

MINUTES
City of Los Angeles
BOARD OF ANIMAL REGULATION

September 22, 1999, 5:00 p.m.

The Board of Animal Regulation Commissioners convened in regular session on Wednesday, September 22, 1999, at Cheviot Hills Recreation Center, West Los Angeles, CA

I. Call to Order/Roll

The meeting was called to order at 5:25 p.m.

Commission Members Present: Vice President/Acting President Avila, and Commissioners Jackson and Forster. Commissioner Riordan was delayed in arriving. Commission has one vacancy at present.

Staff Members Present: General Manager Dan C. Knapp, Jackie David, Eric Gardner, Linda Gordon, Robert Pena, Renée Quimby, Margaret Sullivan, and Carmella Ortiz.

II. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Riordan moved, and Commissioner Jackson seconded, the approval of the minutes of the meeting for September 14, 1999. Minutes were approved unanimously (3 Ayes, no Abstentions).

III. New Business

Commissioner Avila advised members of the audience how to fill out speaker cards so that they might address the Board on items of interest to them this evening, for one minute on agenda items, and three minutes on other issues of concern.

General Manager's Goals for 2001 Budget

General Manager Dan C. Knapp introduced the goals, indicating they would be due to the mayor by October 1st, 1999, and recommending adoption by the Commission. Goals were prioritized by staff. The Department has been significantly under-resourced for a number of years, and although last year represented the first year of a multi-year investment by the Mayor, and the Department received a significant budget increase, it is still placed below where it should be, with a total budget slightly of slightly over \$15ML. The operational budget is \$10.2ML, and a CAO study shared that if the Department was consistent with a per capita budget for animal services calculated on a 1991 study using the CPI to bring the budget current, it should have a budget of \$21ML annually. The Department is still critically understaffed. So the budget goals do not necessarily represent upgrades to services, but rather represent bringing the operations to the level it should be at to meet current demands for service. There are 10 goals established:

1. Increase the safety of City neighborhoods through increased investment at district shelters in veterinary division staff, field officers, and clerical staff. The department received an

additional 54 positions this year, the majority of them in the area of animal care. There is still a critical shortage of officials in the field for response, and clerical support at the district offices, where staff is especially needed to answer telephones. Requests will go to the Mayor for more animal control officers, particularly to address problems of stray and packing dogs, clerical and administrative support staff, and more veterinary staff. The Department will request one veterinarian per shelter.

2. Reduce overcrowding at the shelters and provide space for proper rabies quarantine. Department requests continuing the use of the temporary South Central Annex animal shelter after the new facility opens (late) in August of 2000. Department facilities are now operating at 150% of capacity, with 4-7 dogs per kennel. This is unacceptable. The City Council authorized a facility study; the study will be completed by April, 2000, and will indicate where new facilities are needed. In the interim the Department needs assistance, and the continued authorization for operation of the South Central Annex will help.
3. Complete the process for placing the bond measure for renovation of present facilities and building additional new facilities on the November, 2000 ballot. Upon approval by voters, begin planning and design phases for renovation and new building projects. Staff will be requested for additional staff to work on this process, a reimbursable cost if the bond is approved.

(Commissioner Riordan arrived at this point)

4. Diminish the number of unwanted dog and cat births through increased spay/neuter assistance, including low and no cost vouchers for low-income families and in neighborhoods of greatest need, mobile vans and spay/neuter clinics. One group of private donors has raised \$65,000 for a mobile clinic. Mark Ridley-Thomas is working with another group to raise funds for vans. The Department will also request funds from the City Council.
5. Encourage responsible pet ownership and care, and reduce the number of stray dogs, and create access to department services. Develop and create a comprehensive multi-cultural, multi-lingual public education plan. The Commission approved the master plan presented to it several months ago to begin a full education program. The Department has lacked materials in other languages, and the Public Information Officer, Jackie David, has been doing a wonderful job, but without the help of the support staff needed to put this program into effect.
6. Better facilitate and focus Department resources by providing a staff liaison to the Neighborhood Councils. The new Charter authorizes these Councils, and although it will take some time for the whole process to be put into operation, but they will assist the Department in defining services required, focusing services, and developing a strategic plan with the direct participation of individual residents. Without a liaison, there is the possibility that communities within the City will continue to feel distant from the Department and its processes.
7. Modify hours of the animal shelters to be more convenient and accessible to working families. The Mayor has set in his priorities this year that all City services be made more accessible to the working public. The Department expects to increase adoptions and

redemptions by being open at times that working residents are able to visit the shelters. It will be proposed that shelters be open on Sunday, and on at least one night per week.

