



City of Portland
and Multnomah County

Animal Services Taskforce

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ANIMAL SERVICES

FINAL REPORT – Recommendations

November 2008

City of Portland and Multnomah County
Animal Services Taskforce

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INTRODUCTION

The Animal Services Taskforce was chartered in May 2008 by the Portland City Council and the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners to study and evaluate options; make recommendations for appropriate and viable service levels and service priorities; and identify sustainable funding methods to insure continued services into the future.

Specifically the City and County look to the Taskforce to provide viable option(s) that will:

- Provide restored animal services, beyond the reduced-service status quo.
- Identify sustainable funding mechanisms (non-capital) that put the bulk of the cost of operating an animal services program on animal owners.
- Include recommendations for phase-in, and transitioning of the program from the County to the City.

The Taskforce was given a deadline of November, 2008, to report its findings. The Taskforce met six times between May and October 2008. In addition, several sub-groups met to work on sections of the recommendations; and four public workshops were held to gather input from interested City residents into the questions being considered by the Taskforce. *The results of the public workshops have been submitted under separate cover.*

THE PROBLEM

Multnomah County, which currently provides animal services countywide, including the City of Portland, can no longer fund the level of animal services that will keep pace with the growing expectations and demands for those services in Portland.

Citizens throughout the County, but most notably in the City of Portland, have requested restoration of animal services that contribute to urban livability, most notably improved response rates, greater public accessibility to services and a significant reduction in the numbers of animals that are euthanized. Multnomah County has aspired to work toward these improvements, but financial constraints have prevented the County from reaching all of its goals and have resulted in reducing the level of some services.

Most of the financial support for Multnomah County Animal Services comes from the County's General Fund budget, which depends on revenue from property taxes. Approximately 80% of these taxes come from residents of the City of Portland, who also generate approximately 80% of the demands that are placed on the County's Animal Services program. Residents of the City of Portland have expressed a demand for levels of animal-related services appropriate to more highly urbanized areas, such as barking dog response and leash law compliance that may not be in demand in other Multnomah County jurisdictions

Private, non-profit groups currently work with the County to collaborate on providing better animal services for the County's residents and their animals. These organizations will continue to work toward more humane treatment for animals. However they have made it clear that they will not take on government's role, which is to provide the animal control aspects of animal services.

The headquarters and shelter for Multnomah County Animal Services is old and undersized and is not conveniently located for the majority of the residents of the County and especially the residents of Portland. Intake of dogs and cats, which had been decreasing between 1980 and 2000, has begun to climb again, increasing 41% since 2000. This increase is driven by an 81% increase in cats, and 10% more dogs entering the shelter. Forty-five percent or 4,438 of these animals were euthanized in 2007, a level seen as unacceptable by many citizens.

The public workshops that were held in conjunction with this study indicated that that nearly three-quarters of those participating felt that local government should be offering more animal services. Lead among those was a subsidized spay neuter, improved lost and found services, and more shelter hours. Participants viewed enforcement of licensing laws as the most acceptable source of new revenues for Animal Services. Other options such as increased license and other user fees or a pet food surcharge were viewed less favorably.

With the bulk of support for Animal Services coming from the County General Fund (71%), a high bar would be set for the City of Portland to be able to provide the full spectrum of Animal Service programs, separate from the County and without a commitment of City General Fund support. Historically, compliance with pet licensing requirements has been poor, with only 14% of pets currently licensed (25.4% of dogs and 7.4% of cats). Financial analysis by the Task Force illustrates that it is unlikely that Animal Services could be funded, exclusively, via license and other user fees, even with exponentially improved compliance rates and higher fees.



THE OPPORTUNITY

Current financial uncertainties, nationally and locally, may seem to predict difficulties for meaningful follow-up or outcomes from this report. A number of taskforce members refer, ruefully, to their tenure on similar initiatives in 2000 and 2002 and have expressed concerns regarding a similar fate for the recommendations of this 2008 iteration. However, several key developments and trends may have changed the climate for, and interest in, a renewed approach to animal services, particularly in the City of Portland.

Urbanization: Portland has grown significantly over the past decade, and growth has brought greater urbanization and gentrification. The expectation for responsive urban services has risen dramatically and will continue to grow. Issues such as speedy response to complaints about nuisance or barking dogs,

pick-up of stray animals, enforcement of leash and scoop laws, accessible shelter facilities, expanded shelter hours, and easy-to-use pet lost-and-found services have become part of the overall urban services package that Portland citizens expect from local government.

