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CONSULTING SERVICES
ANIMAL CONTROL SERVICES REPORT AND ANALYSIS
CITY OF DESERT HOT SPRINGS
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Introduction

At the direction of the City Manager, I conducted a review and analysis of the current level of Animal Control Services for the City of Desert Hot Springs and researched viable options for providing Animal Control Services for the City in the future. The Riverside County Department of Animal Services is providing both Field Services and Shelter Services at this time under a contractual agreement. Riverside County provides one animal control officer Monday through Friday, 7:30 am to 5 pm, with on-call for emergencies afterhours and holidays. Riverside County provides shelter services at the Animal Campus, located in Thousand Palms. The service level currently provided represents a minimal staffing level for the Community due to financial constraints. The County of Riverside has been providing Animal Control Services to the City of Desert Hot Springs since 2008, when the City closed its own Animal Control Office and Kennel. Prior to 2015, the County and before that, the City, provided two animal control officers for the community.

Animal Control provides a variety of services, to include responding to stray and barking animal complaints, impoundment and quarantining of animals, licensing, cruelty to animal investigations, enforcement of regulations and ordinances, dead animal removal, shelter care, adoption and more. All of these services provided can be separated into three independent components; Field Services, Shelter Services and Licensing. The County of Riverside currently provides for all three of these elements, which collaborate with and support each other, but operate independently. When analyzing how the City receives these services, they can be evaluated separately. The City has the option of providing for itself Field Services, Shelter Services and Licensing or it can chose to contract out all or part of these three areas. An assessment has been made as to which organizations are available to provide services in each of these three areas and which can do so most effectively and efficiently.

Shelter Care Services

Prior to 2008, when the City had its own animal control services in-house, the City Animal Control ran its own kennel or pound. Those facilities still exist within the City Corporate Yard on Hacienda; however, they are outdated, in disrepair and are currently inadequate. City Staff has previously this year performed a cursory examination of the structure with the assistance of a contractor and determined that it would be cost prohibitive to rehabilitate the kennel building to a full service Shelter by today's standards. The building does not have sufficient kenneling space or adoption areas. There is minimal storage room for food and other supplies and lacks veterinary service space. There is the potential, however, to develop it into a short term detention or transition kennel with some facility rehabilitation and improvement costs. There is an exterior fenced area with a limited number of kennels that are serviceable and they are currently used by the police department and city yard personnel on occasion to temporarily shelter stray dogs that are encountered after hours. These animals are immediately taken to the Animal Campus County Shelter as soon as the animal control officer comes back on duty.

The Animal Campus County Shelter is located in Thousand Palms and was built in 2005 under a Joint Powers Agreement with the County of Riverside and most of the Cities in the Coachella Valley. It was built as a "state of the art" facility, operated by the County of Riverside Department of Animal Services to service the Coachella Valley. The 28,000 square foot facility, with 60 kennels, can shelter dogs, cats and larger animals, such as horses or other domestic farm animals. The Animal Campus has partnered with Animal Samaritans, which has their facility next door and other animal rescue organizations to divert as many impounded animals as possible to adoption. They provide for veterinary care, licensing and educational services. From January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016, the Animal Campus has taken in 914 animals from Desert Hot Springs and has a 44.4% euthanasia rate (4.8 % treatable, 39.6% untreatable). It should be noted that in speaking with the various organizations which provide shelter services, the definition of treatable versus untreatable varies. As an example, some shelters will classify all aggressive dogs as untreatable, while others will only classify dogs that are aggressive to people as untreatable. The County charges \$125 per impounded animal (dogs, cats or other) and \$20 for larger domestic animals. The current contract is \$126,945 for the fiscal year. Any impounds over the Cap of 1,012 at the end of the year will be an additional expense.

Other local sheltering facilities were evaluated as possible shelter service alternatives for the City, including the Humane Society of the Desert and the Palm Springs Animal Shelter, which is operated by Friends of the Palm Springs Animal Shelter, a 501.c3. While evaluating the

possibility of utilizing these facilities and organizations as potential sheltering facilities for the municipal kennel, some inherent disadvantages became apparent. The image of the non-profit, donor supported charitable humane organization may be compromised when the public realizes the agency also receives tax money. While the tax money is not sufficient to cover operational costs, many tax payers won't believe it. Humane organizations must continually stress the humane aspect of their work in order to project a favorable image. The "City Pound" image can no doubt bring public prejudice against the non-profit organization. Operating an impound facility necessarily involves the enforcement of animal ordinances which can place in people's minds that the facility is "against the animals."

