



MINUTES
BOARD OF ANIMAL SERVICES COMMISSIONERS
CITY OF LOS ANGELES

Monday, September 26, 2005
9:00 a.m.
CITY HALL
200 N. Spring St.
Room 1060
Los Angeles, CA 90012



Commissioners: Kathleen Riordan, President
Marie Atake
Erika Brunson
Tariq Khero
Deborah A. Knaan

COMMISSION MEETING, 9:00 A.M.

Commission President Riordan called the Commission meeting to order at 9:20 a.m. Present were Commissioners Riordan, Atake, Brunson and Knaan, and Commissioner Khero was absent.

Item 3 F was taken out of order.

REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

F. Update on Rabbit Spay/Neuter Implementation

Deputy City Attorney Dov Lesel reported that an ordinance was forwarded to City Council on September 20, 2005 to increase the rabbit adoption fees from \$15.00 to \$50.00, and to require the mandatory sterilization for rabbits being adopted. Commissioner Knaan questioned why it had taken so long for action to be taken to implement the program. The Department was concerned that rabbit adoptions would decrease and that the sterilization procedures would cost more than \$50.00 over the long-term. Mr. Lesel indicated that the Department would be able to increase the fees pending the approval of the ordinance by the City Council and the Mayor, but that the Department would be able to implement the mandatory spay/neuter upon the adoption of policy by the Commission. Commissioner Knaan and Commissioner Riordan asked what procedures the Department has to safeguard against releasing rabbits to individuals using them for consumption purposes. The General Manager responded that the Department was developing policy to prevent such individuals from receiving the rabbits. He mentioned that he had instructed staff to deny the release of animals to any individual suspected of using them for inappropriate reasons. Mr. Stuckey suggested that the Commission allow the Department to draft a policy for the Commission's consideration. Commissioner Knaan commented that the shelters should require proper paperwork and proof of rescue cards upon the release of rabbits. She added that the Department also draft policy on who qualifies for discounts or fee waivers, and that the issue be placed on the agenda for the next Commission meeting.

Public Comments

Lorraine Alkire: Volunteer. Supported the Department's policy for the mandatory spay/neuter for rabbits.

Diana Penman: Volunteer. Stressed the importance of enforcing the policy of spay/neuter and felt that adoption fees should not be waived.

Brett Jay Lazarus: The mandatory neuter is the solution to eliminate the unwanted rabbit reproduction and population. The General Manager, along with all rescue groups, must support the \$50.00 adoption fee.

Elizabeth Menes: Many individuals adopting rabbits are unaware of their medical costs because their neutering procedure has not been immediately required in the past, which has led to abandonment of the rabbits and their return to the shelters.

Sharon Tomlin: While a volunteer, had experienced a situation in which a family had come into the North Central Center and adopted 4 large rabbits without spay/neutering them.

Stephanie Anderson: Believed that mandatory spay/neutering and the increase in fees would control the rabbit population, prevent abandonment, improve the quality of life for rabbits along with behavioral issues.

Lisa Edmondson: Shocked that the Department does not have procedures in place to record and check the backgrounds of individuals adopting the rabbits.

Vivian Edmondson: Said that the \$50.00 fee was less than the fees charged by those outside the Department.

Jodi McLaughlin: Hoped to implement the mandatory spay/neuter of rabbits to bring value to their lives.

Bona Tucker: Described 2 incidences at Harbor Center in which rabbit adoption led to a population explosion. Strongly recommended the mandatory spay/neuter policy.

John Ahouse: Credited the shelter staff and the City Council on bringing light upon the rabbit issue, but that the City must implement such policy in order to catch up to the County and with other cities.

Jin Ah Lee: Experienced taking in a neighbor's pregnant rabbit after it had been abandoned. Supported the Department's policy.

Michelle Kelly: Requested that the Commission calendar the issue to review a proposed policy, and to be kept up-to-date on the timeline for getting the policies implemented and approved. No rabbits should be given for free. Only the General Manager reserves the right to waive fees.

Nina Stewart: Said that she would be glad to pay the \$50.00 fee for adopting rabbits at the shelter and asked that the policy be implemented as soon as possible.

Jehane Delawar: Indicated that the problem with rabbits is that they often are a source of food for other animals, and are used as test subjects for laboratory experiments. The Department must work to educate the public on how to care for rabbits.

Sharon Tydell: Claimed that not requiring a similar adoption fee as dogs and cats only serves to devalue the lives of rabbits and encourages individuals to use rabbits for inappropriate purposes.

Debbi Folsom: Thanked the Commission for working towards implementing and enforcing a policy to require the mandatory spay/neuter rabbits.

