



**COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO
CALIFORNIA**

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MUNICIPAL SERVICES AGENCY

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ANIMAL CARE & REGULATION
PAT CLAERBOUT, Director

For the Agenda of:
September 9, 2004
9:30 a.m.

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Department of Animal Care and Regulation

Subject: Report Back On Costs For A Potential Low-Cost (Mobile Or Otherwise) Spay/Neuter Clinic

Contact: Pat Claerbout, Director, 875-5051

BACKGROUND

Discussions have been ongoing with members of your Board and members of the community regarding the need for a low-cost spay/neuter clinic in Sacramento County. Studies undertaken across the country have proven the positive correlation of the reduction in shelter populations and euthanasia rates in areas where low-cost sterilization is available. The Humane Society of the United States states, "Only by implementing widespread sterilization programs will we be able to end the pet overpopulation tragedy."

According to a survey done by the Sacramento Area Animal Coalition (SAAC), the average cost to spay a female cat is \$82.40, a male cat neuter is \$44.23, a female dog spay, depending on the dogs weight, is between \$100.94 to \$169.89 and a male dog neuter ranges from \$88.70 to \$126.53. Theses costs do not include vaccination or added cost if the animal is pregnant or in heat. For many people and especially those of low or fixed income, having their pet sterilized is financially impossible.

There are low-cost spay/neuter programs offered by several animal welfare groups in the Sacramento area, including the Sacramento Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), but all are limited by their financial resources or the availability of veterinarians to provide the services. Currently, there are not enough resources to provide low-cost spay/neuter services in our community to impact the pet overpopulation problem. Daily, female dogs and their pups or cats with their litters of kittens are relinquished at the shelter because the owners cannot afford the cost of having their pet spayed. There are not enough homes for the number of animals being born each day. More than 50.0 percent of these animals will be euthanized. To

end the euthanasia of adoptable animals, spay and neuter services must be available to everyone within our community.

DISCUSSION

Statistics state that the average female animal is capable of producing 15 offspring per year. From this we can deduct that for every spay surgery performed we could potentially reduce the pet population in Sacramento County by approximately 15 animals. There are several models of low-cost spay/neuter programs in use across the country. After review of the different programs, the following three models seem to best fit the Sacramento community needs.

Model 1 - Mobile Spay/Neuter Unit

Mobile spay/neuter units are used in many programs, especially those serving a rural population or areas where large numbers of the population depend on public transportation. The mobile unit is taken into a neighborhood for one to several days providing spay/neuter services. These units are highly visible, which adds to their effectiveness. By bringing the services to the neighborhood, it is convenient for the pet owner to have their pet spayed or neutered. Specific areas of low-income or areas with a high volume of problem animals can be targeted. The numbers of surgeries that can be provided daily are limited by the size of the unit. Currently, the City of Sacramento uses their 24-foot trailer for public low-cost spay/neuter clinics within the city several times a month. An average of 15 surgeries, primarily cats and medium sized dogs, are performed daily. The major drawback to such a program is the initial cost of the mobile unit. The City of Sacramento's spay/neuter trailer, fully equipped was \$96,000.

Estimated Program Cost

Daily Staffing Cost (1.0 veterinarian, 1.0 licensed assistant, 1.0 assistant)	\$640.00
Medical supplies	50.00
Revenue	
\$30.00 spay/neuter charge (flat fee for all animals) x 15 surgeries per day	<u>(450.00)</u>
Net daily operating cost:	\$240.00

Estimated yearly funding for the program \$24,960
(Daily operating cost at \$240.00 x 104 work days = \$24,960)

Initial start-up cost

Mobile spay/neuter unit fully equipped	\$96,000.00
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Program Effectiveness

An average of 15 surgeries per day reduces the potential population by 225 animals daily.

Model 2 - Expanded Use of Existing Shelter Facility

Currently, the shelter medical program consists of a veterinarian on staff five days a week, performing spay/neuter surgeries on adopted animals and providing medical care to the shelter animals. The remaining two days per week the medical unit is unused. If funding was made available, the current program could be expanded to provide low-cost spay/neuter services to the

public the remaining two days a week. Cost to implement the program consists primarily of staff salaries for the additional two days per week. Using the shelter facility would allow current staff and volunteers to support the program as needed, reducing overall program cost. A low-cost spay/neuter clinic conducted from the shelter could provide services to 15 to 20 animals daily. We would also be able to target larger dogs, to whom it is the most difficult to provide low-cost surgery.

