

REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL



DATE: April 4, 2017

TITLE: Animal Care and Control Services Project

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RECOMMENDATION

- 1) Authorize the City Manager to hire one (1) full-time Senior Animal Care and Control Officer, one (1) full-time Animal Care and Control Officer, and two (2) part-time Kennel Technicians for Animal Care and Control Field Services; and**
- 2) Amend the existing Agreement with Riverside County Department of Animal Services.**

DISCUSSION

City staff conducted a review and analysis of the current level of animal control services for the City and researched viable options to improving them (Exhibit A). Animal services are provided in three categories: Shelter Services, Field Services and Licensing. Currently, the Riverside County Department of Animals Services is contracted to provide all three categories. Shelter Services are provided at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus. The County provides one Animal Control Officer with all vehicle and equipment costs. The County also issues licensing at the Shelter and online.

City staff is recommending that the City begin providing both Field Services and Licensing Services with city employees. Staff is also recommending that the City's Kennel and Animal Control Facility be rehabilitated and used as a "Way Point" for impounded animals and offices for animal control staff and public access. Staff is recommending authorization to hire one full-time Senior Animal Care and Control Officer, one full-time Animal Care and Control Officer and two part-time Kennel Technicians. The rehabilitated facility would allow for Staff, at their discretion, to hold impounded animals for a short period of time to afford the animal's guardian an opportunity to retrieve their pet locally. Other unclaimed animals would also have an opportunity to be placed in a non-profit animal adoption or rescue facility, before being moved to the Coachella Valley Animal Campus. This would provide a better service to the community and reduce Sheltering costs. Sheltering Services would remain with the County.

The cost of this proposal would include the hiring of one Senior Animal Care and Control Officer, one Animal Care and Control Officer and two part-time Kennel Technicians. This would provide the community with Animal Services seven days per week, with the officers working four days a week, ten hours a day, with one day of overlap. The kennel technician positions would work 4 days per week, five hours per day. If the City began to issue its own Dog Licenses, existing staff at the Police Department Records Counter and the Code Enforcement Administrative Assistant, could assist in issuing and billing for annual tags. The PetPoint animal services software is web based, so it can be employed at various sites, including mobile platforms to issue and track animal licensing.

A Salary Comparison was completed (Exhibit 5) for these animal care and control positions. Using the Salary Comparison Average Salary, the salary and benefits would total \$221,157 with overtime. In determining cost for operations, two local government agencies with similar populations and animal intakes were compared. The County of Siskiyou in Northern California has a population of approximately 28,000 in the County provided service area and the City of California City, which has a smaller population than Desert Hot Springs at 14,000, but has a similar animal intake number. Both these sites were visited and toured because they provide full

animal care and control services and have zero kill facilities. In both cases, the Animal Shelters are contained in facilities which were not originally designed as kennels. In both cases, these organizations have brought their relatively high euthanasia rates to essentially zero, using both volunteerism and the internet. The operational budget, excluding salaries and benefits, for Siskiyou County's and California City's animal services is \$34,000 and \$63,725 respectively. The proposed operating budget for a Desert Hot Springs Animal Care and Control Services is \$327,157 to include salaries and benefits (Exhibit 3). A breakdown of the proposed operating budget is attached and includes Shelter Services at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus. The City's current budget is \$281,571 for one Animal Control Officer contracted from the County.

Start up costs for this proposal would include a complete rehabilitation of the City's old animal kennel. This would afford its use as a waypoint before potentially moving of the animal to the County Animal Campus, should it not be possible to return or place the animal in a short period of time. Normally an additional start up cost would include an animal control vehicle; however, the City of Desert Hot Springs still has the specialized vehicle in its vehicle fleet, a 2005 Ford F250 with 48,000 miles. The vehicle is mechanically sound, only requiring some cosmetics. There would be costs for initial supplies and equipment and some minimal software and computer costs. New employees would require training, uniforms and safety equipment as well. The City would still be required to maintain a contract with the Animal Campus for animal shelter services, however, the cost would be greatly reduced by providing a disposition of the animals locally whenever possible. In reviewing 2016 statistics for dispositions of animals at the Animal Campus, 54.3% of the animals are returned to their owners, adopted or otherwise placed. This percentage of animals diverted from the Animal Campus could rise if animals that are treatable and euthanized are also successfully diverted. This would reduce the contract cost with the County by over 50% or a savings of \$63,500 each year. A chart which breaks down these anticipated start-up costs is attached (Exhibit 4) and is estimated to be \$188,100.

In summary, the proposal for a City run Animal Care Center would provide a better and more efficient effort to return, divert or place animals in the community using City employees, volunteerism, technology, education and a local licensing effort. Licensing amnesty is another area to consider for a start up program cost. Licensing applications have dropped off over the past few years, while undoubtedly the animal population has risen. A method to reinstate licensing applications levels and revamp and update licensee records would be to initiate a license amnesty program, providing free licenses to animal owners for a one year period. In conjunction with this amnesty program, the City would work with animal spay and neutering programs to assist in providing vouchers for low income pet owners. The cost would be the loss of licensing income for a year, which currently stands at \$57,661 and the financial assistance provided to the Spay/neutering providers for vouchers. The goal of the amnesty program would be to encourage all canine pet owners to obtain or renew their licenses to assist in the reuniting of dogs with their owners when found stray and to insure that all future licensing fees are paid through billing notices. If licensing increased by 50% for example, the lost revenue from the first year would be regained after two subsequent years. Licensed pets will encourage responsible pet ownership.

FISCAL IMPACT

The first year net start up cost is \$188,100. This represents combining the loss of the first years licensing revenue from the Amnesty Program with actual start up expenses.

Start up Cost - \$130,100

Licensing Amnesty one year revenue loss - \$58,000

Net increase in operating expenses for the City would be \$45,586 for Animal Services. This is the difference between the current cost for contacted field services with the County of Riverside and this proposal for using City employees.

Proposed City Annual Operating Costs - \$327,157
Riverside County Contract Costs - \$281,571*

*The County has advised City Staff that these costs will be going up in the near future.

EXHIBITS:

- 1) Animal Control Services Report and Analysis
- 2) Coachella Valley Animal Campus Euthanasia Statistics
- 3) Proposed Operating Budget
- 4) Start-up Costs Budget Breakdown
- 5) Animal Control Salary Survey