There are some definite advantages to utilizing a humane organization facility as well. As an example, The Humane Society of the Desert is located nearby off North Indian Ave. and has a wonderful facility. It is spacious, clean and run in a professional, caring manner. Animals there receive quality veterinary care and there is staff onsite 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Much of what animal services the City is required to do, the Humane Society of the Desert is already doing. There is kennel space available for the City to use, but for smaller canines, an air conditioned mobile structure would have to be provided. Feline animals would not be allowed into the facility, due to the possibility of highly contagious diseases being introduced into the feline animals already on site. All cats would have to be tested prior to entry. Lastly, the cost would be prohibitive. In addition to providing City staff to help take care of the City used kennels at the site, there would be an annual fee of about \$192,000 per Malinda Bustos, the President of the Humane Society of the Desert, for the City to use their facility.

I also spoke with Dr. Shayd Ahkami, who at the time was the Director of the Friends of the Palm Springs Animal Shelter, a 501c3, which operates the City owned shelter for the City of Palm Springs. Friends of the Palm Springs Animal Shelter have had great success in garnering community support for their effort and have changed the traditional stigma of the "City Pound" image. The Palm Springs Shelter is running over its capacity with almost twice the number of animals the facility was designed for. Many animals are in temporary kennels, in areas not originally designed for kennel space. The Palm Springs Shelter is a "no kill" shelter. It has an annual operations budget of approximately \$2,000,000 of which about \$700,000 is from donations. The balance is funded by the City of Palm Springs. They have 9 full time and 16 part time personnel and additionally log over 40,000 volunteer hours per year. The Animal Samaritans are also not in the position of providing contract shelter services for all the above listed reasons.

A City owned and run in-house shelter was also examined in this review. In order for the City to provide 100 % of the animal shelter services for the community, It would be recommended that a new, modern, state of the art facility be built that would be able to handle both the current animal population and anticipated future needs. The facility would also have to accommodate a variety of animals, such as horses and other domestic stock or contract that service out. The Shelter services would require additional full time personnel and would incur all the veterinarian expenses. The City is not currently in a position at this time to design and build a new full service animal shelter.

Field Services

Riverside County Department of Animal Services currently provides the City one animal control officer, including a vehicle and supporting equipment, for \$127,026 annually. Prior to this minimal deployment level, in the 2015 contract, the County provided the City two animal control officers at a cost of \$254,052 with funding for additional saturation patrols in problem areas (\$2,400 for 30 hours). There was also a fee schedule set up for Outreach Activities such as Shot Clinics (\$2,783 per event) and Education Outreach (\$2,553 per event). After-hours rate is \$82/hour with a two hour minimum. Overtime is budgeted at \$18,000, which is based on past experience. According to Riverside County Animal Services Deputy Director Frank Corvino, there has not been a rate increase for shelter services since the Animal Campus opened. He said that both field services and shelter services fees will be increasing soon.

Other vendors for Field Services are currently not available locally. There are few private companies providing Animal Control Field Services, none of which are local and the only other municipality in the Coachella Valley with their own Field Services is the City of Palm Springs. The City of Palm Springs was contacted and an inquiry was made as to whether they would consider providing Field Services to Desert Hot Springs, but they are not in a position to do so at this time. Anderson Penna and Partners would consider providing Animal Control Staff under contract, but currently are not providing these services anywhere.

Licensing

Currently the City dog licensing is being handled by Riverside County Department of Animal Services. Our current ordinance requires all licensed dogs to be micro chipped and to have a current rabies vaccination. The cost of the license for neutered or spayed animals is \$16 and

unaltered animal licenses are \$100. If the pet guardian is a senior and the dog is altered, the fee is \$10. The County takes \$6 of the licensing fees to cover their costs for handling dog licensing for City residents. The licenses issued are Riverside County dog tags. The City has an option of issuing their own City dog licenses or pays a private company to provide the service. If the City issued their own dog licenses and also used the Animal Campus Shelter, which is operated by the County, the County would still be able to issue the City dog licenses from that facility for Desert Hot Springs residents when they adopt or reclaim their dog. The County would charge the \$6 fee for each City license they issued. It is anticipated that if a private company were to provide the service, the cost for the service would be at least the same as the County charge. The license revenue for the 2015/2016 fiscal year was \$57,661. Issued licenses and fees have been falling over the last few years. There were 1,758 licenses issued in fiscal year 2015/2016. The first 6 months of this fiscal year 700 licenses have been issued.

