

MINUTES FROM THE HURST ANIMAL SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

August 3, 2016

On the 3rd day of August, 2016, at 12:00 p.m., the Animal Services Advisory Committee for the City of Hurst, Texas, convened at the City Hall Council Chambers, located at 1505 Precinct Line Road, Hurst, Texas.

The following members were present:

Assistant Chief Steven Niekamp - City of Hurst
Animal Services Supervisor Amanda Earl - City of Hurst
Veterinarian Dr. Jason Risley

Animal Services Officer Michelle Watson, City of Keller, was absent.

There were 23 members of the public present, as well as two City of Hurst employees.

A quorum was present.

Assistant Chief Steven Niekamp called the meeting to order and the following business was conducted:

Consent Agenda

1. Considered approval of the minutes from the previous meeting held on April 13, 2016. Animal Services Supervisor Amanda Earl moved to approve the minutes. Assistant Chief Steve Niekamp seconded the motion. Motion prevailed by the following vote: 3-0

Discussion Items

1. Animal Services Supervisor Amanda Earl advised the Committee of Hurst Animal Services statistics for October 2015 to July 2016 and made a comparison to the same period of the previous fiscal year. Overall live release rate is 87 percent for cats and dogs. The live release rate for dogs was 93% and for cats was 75%. The lower live release rate for cats is due in part to cats becoming ill in the shelter environment as well as the intake of feral cats that must be euthanized. Of the total number of cats impounded during this period, 22% were feral cats. Of the total number of dogs impounded, 51% of dogs were returned to their owners. Shelter staff and the community work very hard as a team to return dogs to their owners. Thanks in large part to Hurst Animal Services' social media presence, cash donations were up by 93% over last year. Shelter visitors were up by 52%. Shelter fees were down by 5%, but the Clear the Shelters event had a large impact on fees due to free adoptions during the event. Our relationships with the SPCA, Operations Kindness, and Mid-Cities

Community Cats have brought about one of the most significant changes of this period, a 200% increase in animals transferred to placement partners. Euthanasia rates were down for both dogs and cats. Intake rates were down by 14%. A pilot program in early 2016 accounted for most of our feral cats being transferred to Mid-Cities Community Cats.

2. Assistant Chief Steve Niekamp sought comment on the Clear the Shelters event. Animal Services Supervisor Amanda Earl advised the event was a big success both locally and nationwide. Hurst Animal Services had 36 total adoptions, 19 dogs and 17 cats. The return rate for the DFW area was less than one percent so far. We have had only two returns so far. Adopters came from several cities in DFW and beyond. We had over 113 visitors, not including minor children and a significant number of visitors that were turned away because we had no more pets left to adopt.
3. Assistant Chief Steve Niekamp advised on the status of the new shelter project. The City of Bedford has pulled out of the project and the City of Richland Hills is still considering the cost-effectiveness of their participation. The Humane Society of North Texas is still on board. Hopefully, we will have more information after the new City Manager, Clay Caruthers, has completed the transition into his new position. After seeing so many Clear the Shelters visitors packed into the small shelter office, we are definitely in need of a larger shelter.
4. Assistant Chief Steve Niekamp sought comment on the status of the Foster and Borrow a Buddy program. Animal Services Supervisor Amanda Earl advised that the program is underway. We are working on getting volunteers approved with the intent of having a volunteer orientation at the end of August. Amanda explained the purpose of the Foster and Borrow a Buddy programs and how these programs will benefit shelter pets.
5. Assistant Chief Steve Niekamp advised that the process of adding a new member to the Animal Services Advisory Committee is still in the works. Animal Services Supervisor Amanda Earl introduced the new member of the board, Dr. Jason Risley of VCA Bedford Meadows Animal Hospital.
6. Assistant Chief Steve Niekamp opened the floor for public comments regarding the topic of implementing a City approved TNVR (trap, neuter, vaccinate, return) policy for feral cats. Cari Alexander, a resident of Hurst since 1978, has participated in TNVR for over 16 years with local University campuses. She spoke about the success of the TNVR programs with which she has been involved, as well as the goals of TNVR programs – to cease unwanted reproduction of feral cats, to vaccinate the feral population, to reduce the euthanasia rate of healthy animals, and to prevent the vacuum affect. She also stated that having feral cats in the City is a source of non-chemical rodent control. Carrie advised that a successful program relies on having loving caregivers to support feral colonies, local low-cost clinics to vaccinate feral cats, and an animal shelter staff that supports TNVR, but it also requires support from the City government, which Hurst