Evelyn Walton: Volunteer. Involved with several families who became owners of over 20 rabbits. Supported the mandatory spay/neuter as a solution.

Barbara Trelease: Irritated that the implementation and approval of Department policy would not occur for at least two more months. Advised that the shelter get more experienced veterinarians for the rabbits.

Scott Sorrentino: Supported the fee increase and the mandatory spay/neuter, but suggested the need for an improved training program for staff on how to care for rabbits. Wrote a proposal on the issue and asked that it be tabled on the agenda for a future meeting for the Commission's consideration.

Laura Beth Heisen: Informed the General Manager of the illegal practice of releasing rabbits without recording the names and current addresses of those adopting. Questioned the General Manager's statistical reporting. Urged that the policy go into effect as soon as possible.

Dina Takouris: Felt that there should be a provision in the policy to allow a legitimate rabbit rescuer to receive a rabbit without having to pay fees, based on the proof of proper identification.

Rachel Poap: Offered the assistance of the Sam Simon Foundation to spay and neuter rabbits.

Phyllis Daugherty: Commented that the County does their spay/neutering procedures internally.

Susan Hee: Clarified that the County charges \$35.00 and not \$25.00 to spay/neuter rabbits.

Commissioner Knaan asked the General Manager to issue a directive to prevent all individuals from adopting rabbits for free. Fees should only be waived with the approval of the General Manager. Commissioner Riordan suggested that the issue be placed on the agenda for next Commission meeting on October 11, 2005. Mr. Stuckey agreed.

1. REPORT OF THE GENERAL MANAGER – GUERDON H. STUCKEY

A. Extended Shelter Hours

The General Manager reported that the Department would be extending their business hours at the shelters beginning Tuesday, October 4, 2005. The shelters would remain open until 7:00 P.M. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Commissioner Knaan strongly felt that the increased hours would encourage adoptions. She asked how the extended hours would be promoted. Mr. Stuckey mentioned that there would be a press release involving several newspapers and would inform the Commission of the complete plan later in the week. Commissioner Brunson asked if there was a possibility to have the extended hours applied for the entire week. Mr. Stuckey responded they would have to see how the community responded.

B. Rescue Waggin' Update

Behavioral Specialist Penny Scott Fox of the Pasadena Humane Society described the Safer Testing Program. The Safer program involves 7 tests with a strong focus on aggression. The tests results pointed out that those exposed to the tests, exhibited less aggression. Commissioner Atake questioned the lowered euthanasia rates, and commented that the Pasadena shelter may have lower kill totals in general comparison to those of the City. Ms. Fox responded that she has dealt with shelters as large as that of the City and felt confident in Safer's impact. Commissioner Brunson asked what the major benefits were from Safer. Ms.

Fox commented that the Department would have better knowledge of the population in their kennels, and that staff would be better able to advise the individuals wanting to adopt.

A representative of PetSmart, Susana Del La Maddalene confirmed that she had met with the General Manager and his staff to address the issues of animals being selected to the Rescue Waggin' program and the access to the animals. She also reported that the Rescue Waggin' program would require the use of Safer Testing. Commissioner Knaan hoped to address in the future the issues of public access to the animals selected, the time frame in which the animals would be available for adoption, program costs, and the selection process for the program.

Public Comments

Scott Sorrentino: Concerned about the availability of the animals to rescue groups and the general public. Also Concerned with the temperament testing in regards to Rescue Waggin.'

Felice Catena: Addressed the issue of temperament testing as a rehabilitative measure. The Safer Testing if allowed would become a deciding factor for who lives and who dies.

Laura Beth Heisen: Agreed that this form of temperament testing would lead to more animals being killed. The program would expose animals to illness due to longer periods of holding time.

Phyllis Daugherty: Commented that Park Rangers could issue applications for licensing. Discussed that the Safer Testing purpose was to protect the public from adopting potentially dangerous animals.

Joyce Forest: Suggested that the animals selected for the Rescue Waggin' be those that have been in the shelter the longest. Asked when the animals would be returned to the shelters if not chosen.

Penny Scott Fox: Offered individuals to come to the Pasadena Humane shelter to view an actual Safer Test.

Susana Del La Maddalene: Assured the Commission that Rescue Waggin' would be flexible in allowing the rescue groups and the public access to the animals before being selected and transported.

Commission President Riordan called Break at 11:05 A.M.

Commission President called the Meeting to order at 11:15 A.M.

Items 3 B and A were taken out of order.

