

Agenda

Item: 7A

Date: 3-26-12

CITY OF SIMI VALLEY MEMORANDUM

March 26, 2012

TO: City Council

FROM: Department of Community Services

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR DIRECTION REGARDING AN ORDINANCE PROPOSED BY VENTURA COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES REQUIRING THE SPAYING AND NEUTERING OF PIT BULLS

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council provide direction to staff regarding an ordinance (Attachment A, page 4) proposed by Ventura County Animal Services requiring the spaying and neutering of pit bulls.

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

At the January 26, 2012 Ventura County Animal Services Commission meeting, the Commission discussed and recommended that the County of Ventura and each city that contracts with the County for shelter services consider adoption of an ordinance requiring the spaying and neutering of pit bulls. Ventura County Animal Services is recommending adoption of the proposed ordinance to decrease the number of pit bulls entering the County Shelter and decrease the associated euthanasia rate for pit bulls. To date, only the Ventura City Council has indicated its support and will be introducing an ordinance for adoption. The cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, and Port Hueneme have indicated that they will consider the proposed ordinance prior to the next Animal Services Commission meeting scheduled for April 12, 2012. If consensus is reached across the jurisdictions, it will be presented to the County Board of Supervisors. If only a few cities are supportive of adopting the ordinance, Animal Services has indicated that they would be open to working with those individual cities to move forward with a local ordinance, however it would be more difficult for them to manage. Under those circumstances, the City Council could elect to work with Animal Services to adopt a local ordinance. Staff is requesting direction from the City Council regarding the ordinance proposed by Ventura County Animal Services requiring the spaying and neutering of pit bulls.

FINDINGS AND ALTERNATIVES

During the period from July 2008 to December 2011, pit bulls represented almost 21% of the Ventura County Animal Shelter's intake of dogs with a total of 5,181 pit bulls sheltered. During the same period, 5,200 chihuahuas were sheltered. Although pit bulls and chihuahuas represented about the same percentage of the Shelter's 25,179 sheltered dogs, the outcomes for each were different largely due to the adoption rates for each group. Of chihuahuas, 58% were adopted or transferred, 29% were euthanized, and 13% were returned to owners. Of pit bulls, 20% were adopted or transferred, 59% were euthanized, and 21% were returned to owners. Simi Valley's pit bull shelter rate was slightly lower

representing approximately 17% of the total 2,774 dogs from Simi Valley that were sheltered during the same period. Of Simi Valley's 468 pit bulls, 15% were adopted or transferred, 51% were euthanized, and 34% were returned to the owner. Dogs may be euthanized for a number of reasons including shelter overcrowding, medical conditions, or aggression.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) recognizes the only method of population control to have long-term efficacy in significantly reducing the number of animals entering shelters is the voluntary sterilization of owned pets. The disproportionate number of pit bulls is largely due to low adoption rates and resistance to voluntary spay and neuter programs. Even though free spay and neuter programs were offered to pit bull owners retrieving their dogs from the Shelter, last year only 36 owners in the County took advantage of the programs despite the resulting higher licensing cost associated with reclaiming their unaltered dogs. While Chihuahuas exhibit similar intake trends, they have proven to be more likely to be adopted at which point they are spayed or neutered. **Although the ASPCA recognizes a number of benefits associated with spaying and neutering, including longer life spans, less motivation to roam away from home, and aggression issues, the main goal of the proposed ordinance is to address overpopulation and reduce the number of pit bulls euthanized.**

In response to the high euthanasia rate among the County's pit bulls, at its January 26, 2012 meeting, the Animal Services Commission discussed and recommended that the County of Ventura and each city that contracts with the County for shelter services consider adoption of a mandatory spay and neuter ordinance to reduce shelter overcrowding and decrease the euthanasia rate of pit bulls. The proposed ordinance would utilize administrative citations to gain compliance and allows a number of exceptions for young, infirm, registered purebreds, or law enforcement dogs. Additionally, the proposed ordinance authorizes an appeal process for those who feel their dogs have been wrongly classified as a pit bull that would be administered by Animal Services staff.