“The Pet-Friendly City”: Portlanders take pride in the “animal-friendly” nature of their city. In recent years they have demanded a range of accommodations for animals that include off-leash areas in parks, outdoor areas at local restaurants that accommodate pets, and the presence of pets at public events. Anyone who gets out and about in Portland’s neighborhood retail areas has noted water bowls, set out at storefronts on nearly every block, and local retail shops with treat jars, ready for the pets accompanying their patrons. The region is also blessed with a strong community of animal-aid organizations, advocates and volunteers, with a history of working in collaboration to improve the lives of Portland’s pets. The Animal Shelter Alliance of Portland (ASAP), a coalition including most non-profit, animal control, and veterinary medical associations for the four counties comprising the greater Portland metropolitan area, is creating plans now that can be highly leveraged for providing this plan’s recommended strategies to reduce shelter intake through proactive population control.

National Initiatives: There is opportunity to link a new approach to animal services to emerging national initiatives, and potentially to leverage the high profile and funding available to support those initiatives. One example is the national priority placed on emergency preparedness in the wake of catastrophic events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Katrina, in particular, highlighted the need for a coordinated animal location and rescue strategy. Another example is the drive toward “green” initiatives. With its leadership in recycling, green building, and mass transit, it makes sense that Portland could take the lead in developing environmentally-sensitive animal services solutions. A third area is strong national trend to create “no-kill” communities, where euthanasia is limited to only those animals too ill, injured or dangerous to be placed in homes.

It is likely that grant funding is available in these types of high-profile arenas. This would create further opportunities to leverage the media profile of these global initiatives, which would heighten the awareness of, and the alignment with, an animal services program.

Innovative Portland: The fourth trend has to do with how Portlanders see themselves in the bigger picture. Portlanders view their city as an incubator for innovation and excellence. They take pride in the various arenas - from mass transit to vibrant neighborhoods, to recycling, to “green” building and technologies - in which their city is viewed as a national model. Portlanders would likely be chagrined to know that other cities provide better, more modern, healthy, and humane services through their public animal shelters and animal education and outreach services.

History of Successful City and County Partnerships: The City and County are currently partners in the collection of City of Portland Business Licensing fees and the Multnomah County Business Income Tax. The City collects the revenue for both entities and has developed a significant competency in the areas of compliance enforcement and collections. The City of Portland Revenue Bureau believes that this model can be successfully applied to animal registration enforcement and collections, enhancing the existing partnership and further benefiting both parties.

An urgent need for change: The Multnomah County Animal Shelter is aging, inadequate to the needs of a growing population of people and pets, costly to operate, and remotely situated for most residents. Shelter replacement opens a host of opportunities to innovate, leverage other initiatives and funding sources, partner with other organizations, and engages the imagination and commitment of the community.

In this period of national financial difficulty, it is important to note that financial optimism is not the predictor of success for new animal services initiatives; if that were so, then a change for the better would have come about in 2000. The will, interests, and activism of citizens may be aligned at this moment to foster a new approach to Animal Services.



VISION: THE TIME IS RIGHT

The time is right to establish Portland and Multnomah County, in partnership, as leaders in the provision of modern, accessible, and sustainable Animal Services that have the full participation of animal owners and the support of all residents, and that move the city and county a giant step forward on the path toward humane and conscientious care and treatment of animals.

We can achieve this vision through:

- A value-added registration program that incentivizes participation.
- New funding through the registration fee structure.
- Compliance and collections enforcement, so that all pay their fair share.
- A modern and centrally-located animal shelter facility that can serve as a center and catalyst for animal services and for animal aid organizations in the region.
- Restored livability services appropriate to the urban environment.
- Strong future-focused programs, including spay and neuter incentives and requirements, humane education, and public outreach that reduces problems and benefits humans and animals in the long term.
- Heightened citizen awareness, support and involvement in developing and funding animal services.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Taskforce understood that a component of its charter was to recommend a means to transition all or part of animal services provision from the County to the City. However upon deliberation, the Taskforce was unable to justify the value or expediency of such a transition. The overarching assumption in the following suite of recommendations is that animal services provision should not be bifurcated and that the primary responsibility should remain with the County, albeit under an entirely new approach that includes license "rebranding", enforcement, education, and services that strategically focus on reducing animal-related problems and costs in the future.