currently lacks. Sandra Blitz, a 50 year resident of Hurst, thanked the board for allowing the community to speak on the TNVR issue. She stated that, through policy, city governments elect to kill healthy, viable cats, but there is another option available – TNVR. She added that many of the outdoor cats in the City are domestic pets. Killing hundreds of thousands of healthy cats is not the solution to the feral cat problem. Sandra spoke about various examples of TNVR solution with which she has been involved at car dealerships, apartment complexes, Bell Helicopter, and private residences in Hurst, Euless, and Bedford. She stated that groups like Mid-Cities Community Cats and Alley Cat Allies work to educate the public about the benefits of TNVR. She asked that the City change the ordinances and Standard Operating Procedures regarding feral cats to reflect a new TNVR policy. Cindy Freckman, a resident of Azle, volunteers with the Trinity Gap Club rescue and with Mid-Cities Community Cats and does TNVR privately in her area. She stated that supporting a TNVR program has nothing to do with liking or disliking cats, but is about controlling the cat population and preventing the vacuum affect. She commented about the stress on animal services employees who have to euthanize cats as well as the financial burden for the City. Jami Johnson, a resident of Colleyville, mentioned that a successful TNVR program relies on volunteers within the community who are willing to support the TNVR process, which the City of Hurst already has. Jim Hanophy, Chief Executive Officer of Operation Kindness and a Hurst resident since 1995 spoke about the effectiveness of no-kill groups like Operation Kindness and how many animals' lives are saved through Operation Kindness each year. He stated that he believes the Hurst Animal Services staff "get it" when it comes to the commitment to prevent the unnecessary death of animals. He believes that a TNVR program is a highly effective tool to help the City of Hurst become a no-kill city. Kim Leach, a resident of Hurst for 20 years and volunteer at Hurst Animal Services and Mid-Cities Community Cats said she supports the City Council and thinks Hurst is the best city in which to live. She believes we can become a better city by becoming a TNVR city. Trasa Coburn, a Hurst resident, believes that implanting a TNVR program would free up tax dollars and shelter staff manpower for other uses. She believes that TNVR responsibilities should lie with willing volunteer groups who are ready to step in and make TNVR successful. She stated the only down side to starting a TNVR program would be educating the public. Sandy Shelby, Executive Director of the Humane Society of North Texas stated that HSNT is excited to partner with Hurst Animal Services in the future. She stated that TNVR programs were not popular when the first began in the 1990s, but once citizens started to see a decrease in nuisance cat behaviors, HSNT and Fort Worth began to see a decrease in citizen complaints. She believes that controlling feral populations through TNVR is a public health requirement, as feral cats are vaccinated, birth rates drop, and live release rates of healthy cats increase. Animal Services Supervisor Amanda Earl stated that a TNVR program can only be successful with community support, which would require educating the community about TNVR. Members of the audience made suggestions about how to inform the public, including providing information on water bills. After written public comments were addressed, members of the audience asked questions related to the City's policy about feeding, transporting, and euthanizing feral cats. Amanda Earl addressed these questions. Steve

Niekamp and Dr. Risley asked how feral cats are re-vaccinated after their original vaccine expires. Amanda Earl stated that cats are initially given a three-year vaccine, and members of the audience stated that they trap and re-vaccinate feral cats as much as possible. Amanda Earl advised that some cities require feral cats to be microchipped, which aids in identifying them when they end up in the shelter. Cindy Freckman added that she did Internet research and discovered that only one or two cats nationwide have tested positive for rabies in 2015. Steve Niekamp asked if TNVR groups have experienced problems with people bringing cats from other cities into known no-kill, TNVR cities. Several members of the audience gave various responses including; cats typically will go back to the area they came from if they are moved, and; TNVR volunteers have not seen cases of people bringing cats from other cities. Steve Niekamp advised that one concern citizens have is that feral cats kill birds. Cari Alexander replied that one way to prevent cats from killing birds is to ensure they are well fed, which TNVR volunteers do. Also, sterilizing feral cats changes their anatomy and they tend to gain weight and lose interest in hunting. Additionally, cats are not the only hunters – wild animals, domestic cats, and predatory birds hunt as well. Steve Niekamp asked if the various TNVR group members had any evidence to support residential TNVR instead of evidence coming solely from businesses and college campuses. Various members of the audience gave anecdotal evidence of TNVR success in residential areas including hoarding situations in Hurst. During this discussion, Sandra Bitz made a recommendation that the new member of the advisory board be a citizen who works with a nonprofit animal welfare group.

7. The next meeting date was set for Wednesday, January 18, 2017, at 12:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers located at 1505 Precinct Line Road.

Adjournment

1. Animal Services Supervisor Amanda Earl moved that the meeting be dismissed. Dr. Jason Risley seconded the motion. No further matters were discussed and the meeting was adjourned at 1:23 p.m.

Approved this 15 day of August, 2016.

Attest:



Supervisor Amanda Earl

Approved:



Assistant Chief Steve Niekamp