At the January 26, 2012 Commission meeting, a few breeders and rescue organizations commented on the ordinance. Some of the issues and concerns expressed included how to accurately identify pit bulls, singling out a specific breed or animal characteristics for mandatory spay/neuter, enforcement of the ordinance by Animal Services, and the need for an appeal process. The City has also received correspondence, which is included as Attachment B, page 6.

The designation of pit bull is not a specific breed but rather a classification used to identify a dog with physical traits and distinguishing characteristics of the Staffordshire Bull Terrier, American Pit Bull Terrier, or American Staffordshire Terrier breeds as established by the American Kennel Club or United Kennel Club. A pit bull may be a mixed breed of dog containing those traits and characteristics. Since the pit bull classification includes multiple and mixed breeds of dogs, the number of dogs identified as pit bulls in the Shelter exceeds most other breeds of dogs. Animal Services has indicated that enforcement of the ordinance would only be imposed upon dogs that are subject to other enforcement actions (i.e., leash law violations). Several other concerns were also raised at the Commission meeting by a local rescue organization, Tender Loving Canines, related to the use of bordetella shots at the shelter, maximizing the use of the Animal Services website for rescue organizations, and co-mingling of animals at the shelter to reduce euthanasia rates, all of which are being addressed separately.

Currently a number of contract cities are considering the proposed ordinance, and if consensus is reached across the jurisdictions, it will be presented to the County Board of Supervisors. If only a few cities are supportive of adopting the ordinance, Animal Services has indicated that they would be open to

working with those individual cities to move forward with a local ordinance, however it would be more difficult for them to enforce. Therefore, staff is seeking direction from the City Council regarding an ordinance proposed by Ventura County Animal Services requiring the spaying and neutering of pit bulls. Should the City Council decide to adopt an ordinance, it is recommended that staff return with an update if and when the County Board of Supervisors has acted on the proposed ordinance. This will allow the City Council to make amendments, additions, or deletions to the ordinance if adopted by the Board of Supervisors. Simi Valley Municipal Code Section 6-1.101 codifies by reference the County's Code of Ordinances in Chapter 4 of Division 4 commencing with Section 4411 with few exceptions, amendments, and deletions. Therefore, should the City Council decide not to adopt an ordinance, it is recommended that staff monitor the Board of Supervisors' actions and, if necessary, return to the City Council to modify the City's Municipal Code to exclude the County's ordinance from the City's Municipal Code.

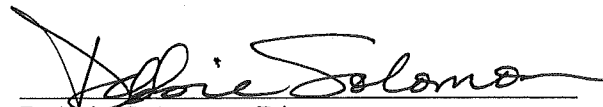
The following alternatives are available to the City Council:

1. Provide staff with direction regarding an ordinance (Attachment A, page 4) proposed by Ventura County Animal Services requiring the spaying and neutering of pit bulls;
2. Provide staff with further direction.

Staff recommends Alternative No. 1.

SUMMARY

At the January 26, 2012 Ventura County Animal Services Commission meeting, the Commission discussed and recommended that the County of Ventura and each city that contracts with the County for shelter services consider adoption of an ordinance requiring the spaying and neutering of pit bulls. Ventura County Animal Services is recommending the adoption of the proposed ordinance to decrease both the number of pit bulls entering the County Shelter and decrease the associated euthanasia rate for pit bulls. The Ventura City Council has indicated its support and will be introducing an ordinance for adoption. The cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, and Port Hueneme have indicated that they will consider the proposed ordinance prior to the next Animal Services Commission meeting scheduled for April 12, 2012. If consensus is reached across the jurisdictions, it will be presented to the County Board of Supervisors. It is recommended that the City Council provide staff with direction regarding an ordinance proposed by Ventura County Animal Services requiring the spaying and neutering of pit bulls.



Debbie Solomon, Director
Department of Community Services

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