

**COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO
SACRAMENTO**

For the Agenda of:
September 15, 2005
9:30 a.m.

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Department of Animal Care and Regulation

Subject: Report Back On Status Of Public Low Cost Spay/Neuter Program

Contact: Pat Claerbout, Director, 875-5051

BACKGROUND:

At the Final Budget Hearings on September 7th, your Board requested information on the status of funding approved in Fiscal Year 2004-05 for a low cost spay/neuter program.

DISCUSSION:

During the 2004/05 Final Budget Hearings, your Board requested a report on the feasibility of providing low cost spay/neuter services to the community. As a result of that report, your Board approved augmentation to the Department of Animal Care and Regulation's budget of \$35,000 for a spay/neuter program.

The feasibility study discussed three program options to deliver a low cost spay/neuter program to residents of the County:

- Model I was a mobile spay/neuter unit. While this option has proven to be very effective in other communities, its initial start up cost of \$96,000 was determined to be too costly.
- Model II was a program based on expanding the use of our current shelter clinic for two additional days weekly. The clinic was staffed five days per week for adoption surgeries and shelter medical care. This model was the most cost efficient with essentially no start up cost. All funding provided for the program would cover staff salaries for a Veterinarian, 1.5 support staff and medical supplies. Additional revenue to offset the program would be generated by a low cost fee (\$30.00) charged to the animal owner. This program would provide services to the largest number of animals.
- Model III was a voucher program in cooperation with local Veterinarians. This program has lower overhead to administer, with all of the funding covering the cost of surgeries at participating Veterinarians. The effectiveness of the program (number of animals sterilized) is dependent on the participating Veterinarian's willingness to provide high volume and truly low cost surgeries.

Discussions also indicated that a combination of Model II and Model III would allow the greatest flexibility if difficulties were encountered in hiring additional veterinary staff required with Model II.

At the time of final approval of funding for a spay/neuter program, the Department did not have a Veterinarian on staff. All adoption surgeries and shelter medical care was being performed by outside contract Veterinarian Hospitals. The Department immediately initiated recruitment for Veterinarians to staff the shelter and implement the new low cost spay/neuter program. We received few inquiries about the positions. Three part-time Veterinarians were initially hired to staff both the shelter and spay clinic. Prior to getting the spay clinic up and running, one of the Veterinarians resigned, and further recruitment has been unsuccessful. Staff explored the option of sending more shelter adoption surgeries to our outside contract hospitals thus freeing up our remaining shelter Veterinarians for a public spay/neuter clinic. Unfortunately, staff found that this practice often resulted in adopted animals waiting in the shelter for an additional 3-5 days. This increased crowding in the shelter and was not well received by the public. Coupled with the difficulty in recruiting shelter Veterinarians, is the difficulty of recruitment and retention of trained experienced registered Veterinarian Technicians. Our first priority must remain providing veterinary staff for shelter animal care and adoption surgeries.

As it appeared we were not going to be successful in getting this program up and running in the near future, the department moved on to implementing a voucher program. Invitations to participate in the program were mailed to all Veterinarian Hospitals in Sacramento County. Over sixty hospitals were contacted. Responses were received from only eight hospitals with six willing to provide surgeries at a substantially reduced fee. Contracts were then drawn up with these hospitals and the program initiated. Due to the much higher cost of individual surgeries under this program, it reduces the number of animals we can spay or neuter.

Of foremost importance is that the County does have a program in place to assist low income residents with the spay/neuter of their pets. The Department is currently collaborating with other local animal welfare organizations and Sacramento City Animal Services in discussions with private foundations to fund a low cost spay/neuter program. The outcome of these discussions will not be known for several months.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS:

Under the current voucher program, the allocated \$35,000 from the 2004-05 budget is anticipated to be spent within 6 months with the current level of Veterinarian participation. Any additional augmentation to the program in the 2005-06 budget would extend this timetable and increase the number of animals sterilized.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pat Claerbout, Director
Department of Animal Care and Regulation

APPROVED:

Terry Schutten
County Executive

By:

Cheryl Creson, Administrator
Municipal Services Agency