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EDWARD A. BOKS
General Manager

Report to the Board of Animal Services Commissioners

Edward A. Boks, General Manager

COMMISSION MEETING DATE: August 13, 2007 **PREPARED BY:** Linda Barth

REPORT DATE: August 8, 2007

TITLE: Assistant General
Manager

SUBJECT: South Los Angeles Annex Program for Special Training of Pit Bull and Pit Bull Mixed Breed Dogs and Related Job Training Opportunities

BOARD ACTION RECOMMENDED:

That the Board receive and acknowledge the summary below of a new training program at the South Los Angeles Annex for dogs of pit bull mixed breed, featuring part-time job training opportunities for ex-offenders or others; integrating an existing owner training program for pit bull and pit bull mix owners; and utilizing the expert volunteer assistance of Villalobos Rescue Center to improve training and socialization of pit bull mixed dogs.

SUMMARY:

Department staff and volunteers developed a pilot program for our South Los Angeles Animal Care Center Annex which proposed to employ ex-offenders to work with pit bull and pit bull mix dogs that are impounded among the City's six Animal Care Centers. This program, developed with the voluntary consultation of the successful Villalobos Rescue Center, featured use of regular part-time salary authority and good coordination with Villalobos' volunteers and public training classes to establish a program which was coined a "Pit Bull Academy."

As originally proposed for the program at the South Los Angeles Animal Care Center Annex, the Department would hire as Relief Animal Regulation Workers six people who were currently on parole, subject to approval under existing City of Los Angeles hiring procedures, and two people as Relief Animal Care Workers who were experienced in training the pit bull breed, to serve as senior employees, also in accordance with City rules. These positions are exempt from Civil Service and serve as At-Will employees.

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The Department has an annual budget of \$266,794 to hire persons in several relief classifications, including the two classifications above. Persons hired for these relief, part-time positions are brought on by the Department to help with short-term work increases, to cover for vacancies, or to assist with special events. About 25 persons are on payroll in these classifications at any time, on average.

Under the Pit Bull program, all eight part-time employees would work with existing City staff in caring for and handling the dogs. The program is set up to operate on a six month rotation; during a six month stint a parolee will practice dog handling skills with dogs that will make the animals more attractive for adoption. They will also learn basic job skills. The fundamental goals of the program would be to give parolees job skills for viable employment and to give more animals opportunities to become part of loving families.

Parolees who had animal cruelty-related convictions at any time would not be hired. Employees in this program may work only 1000 hours per calendar year. They have no access to private information and a full-time staff member is on site during all working hours. Public contact is rare and only with full-time staff immediately supervising.

The program was modeled after the Villalobos Rescue Center's "Pets in the Hood", a multi-service program that targets the "underdogs" of the canine and human world. Villalobos' Tia Maria Torres' experience as a dog trainer and as a Gang Counselor for the City of Los Angeles led her to create "25-to-Life," the inmate services program at the Villalobos Rescue Center, which provides a second chance to both dogs and people. Parolees are taught typical ranch hand duties such as, construction work, plumbing, electrical, and auto mechanics, in addition to animal care and handling. However, the program's resources are not limited to the animal industry. The organization's strong relationships within the community allows for the needs of each individual parolee to be addressed, whether it be learning how to set up a bank account, learning how to apply for a driver's license, or enrolling in continuing education classes. Our program at the South Los Angeles Animal Care Center Annex would benefit from the voluntary guidance of the "25-to-Life" program experts. For this South LA program, Villalobos would be volunteering time to continue the existing training classes that have been offered to pit bull owners for years, as well as to become involved in training the ex-offenders hired as part-timers.

Training for the part-timers would include fundamentals of dog behavior, learning how to skillfully handle dogs based on their breed and heritage, the different types of dog aggression, animal cruelty and the truth about illegal dog fighting, and the value of rehabilitation versus punishment. Hands-on training will focus on body language, kennel ethics, leash work, temperament testing, obedience training, customer service training, adoption procedures, and marketing. Upon completion of the program, parolees would have acquired skills to make them candidates for positions in the private sector including: a dog handler for film and television, professional dog walker, boarding

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kennel employee, doggie daycare employee, pet trainer for both private clients and at corporate locations such as Pet Smart, Petco, or as veterinary assistant.

According to the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of animal care and service workers is expected to grow 18-26% for all occupations through 2014. The companion animal population, which drives employment of animal caretakers in kennels, grooming shops, animal shelters, and veterinary clinics and hospitals, is expected to increase. Pet owners, including a large number of baby boomers, whose disposable income is expected to increase as they age, are expected to take greater advantage of grooming services, daily and overnight boarding services, training services, and veterinary services, resulting in more jobs for animal care and service workers. Demand for animal care and service workers in animal shelters is expected to remain steady. (US Department of Labor <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos168.htm>, May 7, 2007)

Program evaluations would be completed at the conclusion of the six month term and follow-up evaluations of the program's participants would document milestones achieved, including further employment for the program's participants and the number of animal adoptions. The pilot program concept also is being considered as the subject for an upcoming reality television show, which could result in increased exposure for the City of Los Angeles' gang violence prevention initiatives and the Department of Animal Services Animal Care Centers, ultimately leading to increased animal adoptions.

On July 31, 2007, Councilmember Zine introduced a Motion, seconded by Councilmember Rosendahl, requesting the Department to provide a comprehensive report to Council about the proposed "Pit Bull Academy" program prior to a grand-opening date of August 4, 2007 (Council File 07-2421). The questions raised by the Motion focused on concerns about contracting, cost, and liability. On August 3, 2007, the Council first discussed the Motion, learning key facts about the program which are detailed above. While Council generally supported the goals of the program in terms of both increasing animal adoptions and helping ex-offenders with job training, further information and reports were requested prior to execution of the planned program. The Council also solicited the input of the Board.

On August 4, at the South LA Annex, Villalobos Rescue demonstrated some of the dog-handling skills they teach and also conducted the introductory sessions for several scheduled dog training classes for owners. Meanwhile, the Department is working with City staff and officials to provide information as requested. An alternative being discussed re-focuses the program more on the need to socialize and train animals for increased numbers and success in adoption by eliminating the plan to hire parolees for the part-time positions. This reduces the intensity of supervision and review that would be needed, and avoids creating expectations of taking tests for regular City jobs, as parolees and recent parolees are not eligible to take civil service examinations. Similar goals might be achieved through hiring of persons on probation or in gang diversion

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programs. Some of the parolees already slated to be part of this program and counting on the work for a few months might still be given some employment opportunity, however, it could include general kennel work as well as some training, and not exclusively the pit bull program.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The pilot program is not projected to have additional expenses, outside of salaries, since the animals would receive care and feeding whether or not they were involved in the pilot program. There are opportunities for minor additional revenue (due to adopting trained dogs rather than euthanizing them) and some other enhancements such as donations to help us with the program. While there is staff cost, it also serves to relieve some of the workload for currently assigned staff, who are then freed to help with the heavy load at the main South Los Angeles facility.

Relief Animal Care Workers	2 @ max 1000 hours @ \$17.03/hr =	\$34, 060
Relief Animal Regulation Workers	6 @ max 1000 hours @ \$15.89/hr =	<u>\$95, 340</u>
Total maximum cost:		<u>\$129, 400</u>

Approved:

Edward A. Boks, General Manager

BOARD ACTION:

_____ Passed	Disapproved _____
_____ Passed with noted modifications	Continued _____
_____ Tabled	New Date _____