The City of Portland should become an active partner in the provision of the services, especially in the collection of fees. Some other areas of these recommendations, including education and outreach and the provision of adequate facilities, also envision the City taking on a role as partner with the County. Expansion of the collaboration with existing nonprofit animal-aid organizations is also recommended, where appropriate.

The following summarizes the seven Taskforce recommendations. *Additional discussion and detail on each of the recommendations are included later on in this report.*

Recommendation #1

Re-design and re-brand dog and cat “licensing” in favor of a countywide incentivized pet registration program, with value-added benefits and services to enhance voluntary compliance, and aggressive enforcement for non-compliance.

Retire the licensing “brand”: Compliance with current licensing requirements is low, with less than 14% of pets licensed under the current system. Public workshop attendees in Portland strongly favored increased licensing compliance, with increased penalties for non-compliance, as the best source of funding for animal services. However, County residents are declining to participate in a program that they perceive as punitive and bureaucratic, with little value to them, their pets, or the community-at-large. The bureaucratic-sounding concept of licensing should be abandoned in favor of a pet registration program that can deliver and represent value to the individual and the community.

Re-brand based on a compelling concept: While non-compliance results in loss of revenue to support animal services, it also limits accounting and location awareness of animal populations in the county. This awareness is important to the public’s health and safety, animal safety, environmental integrity, and emergency preparedness. Any of these issues could be compelling themes around which to re-brand and incentivize pet registration. Professional marketing research, analysis and program design will enable the most effective themes, program features, incentives and messaging to be identified and established.

Add value: Regardless of program theme or approach, the two keys to increasing participation by pet owners are the perception of value and perception that the requirement will be enforced. Examples of value-added enhancements could include:

- Reduced cost of spay and neuter services.
- Reduced license fee for spayed and neutered animals.
- Reduced-cost micro-chipping.
- Coupons from participating retailers for pet food, products or services that allow the purchaser to recapture the cost of the registration.
- Enhanced services such as a “free ride home” from the shelter for a lost pet.
- Links to community programs that benefit animals, so that the registration fee is, and is perceived as, part of being a good citizen and an advocate for animals.

Tiered service levels and fees: In order to build real and perceived value and increase the revenue potential of the registration program, a tiered fee and benefits structure should be established. Higher fee tiers could include some or all of the benefits listed above, plus service-specific donation opportunities. A “Household Pet Registration” option could be integrated, to make the program accessible to multi-pet households and to those who provide animal-aid and foster care service. Low income rates or discounts can be factored into a tiered fee system.

Inform, educate and make accessible: Voluntary citizen compliance with a new registration program and “brand” will require investment in public information, education and outreach about the program, and easy-to-use public access to the registration system.

Recommendation #2

Fund restored animal services through increased participation in the re-branded, incentivized, and enforced registration program.

All pay their fair share: A more compelling and value-laden registration program “brand,” that encourages and builds participation, coupled with a strong compliance and enforcement program is needed. This approach was viewed by Taskforce members, and by the public participating in the Taskforce public workshops, as the most fair and politically viable means of funding enhanced animal services. The feedback at the workshops made it clear that citizens are unlikely to support other, more aggressive forms of animal services funding, such as a pet food surcharge, until all pet owners are contributing their fair share to the official animal registration program.

Increase fees along with enhanced program value: The Taskforce proposes registrations fees of \$25 per dog and \$10 per cat, with additional fees for registration of fertile animals (\$12 per dog and \$22 per cat). This represents an increase over current licensing program fees of \$18 per dog and \$8 per cat and with no premium for fertile animals.

Fees alone are insufficient: It is clear that registration fees, alone, will not support a full suite of shelter and other necessary animal service programs within Multnomah County. The Taskforce does not believe that Animal Services can be adequately supported, without continuing and stable baseline funding via the County General Fund.

Fee-based funding builds over time: It must be assumed that building a fee-based funding strategy will take place over time. Program elements may need to be phased in, or funded in the initial years through a source other than registration-related fees. The Taskforce projects that in Year Five of an incentivized and enforced registration program approximately \$1,780,000 additional revenue will be generated via increased fees and participation. The financial model and analysis attached to this report illustrates the revenue potential of the registration program over time. *Please see Appendix B of this report for detail on the financial model that supports this recommendation.*

Recommendation #3

Restore quality-of-urban-life services, such as nuisance animal and barking dog response and enforcement of leash and scoop laws, funded via an “urban services” premium on pet registrations within the City of Portland.

