



REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Grant Yates, City Manager

Prepared by: Nicole Dailey, Assistant to the City Manager

Date: March 12, 2018

Subject: Amendments to Existing Municipal Code Related to Animal Control

Recommendation

introduce by title only and waive further reading AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LAKE ELSINORE AMENDING CHAPTER 6.04 OF THE LAKE ELSINORE MUNICIPAL CODE (LEMC) REGARDING ANIMALS AND ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS.

introduce by title only and waive further reading AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LAKE ELSINORE ADOPTING TITLE 6, CHAPTER 6.06 OF THE LAKE ELSINORE MUNICIPAL CODE (LEMC) REGARDING MANDATORY SPAYING, NEUTERING AND MICROCHIPPING.

Background

The City of Lake Elsinore has contracted with Animal Friends of the Valleys (AFV) to provide a full range of animal control and sheltering services to ensure the health and safety of the citizens of the City and its domestic animals for nearly 30 years. These services include field services, after-hours emergency response, humane treatment of animals, public education, sheltering, and enforcement of animal control municipal codes.

The City has agreements with AFV for animal control sheltering and field services, which are governed by separate agreements. The City's animal sheltering services are covered by an agreement with the Southwest Communities Financing Authority (SCFA) administered by Riverside County on behalf of the City and our neighboring cities.

In 2018, the City budgeted \$655,410 for animal control field and shelter services. Part of the City's annual fiscal year costs related to sheltering services are based on the percentage of animals taken into the shelter for our City. Each year, the City of Lake Elsinore has amongst the highest percentage of cats and dogs going into the shelter in the region. Last year, the City was responsible for more than 24.2% of the total animal population brought into our local animal shelter, which was by far the highest for the six areas covered by AFV. For context, the second highest percentage was in the unincorporated County areas, which was responsible for 17.2% of all animals brought in. In 2018, a total of 725 dogs and 619 cats were sheltered from Lake

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Elsinore alone. Of these only 51.8% percent of the dogs and only 2.2% percent of cats were returned to owners.

More concerning, though, is that from 2016 to 2018, the number of stray cats returned to owners has dropped an average of 60% every year. Similarly, from July 2018 to November 2018, the City saw the rate of unclaimed stray dogs rise by 40%. In addition, 86% of the cats taken to the shelter from Lake Elsinore were unsterilized cats and 61% of dogs were unsterilized.

Discussion

As the Southwest Riverside County region has grown, so have the demands and costs for animal control and sheltering services. To address this, AFV and the SCFA Board have urged Southwest Riverside County cities to adopt mandatory spay, neuter and microchipping policies that align with those adopted by the County of Riverside nearly nine years ago. Therefore, staff is proposing a new chapter, 6.06, of the Lake Elsinore Municipal Code, mandating mandatory spaying, neutering and microchipping. Staff modeled the ordinance after the County of Riverside with minor changes to further strengthen the enforcement of the policy. This policy is expected to create long-term changes that will positively impact pet overpopulation and save more animal lives in Lake Elsinore.

The proposed ordinance requires that dogs and cats over the age of four months be altered and microchipped. This will be monitored and enforced during dog licensing and through animal control services including citations. The proposed municipal code does allow for specific exemptions related to sick, old, competition, and/or special service animals. In addition, we have included a Hobby Breeder License, which is modeled after Los Angeles County to allow us to charge a higher license fee for those who prefer not to alter their dog or cat in the interest of possibly breeding the animal.

In addition, the proposed ordinance requires that all dogs and cats be implanted with a microchip. This requirement will greatly improve the City and AFV's ability to reunite cats and dogs with their owners. In the City of Lake Elsinore, residents have shown an increased interest in microchipping their pet. In 2017, more than 25% of all microchip implants conducted by AFV were in the City. Once again, exemptions have been included to address specific reasons why a dog or cat cannot be microchipped.

Finally, at the City Council's direction, staff has proposed an ordinance amendment to Chapter 6.04 eliminating the requirement for cat licensing. Currently, the City of Lake Elsinore is the only entity in Southwest Riverside County that requires cat licensing. Originally, the policy of mandatory cat licensing was adopted to address and reduce the cat population. However, as stated, each year the City and shelter struggle to address an increasing number of feral and stray cats. Therefore, upon further evaluation, the City believes this provision has proven to be ineffective and is unnecessary.

Staff recognizes that these policy changes may cause some concern for citizens. Therefore, staff plans to allow for a three-month grace period, which will be proposed at a subsequent meeting establishing the fines and fees associated with these changes. In addition, staff has proposed that citizens be given the option to pay the citation or to spay/neuter/microchip their dog or cat and waive the fine. Staff intends to work with AFV to properly notify pet owners of these new provisions and the options available including our local low-cost spay and neuter clinic.

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Last month, staff also submitted a grant request for the 2019 Pet Lover's License Plate Grant Program to fund a Spay & Neuter LE incentive program to provide residents free spay/neuter vouchers and to fund the City's first Trap and Release Program. Announcements of award funding are expected in May 2019. This program would allow the City to encourage citizens to come into compliance and assist others who may be unable to afford to spay/neuter their pets.

Fiscal Impact

None at this time. However, these provisions are expected to offset related costs to enforce and implement these new programs and to reduce long-term costs associated with animal control.

Exhibits

- A – Ordinance Amending Chapter 6.04 Animals and Animal Control Officers
- B – Ordinance Adding Chapter 6.06 Mandatory Spaying, Neutering and Microchipping