3. GENERAL MANAGER RECOMMENDS FOR BOARD ACTION

B. Board Report: Isolation Animals

Chief Veterinarian Dr. Cassandra Smith reported that animals held in isolation have had their pictures posted on the Department website to assist owners searching for their pets. Funds have been made available to make modifications to the South Los Angeles Center. The basic plan is to increase visibility without increasing exposure for these animals to infectious diseases. Dr. Smith has asked the California Board of Veterinary Examiners to help the Department in establishing parameters in making changes to the shelters.

Commissioner Knaan commented that visibility and access to animals in the isolation area was a major concern at the East Valley Center. The newest shelters have been designed with increased visibility in mind. They will include a quarantine room to treat animals with rabies, separate from the isolation room.

Public Comments

Scott Sorrentino: Why can't volunteer staff be present at the isolation area so that the doors would not have to be locked? They would be in a position to allow individuals to interact with these animals.

Laura Beth Heisen: The changes will require a marketing plan from the General Manager to raise awareness of these animals. The new shelters should be carefully planned so that the animals can be easily seen.

Phyllis Daugherty: Requested that effort be made to notify all individuals coming into the isolation areas that they are putting themselves at risk to acquire and carry potential air-borne diseases and spread them at home.

A motion to continue the item was made by Commissioner Knaan and seconded by Commissioner Brunson. The motion was approved 4-0.

A. Board Report: Trap Neuter & Return

Commander David Diliberto, Director of Field Operations, made himself available for questions regarding the update on Trap Neuter & Return. Commissioner Riordan asked about the possibility of creating an ordinance that would exempt individuals, carrying proper Trap Neuter & Return permits, from the Municipal Codes. Commander Diliberto agreed that exemptions needed to be made, but that he would have to evaluate which alternative would be more practical, amending codes or creating new codes. Commissioner Riordan inquired if vaccination would be added as a requirement for the Trap Neuter & Return policy. Mark Dodge and Bern Myers from Best Friends Cat Nippers responded that the vaccinations should be done and that they would be inexpensive to perform. Mr. Dodge encouraged the Commission to continue their support and said that the Trap Neuter & Return policy would be able to be presented for changes within a 60-day period.

Laura Beth Heisen: Did not believe that taking cats back to the shelter after trapping was a good idea. Felt that the policy should aim to educate the public on the importance of spay/neutering the trapped cats.

Phyllis Daugherty: Disagreed with the Trap Neuter & Return policy citing that the release of stray cats would increase the potential spread of rabies.

Commissioner Riordan suggested that the issue be placed on the agenda for next Commission meeting on October 11, 2005.

2. COMMISSION BUSINESS

A. Approval of Minutes for August 22, 2005

Commissioner Knaan requested Mr. Ross Pool, Management Analyst II, that the comment by Ms. Heisen under item H. be changed to read as "put each animal's available date on the website." Commissioner Knaan commented that the minutes for the Rescue Waggin' did not include the Commission's discussion of

liability to the City in regards to failure on temperament testing. It also failed to include the concern of cage cards labeled “rescued” as a deterrence to individuals considering adoption, and the discussion of the public being denied access to animals selected to the Rescue Waggin’ program.

Commissioner Knaan motioned that the minutes be accepted with the recommended changes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brunson and was approved on a vote of 4-0.

B. Meetings/Events Attended

Commissioner Riordan went on a trail ride with Mayor Villaraigosa and friends over the weekend. Commissioner Knaan visited the North Central Center. Commissioners Atake, Brunson, and Knaan attended an event that benefited wildlife and spay/neuter on Saturday, September 24, 2005. Commissioner Atake also attended a dog rescue/adoption that same Saturday.

Public Comments

Rachel Paap: Sam Simon Foundation had their first Downtown Dogs Day event on Saturday, September 24, 2005 at the All People’s Church. They plan to continue the event every last Saturday of every month. They worked to spay/neuter 56 animals, as well as presented ongoing humane education presentations. On Sunday, the clinic was able to spay/neuter an additional 40 animals.

C. Consideration of Future Agenda Items

- Commissioner Atake asked if the Commission would consider starting the meetings at City Hall at 10:00 A.M. To be on the agenda for October 24, 2005.
- Commissioner Brunson asked that the issue of emergency preparedness and evacuation procedures in regards to owners being able to keep their companion animals with them be placed as a discussion item. To be on the agenda for October 11, 2005.
- Commissioner Knaan asked that the issue of the Department accepting the use of credit cards as a form of payment be placed on the agenda for October 24, 2005.
- Commissioner Knaan asked the issue of hiring additional personnel for the Department, specifically an Assistant General Manager, be placed on the next agenda. To be the agenda for October 11, 2005.