Restore urban services – at a premium: The City of Portland, with its urbanized and pet-oriented population, is interested in additional quality-of-life related services that are not likely to be fundable with basic registration fees. Such services include barking dog complaint follow-up, leash and scoop law enforcement, immediate nuisance and animal abuse response, and city code specifications and enforcement for siting of animal day-care, boarding and breeding facilities. An additional fee for registration of all pets within the City of Portland should be included in order to pay for these services that are in less demand in more suburban or rural areas of Multnomah County. However, any jurisdiction within the County, at its discretion, could levy a similar added fee should it desire similar service levels.

Multnomah County is the primary service provider: The County is best positioned to provide all animal-related services for jurisdictions within its borders. This will offer a more cost effective and seamless service delivery. Under this model, jurisdictions within the County could contract, via Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA's) with the County, to provide enhanced urban services. Services levels would be determined in the terms in the IGA. The service levels would likely correspond to the revenues available from the urban services fee premium that is collected in the contracting jurisdiction, although additional funds could be contributed at the discretion of the jurisdiction. A model in which the City of Portland, or other jurisdictions, has their own employees to provide urban animal-related quality-of-life services was considered by the Taskforce, but was considered unnecessarily complex, duplicative, and difficult to coordinate.

Recommendation #4

Leverage City and County enforcement and collections resources to increase compliance.

“Universal” Enforcement: The City and County have an existing and substantial investment in enforcement-related personnel. Police officers, park rangers, health inspectors, code enforcement officers, and other officially-designated City and County staff must be able to issue a citation which brings non-compliant pet owners into the registration system, via an Amendment of City Code Chapter 13 which finds a violation for failure to comply with the registration ordinance.

Other aspects of an enforcement model could include linkage with commercial or veterinary pet services, for example a requirement - similar to the rabies vaccination reporting - that requires reporting of all spayed or neutered pets; and/or a requirement that registration program-subsidized spayed and neutered animals be registered.

Collections: The City has developed an effective mechanism with its successful collections experience with business licensing, and has established a successful partnership with Multnomah County for the collection of County Business Income Tax. That experience can be effectively leveraged to dramatically increase collections of animal registration fees. The Taskforce recommends that the City assume the responsibility for collections of registration-related fees county-wide. The City should enter into an IGA with the County that memorializes an arrangement similar to the one in which the City collects countywide business-related fees and taxes. After an initial capital outlay, the collections process will be self-sustaining, through the collected revenues.

Reporting: The current system of pet vaccination reporting has been successful at increasing the pet population census. This system should be maintained, as it will continue to build pet census information each year. Additional reporting avenues could include citizens, rental housing managers, meter readers, and point-of-service providers.

A "Culture of Compliance": An initial period of ubiquitous public messaging in the media, mail, email, billboards, and signage in veterinarian offices, doggie day-care centers, and animal-related retail stores will be required to educate pet owners and the general public about the requirement to register, the benefits of the registration program, and penalties for non-compliance. Follow-up via enforcement and collection actions will re-enforce the message that pets must be registered because, "It's the Law". Ongoing public messaging and enforcement actions will, over time, create a "culture of compliance." This will mean that the expectation among citizens is that pets must be registered and non-compliance damages the community as a whole and places an unfair burden on others.

Recommendation #5

Don't bifurcate and duplicate Animal Services in Portland and Multnomah County. Provide greater proximity and access to a modern animal shelter and animal services through a united city-county approach and partnership.

A County animal shelter: The shelter facility and related services are the most costly components of the crucial suite of animal services. Establishment of a bifurcated city/county shelter system would create duplication of expense and effort, and further localize a system that already suffers from lack of broader regional efficiencies and perspective. The County has history and experience in providing animal shelter services. In order to maximize efficiency and to avoid the waste and confusion of a bifurcated and duplicated system, it is advisable for the County to continue its role in shelter operations and management.

