimed dogs and cats were euthanized by the City of Long Beach in 2008 (of which 76 percent were cats), indicating that much more must be done to limit breeding and hold people accountable for their animals. As a community, we must promote a strategy that will reduce the cost and expand the capacity within our city to provide spay/neuter services for both cats and dogs.

Increasing Healthy Outcomes: Licensing and Microchipping

In 2008, approximately 63 percent of dogs, and 17 percent of cats were returned to their owners or found new homes after entering the shelter. While the "Live Release Rate" (the number of animals finding healthy outcomes), has increased in 2009, a key component to improving adoption, redemption and rehabilitation to an acceptable level is through licensing and microchipping dogs, cats and other animals. This provides the best opportunity for Animal Care Services to return animals before they are ever impounded. In 2009, Animal Care Services received a donated, out-of-commission Navy ambulance. These types of assets should be deployed to bring affordable licensing and microchipping services to hard-to-reach areas of the city through the increased use of cost-effective mobile clinics and outreach events.

Promoting Responsible Pet Ownership and Accountability: Licensing

By far, the largest population of animals euthanized at the shelter in 2008 (over 4,600), were free-roaming cats. While it is illegal for residents of Long Beach to possess unaltered cats, owners continue to allow their cats to roam outdoors and produce hundreds of unwanted litters on an annual basis. To increase the number of cats returned to their owners, improve enforcement of current laws, and reduce the number of cats euthanized at the shelter each year, the City Council needs to encourage a cat-licensing program equal to that of dogs. A survey of (95) cities and (2) counties in the Los Angeles region indicates that (62) cities and (1) county unincorporated area provides for some form of cat licensing. At least (7) of these cities and the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County have confirmed that cat licensing is mandatory. These include:

- Los Angeles County (unincorporated areas)
- City of Carson
- City of Hawaiian Gardens
- City of La Puente
- City of Lancaster
- City of Lomita
- City of Lynwood
- City of Palmdale

While average fees for cat licensing are between \$5.00 and \$10.00 to cover the costs for administration and registration, licensing provides Animal Care Services with the tools to return animals to their owners and hold owners accountable for allowing their unaltered cats to roam. Model cities and national organizations such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) have already provided evidence that these strategies work. The step towards mandatory licensing of all animals in Long Beach should not deter the ongoing efforts of Animal Care Services and their partners to address free roaming cat populations throughout the city such as the shoreline, parks and industrial areas in a humane manner.

Engaging the Community: Education and Volunteer Opportunities

Reaching out to those areas of the city where pet overpopulation and neglected animals are more prevalent requires a new strategy for community engagement and volunteerism. Currently, there are only three License Inspectors canvassing communities to check dog licenses, speak with residents, encourage responsible pet ownership and ensure compliance with existing municipal codes. Another (14) Animal Control Officers will respond to over 24,000 calls for service after problems have occurred. To reverse this trend, the City must promote strategies that go beyond emergency response and embrace prevention as a priority. Resources must be leveraged to increase volunteerism and community engagement over issues where they are needed most (e.g. barking dogs, off-leash, defecation, wildlife conflict, free-roaming cats). Community-based prevention strategies not only reduce the number of unwanted animals impounded and euthanized each year, but also reduces costs associated with animal care and impounds.

There is no single strategy that will alter this community-based problem of animal overpopulation. However, doing the same thing and expecting different results is not a responsible policy. To drive down the number of animals impounded at the shelter each year, the City must work with residents to promote licensing, microchipping, vaccinations and spay and neuter of animals. These strategies work together and have worked in other communities; but require an expanded partnership between the community, non-profit, private and public sectors. The vision of Animal Care Services is to make Long Beach the safest large city in California for people and animals. The expansion of spay and neuter services, cat licensing, mobile services and community engagement are the building blocks for achieving this vision.