3. GENERAL MANAGER RECOMMENDS FOR BOARD ACTION

C. Board Report: 24-Hour Shelter Holds on Animals

Commander Diliberto reported that the Department’s current Adopter’s Alert Policy originally came about as a result of an incident in which a couple came into a shelter with the intention of adoption. The couple however, had no form of payment available on hand. As a result, they were denied adoption and the animal was destroyed the following day. The alert adoption policy was implemented to allow for an extension on adoption and to prevent animals from being destroyed. Commissioner Knaan mentioned that certain individuals were abusing the phone hold policy. She also mentioned that staff was not consistently honoring the phone holds. Commissioner Knaan requested that the Department clearly define abuse in regards to the hold policy. Commissioner Riordan suggested that the shelters issue confirmation numbers to validate official holds, as well as deliver the suspension of privileges to abusers. Commissioner Brunson asked if extensions would be provided for those not able to make adoptions within 24-hour time frame. Commander Diliberto confirmed that extensions would be granted for legitimate reasons. Commissioner Knaan re-

emphasized the need for procedures to increase accountability on those placing holds and on staff receiving holds. Dr. Smith said that veterinarians do check to see if holds have been placed on animals. She suggested that there be a requirement for two staff signatures on an animal to increase accountability. Commissioner Knaan questioned whether staff understood how to uphold the spirit of the Department's mission to save animals' lives. The General Manager responded that he and the Department were addressing the issue on a daily basis, but that change would occur over time.

Public Comments

Phyllis Daugherty: Need for the policy to have specific restrictions concerning the callers who place holds.

Charlotte Laws: Suggested the use of computer IP addresses to identify abusers who place online holds. Also suggested that monetary penalties be assessed on abusers who place holds with credit card.

Dina Takouris: Testified that she had been able to successfully get animals out of the shelters by placing holds on them. Asked if staff information could be made available on request when placing animal holds.

Scott Sorrentino: Agreed with the idea of issuing confirmation numbers to coincide with holds being placed.

Laura Beth Heisen: Questioned the 24-hour period as including the close of the next business day. Suggested that rescuers be allowed more than one hold. Also suggested related animals be treated as one.

D. Board Report: Katrina Animals

Emergency Preparation Coordinator Nancy Moriarty reported on the Katrina efforts. Mayor Villaraigrosa had requested that there be a plan to receive as many as 5,000 animals. Many animals were left abandoned because the Red Cross did not allow them in their shelters. In response, the Department provided sheltering for animals brought in by personnel, with the idea that all resources would be reimbursed through the City's General Fund. All animals received vaccination as necessary and no animal was released without the offer of a free spay/neuter procedure. The procedure to make room for evacuated animals since the Northridge earthquakes, had been to move all the animals from the West Valley Center to County shelters. Commissioner Brunson asked what improvements could be made to the City's emergency procedures. Ms. Moriarty responded that there would be training on the National Emergency Management System to improve the communication between all agencies and jurisdictions, in particular, the communication between animal welfare agencies. Commissioner Brunson commented that most emergency procedures do not include provisions for dealing with animals. Commissioner Knaan inquired about the bomb scare that occurred at the North Central Center and whether there was a plan for evacuating the animals. Ms. Moriarty answered that there was a plan in place, but that the animals were not evacuated because the animals were not in any danger. Procedures for evacuation at the Center had been previously practiced.

Public Comments

Rachel Paap: Commended the Department's role in going out to contain animals from Katrina.

E. Board Report: Cage Cards

Public Comments

Joyce Forest: Believed that the choice of words used on the cage cards are sometimes misleading.

REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

G. Discussion: Threat of Violence Against Employees

Commissioner Riordan expressed her concern of the violence committed against Department employees and inquired about employee safety. Mr. Lesel responded that he had discussions with LAPD and the City Attorney's Office to provide tangible protections for the targeted Department employees. Deputy City Attorney Vivian Swanagan commented that the violence has been an issue for over two years. She mentioned that within the next week, a motion would be introduced to City Council to address the security concerns for the employees. Ms. Swanagan reported that they have had workplace violence training workshops conducted at different departments, and have obtained several restraining orders on behalf of the employees. She suggested the Commission at the next meeting vote a motion on. Mr. Lesel agreed.

Public Comments

Scott Sorrentino: The Rescue Alliance does not condone such acts of violence and that the organization is committed to change through the proper means, such as through the Commission, in order to reach the No Kill goal. Disappointed in the actions of others.