Estimated Program Cost

Daily staffing cost (1.0 veterinarian, 1.0 licensed assistant, 0.5 assistant) \$584.00
Medical supplies 50.00

Revenue

\$30.00 spay/neuter charge (flat fee) average of 10 surgeries per day \$300.00)

Targeting large dogs reduces the number of surgeries performed daily
The numbers of daily surgeries could be expanded to 15-20 for small dogs or cats.

Expanding the numbers of surgeries would also increase the revenue accordingly.

Net daily operating cost \$334.00

Estimated yearly funding for the program \$34,736
(Daily operating cost at \$334.00 x 104 work days = \$34,736)

Initial start-up cost: None associated with program.

Program Effectiveness:

10 surgeries performed per day targeting large dog spays or 15-20 small dogs or cats.
Reducing the potential population by 150 to 300 animals daily.

Model 3 - Voucher Program

The most common low-cost spay/neuter program is a voucher program. Pet owners receive vouchers from the sponsoring agencies to be used at participating veterinarians. Voucher programs vary from providing for the complete cost of a surgery to a co-pay amount for the pet owner. Currently, the SAAC is conducting a voucher program. In this program the pet owner pays a co-pay of \$10.00 per cat or \$15.00 per dog. SAAC covers the remaining cost at participating veterinarians. The SAAC program was implemented in April 2004 and to date has issued 213 vouchers. Vouchers issued in the first month of the program, indicted only a 56.0 percent redemption rate. The rate has not been calculated since April but it is expected to increase during the summer months. Voucher programs provide for a positive collaboration between sponsoring agencies and local veterinarians.

If the truly low-income pet owner is to be reached, the cost of surgery must be affordable. Local veterinarians must be willing to provide services at greatly reduced rates or the sponsoring agency must have the financial resources to cover the standard fees. Obviously, higher surgery cost will dramatically limit the services to pet owners. A voucher program is by far the simplest to implement. It only requires the cooperation of local veterinarians, printing and distribution of

the vouchers and simple cost accounting of the program. The program could be coordinated with the existing shelter staff and volunteers. The animal control officers would provide an excellent distribution link, as they are in daily contact with pet owners needing spay or neuter services.

Estimated Program Cost:

This program allows the most flexibility in funding. The program would be designed based on the amount of funding provided by your Board. All cost associated with the administration of the program would be covered within the Department's current budget.

Program Effectiveness:

If the net cost of the shelter spay/neuter program, \$34,736, was applied to a voucher program, 1,157 vouchers at \$30.00 each could be available to low-income pet owners each year. While this program can reach the greatest number of participants, the additional cost to the pet owner for surgery may limit use by low-income households. Even with a voucher, the average large dog spay would cost the pet owner over \$70.00. Vouchers are most effective when applied to cat spays or neuters covering the majority of the surgery cost.

Comparison

The cost estimate for the models indicates an initial capital cost of approximately \$100,000 for the mobile clinic with a net operating cost potentially lower than Model 2, Expanded Use of Existing Shelter Facility. The use of the existing veterinarian facility for the unused two days has a slightly higher operating cost but may allow the target of members of the public with the greatest need, low-income households owning large breed dogs. The success of the program will hinge on the ability to contract with a veterinarian to perform the services and to be available on the specified days. If contracting with a veterinarian is not immediately possible, a voucher program could be implemented until such time a veterinarian becomes available.

FISCAL IMPACT

Three alternative models for delivery of low-cost spay/neuter services are compared in this report. Range of no additional costs for continuing the SAAC voucher program to \$34,736 (\$340.00 per day) for expanding use of the existing veterinarian clinic on-site versus a total of \$120,960 (\$96,000 capital costs plus \$24,960 operating costs at \$240.00 per day) for a new mobile spay/neuter unit program. The Department's 2004-05 budget does not include costs to provide the low-cost spay/neuter services. Prior to implementation of any of the models, a more detailed cost estimate will be required.

Respectfully submitted,

APPROVED:

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By: _____
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