Animal Services and Care – Goals and Objectives

The paradigm for animal control has shifted over the last few decades to where Enforcement and Licensing are no longer sufficient for our communities. Almost all problems with animals in our communities, including Desert Hot Springs, are people issues. Now, in addition to enforcing animal control ordinances and issuing licenses, there is a need for education, spay and neuter voucher programs, special efforts to adopt out animals and have shelter diversion programs to help animal guardians keep their animals in their homes with counseling and assistance.

Goals

Protection of the community and animals

Reuniting animals to their guardians

Zero Kill of all adoptable animals or animals which can be rehabilitated

Encourage Responsible Pet Ownership

Spay and Neuter of all pets

Objectives

Volunteerism is a huge component to any successful animal service program. Many animals that are found stray are returned to their owners or new homes found, by use of the internet and networking with animal rescue and humane organizations across the United States. All

successful “no kill” facilities and organizations use volunteers or paid staff to post adoptable animals online and to locate available space with rescue and humane organizations. Volunteers also help to maintain a healthy environment for animals that are held in the shelters or holding facilities by cleaning kennels and cages, exercising and socializing animals, feeding and watering. In addition to volunteer hours, donations should be sought from both commercial and private entities for food, veterinary supplies and other needed equipment and supplies. The internet can also be an effective resource for these items as well by posting a wish list of needed items.

Spay and neutering vouchers and clinics are essential methods to get low cost services to pet guardians and encourage the licensing of pets. Staff and volunteers should pursue grant opportunities from public and private sources. The community has some great resources that currently contribute for Spay/Neuter, vaccines and micro-chipping of animals, such as SNIP and Animal Action League, as well as others. The City should look to participate with these groups with funding and facilities.

Shelter Diversion programs, like “Down Town Dog Rescue,” provide counseling and assistance to those animal guardians who seek to turn in their pets to the Shelter because they believe they can no longer provide for their animals. In many cases, a little assistance with a fence repair or some pet food or other incidental assistance will keep the pet in their home.

There are some comprehensive software programs, such as “PetPoint” (currently used by the Palm Springs Animal Shelter), which can be used as a Records Management System for animal sheltering, adoptions, networking with Animal Rescue Organizations across the country, micro chipping and licensing. The cost of the software is minimal and is an effective tool to save time, communicate and share information with pet rescue groups and the community at large. It is another major component in the effort to maintain a “Zero Kill” community for our pets.

City Provided Services Option

Providing a City operated 'Animal Care Center' would be a method to bring together all the significant components or objectives which would help the Desert Hot Springs Community reach the listed goals. With the current funding limitations, it would be impractical to build and run a full service City Animal Shelter, such as the Animal Campus or the Palm Springs Animal Shelter. However, by operating an Animal Care Center, operated by City employed Animal Care and Control Officers, the City can combine the use of volunteers, software and technology, Diversion and Education Programs to work to a zero kill community. Seeking grants and working closely with non-profit groups for adoptions, veterinary services, spay and neutering, education, etc. will enhance the ability of the City to provide better and more comprehensive services to the community.

The concept of a City run Animal Care Center, involves a partnership with the many local non-profit animal assistance groups. Although the existing Desert Hot Springs Kennel facility is not adequate for a full service Animal Shelter, it can be rehabilitated and reconfigured to be used as a "Way Point" for recovered stray animals, giving City staff and volunteers an opportunity to reunite pets with their guardians locally and provide guardians of pets that are looking to surrender their pets some counseling and assistance. Volunteers would be able to post recovered animals online and network with rescue groups both locally and regionally to place homeless animals. It would be a facility where clinics and educational programs could be held and licensing and vouchers could be distributed. The goal would be to make a best effort to reduce or even eliminate the number of animals that are passed on to the Animal Campus Shelter, thus reducing costs to the City for sheltering services and the number of Desert Hot Springs animals subject to the euthanasia rates at the Animal Campus.

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 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 (attached) 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. 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 costs is attached 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.