Bill Dyer: The actions of a few have given the Animal Rights Movement a bad name. Understood the frustration of the extremists, but felt that change must be brought about through proper non-violent means.

H. Discussion: General Discussion and Status Update of Various Actions By Shelter Employees Discouraging Adoptions, Improper Adoptions, and Other Actions That May Require Disciplinary Actions

Mr. Lesel mentioned that the various items under "H." were to only be discussed to the degree that they would not occur in the future. Commissioner Knaan raised the issue of disciplinary action in regards to staff mismanaging adoptions with credit card payment. Mr. Lesel admitted that the policy of requiring identification with credit card payment was vague, and that ongoing training would be needed for staff. Commissioner Riordan commented on the issue of staff discouraging adoptions. Commissioner Knaan asked what steps should be taken to clarify the Department's policy. Mr. Lesel said that a memo would be forwarded to staff. Commissioner Riordan questioned at what point discouraging actions would be considered insubordination. Mr. Lesel clarified that insubordination occurs when an individual purposely voices to disobey orders.

Commissioner Knaan asked for a report on the closing of the South Los Angeles Center. Dr. Smith commented that the spay/neuter center had closed due to loss of personnel, leaving one veterinarian to attend to the animals in the spay/neuter clinic, the main shelter and the Annex. Ms. Smith mentioned that the Center would be interviewing to hire a new veterinarian to perform the spay/neuter procedures. Commissioner Knaan suggested the possibility of hiring part-time employees to assist with the volume of spay/neuter. Commissioner Brunson agreed and proposed that an arrangement should be made in which outside veterinarians would perform the procedures one day per week for the City. Ms. Smith agreed on the ideas, but explained that hiring part-timers would have to be approved first. Mr. Stuckey added that the

changes would have to go through the budget process. The hiring of part-timers would have to be proposed to the City Attorney's Office and approved by City Council. Commissioner Brunson said that she would contact the City Attorney's Office on the matter.

Public Comments

Scott Sorrentino: Asked that a memo be sent to each of the District Managers to address the importance of rabbits at the shelter, and felt that the Commissioners should be copied on such memos.

Laura Beth Heisen: Described a new trend in the shelters in which veterinarians are diagnosing animals as having kennel-cough. On two separate incidences, animals diagnosed with the illness were rescued and found to not have any symptoms of respiratory problems.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Lisa Edmondson: Suggested that the General Manager take more interest in the shelters. Felt that the mobile pet adoption events should be more organized and better promoted; staff should be in uniform.

Evelyn Walton: Rabbits can be purchased at less than \$50.00. Believed that rescue groups should not receive rabbits for free because they would eventually have to pay to have the rabbits spay/neutered.

Charlotte Laws: Commented that the Mr. Stuckey's plan should include a definition of "No Kill." Pleased with Mr. Stuckey's goal of No Kill to be reached by 2008, but felt that the plan should include explicit guidelines on how that goal can be reached by each district shelter. Explained that a strong spay/neuter policy would help in decreasing the number of animals being killed.

Elizabeth Menes: Encouraged that all rescue groups pay the increased adoption fee of \$50.00 so that mandatory spay/neuter would be possible. It would prevent individuals from falsely claiming to be members of a rescue group to be granted discounts or fee waivers.

Phyllis Daugherty: Informed the Commission that the Animal Issues Movement DVD on spay/neuter was available and to be distributed internationally through Animal People. CD form as well as Spanish versions would also be available. Reported on the Katrina dogs that were saved and left behind in the disaster. Agreed with the Trap/Neuter & Return policy to bring the captured animals to the shelter.

Michelle Kelly: Agreed with Ms. Menes's comment. Urged that everyone pay the \$50.00 fee to help pay for the spay/neuter procedure of other animals. Disturbed to hear that past staff has allowed animals to be adopted for consumption. Relieved the General Manager has informed staff that such action is unacceptable.

Scott Sorrentino: Supports the raised adoption fee. People care about rabbits and how they are treated in the shelters. Hoped that everyone would review the proposed plans by the Rescue and Humane Alliance. Raised the issue of the media not supporting the rescue and humane society in providing them with a medium to enact change. Asked why the idea of return cards has not continued.

Laura Beth Heisen: Supported Ms. Daugherty's efforts in releasing the DVD on spay/neuter. Complained on an incident in which an injured dog failed to receive necessary and prompt veterinary care, a violation of City Civil Code. Suggested that shelters have a veterinarian on-call, 24 hours, to tend to emergency cases.

CLOSED SESSION

The Commission entered into a closed session at 3:05 P.M.

The Commission reconvened at 3:40 P.M.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Commission adjourned at 3:45 P.M.