Centrally located: The existing Multnomah County Animal Shelter located in Troutdale, is an aging, outdated facility that has poor public transportation access and is distant from most of the county's residents. The ideal shelter configuration would be comprised of a new, centrally-located main shelter established along the I-205 corridor. This area is recommended because it is outside of the impact zone for most natural hazards and there is access from a variety of different transportation modes. Satellite facilities could be phased in, over time, on the west side of the Willamette River (for intake and adoption) and in other strategic and high traffic areas (adoption only) throughout the county.

Innovative facility concept: Portland has several innovative models on which to base a new and centralized animal shelter concept. Portland's Eco-Trust Building, an anchor-tenanted facility in which organizations and businesses with compatible missions are co-located, provides a model that could serve to bring together a range of animal welfare organizations and animal retail businesses. The facility can also follow the model of many newer City facilities, such as police precincts, which

offer meeting room facilities that are open to the public as both a service and as a means of bringing the public into a closer relationship with the organization. Linkage with public transit system including MAX, bus, and bike trails could maximize accessibility options.

A partnership approach: The new facility can be a focal point for animal issues and services for City and County residents alike. Animal Services staff members, including those funded through the urban services fee and working exclusively in Portland, can be headquartered there. The viability of the facility will depend on a full partnership between the City and County, including development of the capital resources required for site acquisition and construction.

Recommendation #6

Build for the future by including strategic elements that will reduce problems and benefit both animals and humans in the long term.

Build a system now that reduces future problems and cost: Improved lost-and-found services, expanded adoption opportunities, spay-and-neuter services, patrol and nuisance/complaint response, and robust education, outreach and involvement are essential components of a credible, contemporary animal services program. -The City and the County should not contemplate entry into a new animal services program that does not include these essential elements. Numerous other jurisdictions, throughout the US and Canada, have show that these elements are critical for increasing animal adoption rates, reducing the populations of feral cats and other unadoptable animals and creating a more educated and pet-responsible citizenry. Advancing these goals will reduce the number of euthanized animals and help to ensure that the quality of life for both humans and animals will be, not only maintained, but enhanced as the City and County grow and urbanize.

As a practical matter, the Taskforce has stopped short of recommending immediate elimination of euthanasia for healthy and treatable/manageable pets. However, these key system components, will position the City and County to make measurable steps toward that goal over a planned period of time.

Deploy a robust spay and neuter strategy: Reducing the breeding of dogs and cats in targeted households, and of feral cats, is the best approach to cost-effectively reduce animal control intake, nuisance and safety complaints, euthanasia, health risks, and the related costs. Attendees at the public workshops and task force members rated provision of spay neuter assistance as the #1 priority for expanded animal services. In the recommended plan (*See Appendix B of this report*) surgeries are targeted to most effectively reduce shelter intake by serving citizens on public assistance and those caring for stray, free-roaming, feral cats. Based on other communities' experience a sustained plan of this level could well reduce animal intake by 30% over five years. In addition, government participation in this prevention strategy can be the key to leverage the work of other non-profit organizations, the veterinary community and grant makers.

Inform, educate and engage the public: Examples from cities with leading edge and cost effective animal services programs, such as the City of Denver and City of Calgary, Canada, illustrate that public outreach and education are crucial to increased compliances with animal-related laws and ordinances, and volunteer participation. Communicating with the public, via neighborhood association meetings, direct mail, internet and podcast communication, and employing "unpaid" media attention, such as newspaper, radio and TV features and public service announcements are critical to establishing support and alignment with a new program and brand. In the long term, humane education in the schools, starting with early childhood education programs, is the best investment for reducing the costs and tragedies of animal overpopulation, abuse and neglect and for enhancing the urban environment for both pets and humans.

Recommendation #7

Establish a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) to guide and inform animal services provision.

Engage citizens in program governance: A Citizen Advisory Committee should be chartered to guide, advise and provide a forum for this County-led but ultimately multi-jurisdictional program. The purpose of the CAC is to develop periodic strategic goals for the community, provide a sounding board for public ideas and concerns, act as ombudsman for animal issues in the community, provide integration and “voice” between the County, City, and other participating jurisdictions, and provide advice and counsel to the Executive Director of the Animal Services Program.

Launch with a time-limited Implementation Committee: The initial incarnation of the CAC should be a time-limited Implementation Committee, to advise the City and County on how to structure, fund, and phase in the Taskforce recommendations. Based on the experience and recommendations of this initial CAC, the longer-term advisory forum can be established.