8. Increase response to residents' concerns about coyotes and other wildlife issues, with a dedicated team of wildlife officers providing a program including education, consultation and direct intervention when required. The Commission has an excellent policy in place right now, regarding coyotes, but lack of staffing has resulted in the department's not being able to offer consultation and education to residents when they have concerns. As we encroach further onto wildlife habitat, more and more residents have concerns about the proper way to co-exist with these animals by "wild-proofing" their homes and yards so that humans and animals can amicably share the same areas.
9. Under the direction of the Information Technology Authority and in cooperation with other departments, give priority attention to the implementation plan for the 311 Internet services project. Develop a customer service plan, including staff, training, monitoring of customer service satisfaction, and a program to reward employees for positive customer service. Mayor has prioritized implementation of what he calls a 311 and/or Internet service. Once it is operable, residents will be able to dial 311 for any service in the City. Operators will be able to direct the call to a direct service provider in the City, so there are a minimal number of steps to be gone through to get service. Example: pickup of a deceased animal. Many residents are confused as to whether to call Animal Regulation, or Sanitation. With 311, they would call the central number and be connected to the proper service provider without having to know exactly which office to call. Department is proposing adding on a resolution basis, a systems analyst, and other further staffing to be able to develop the customer service plan, and to involve the veterinary community in licensing dogs online.
10. Increase officer responsiveness and facilitate effective field enforcement, by installing Chameleon computer consoles in the animal control vehicles. This year the Department will implement new software replacing its antiquated animal admission, intake and care software at the shelters. The new system will facilitate the responsiveness of the department, increase its effectiveness, and efficiency. A further step will be to place computer consoles in the animal control field vehicles, permitting dispatch directly to the vehicles, and giving officers direct access to the database, so that they can direct, immediate information to assist residents without the delay of going through operators.

Numbers 9 and 10 provide productivity improvements which may allow for a decrease in man-hours to provide services, and may allow for a slight adjustment in the staffing request in the new budget.

One important goal was not included, simply because the Department has so many basic needs to be met. The present year's increase has been like a drink of water to a thirsty person in a desert, because the department has been underfunded for so long. But an ongoing need that has yet to be addressed is for a dedicated task force of officers to do nothing but humane investigations. Right now the officers must dedicate their time to emergency situations, and do not have enough time to adequately respond to those. But the need is great to begin responding to humane complaints.

Commissioner Avila asked Mr. Knapp to explain the budget process, once the Commission approves the goals. Mr. Knapp explained the goals must be submitted to the Mayor's office by October 1st. The Mayor's budget team reviews the goals, discusses with staff, and gives back revised goals; the goals submitted may not be exactly the same as are actually set for the budget. Commissioner Riordan asked about the Internet entry for dead animal pickup under the 311 system, wanting to know if a record would be kept of a description of the animal over several weeks in case someone was looking for his or her missing pet. Mr. Knapp indicated that the Chameleon system would do that. Commissioners had no further questions, and there were no speaker cards on this item. Commissioner Avila announced he would entertain a motion to move approval on this item. It was moved by Commissioner Jackson, seconded by Commissioner Forster, and passed unanimously (4 Ayes, no abstentions).

IV. Pet Overpopulation Ordinance Hearing

Mr. Knapp introduced the proposed ordinance, offering a history of the proposal. There had been three hearings so far, with good input from all involved. Hearings started with the draft ordinance which was distributed to everyone to serve as a launching point for discussion. There is a crisis in the City of Los Angeles, a City that serves as a model for many other cities seeking to replicate programs. There is a crisis in our animal population, causing serious public health and safety concerns. The statistics have not been closed for 1999, but in 1998 approximately 81,000 animals were received in City shelters. 75% of all dogs and cats received were euthanized; the national average is 66% of animals euthanized at shelters. 77% of all cats were euthanized, predominantly during the cat-breeding period of March through October 1998.

It is estimated there are approximately 44,000 stray dogs per year on the City streets. Some people may not feel the impact in their neighborhoods, but in many areas mothers must walk their children to school with bats in hand. Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas supported the drafting of this proposed ordinance, because, as he said, it is necessary to aim at the base of the fire, to stop the conveyor belt bringing animals in such numbers into the shelters, only to be euthanized. Councilman Ridley-Thomas supported the idea of studying the feasibility of a mandatory spay/neuter law. This draft, an intense version, includes mandating that all owners of a cat or dog over four months of age must spay or neuter it; if they choose to keep it intact, they will pay \$100 for an intact permit; if they choose to breed the animal, they will pay \$200 for a breeders' permit. An intact breeder cat would cost \$300, and an intact breeder dog would be \$330.

The other provisions of the ordinance as proposed speak to ownership and responsibility; if one harbors, feeds, cares for, etc for 15 more days; they own the animal. Nationwide, the cat population is going up; in Los Angeles, the dog population is also going up. Unlike other areas of the country, many people in Los Angeles are willing to declare they don't own their dog, even as their children cry when officers remove the dog. The ordinance also addresses the sale and/or transfer of pets. Dogs and cats are given away at supermarkets, or sold in the street. The department especially wants to address the trade in pit bulls or pit bull crosses being bred for fighting and sold for \$50 for amateur dog fighting.

The penalty proposed is a double fine, for not registering an intact animal, or for breeding without a permit, up to \$660 for a breeding dog. If there is no compliance in 30 days, the offense becomes a misdemeanor, punishable with a \$1000 fine and/or six months in jail.

Public Comments

Commissioner Avila explained that each speaker would receive one minute in which to address the Board on the agenda item. One hundred twenty-four speakers addressed the Board. A complete transcription of all testimony will be part of the permanent record of this meeting. Public comments on this item closed at 8:45 p.m.

Commissioner Avila called for general public comments. Bill Dyer addressed the Board on the subject of cruelty to animals. He received a phone call from a neighbor regarding an incident of alleged cruelty at an address on Fairfax Avenue, and discovered religious rites were being conducted involving the use of live chickens, which were apparently being kept without food or water, and which appeared to have resorted to cannibalism. The condition of the animals was reported to the Los Angeles Police Department, which stated this was a religious issue. The County Health Department ordered the activity be taken inside a building instead of being conducted outdoors behind the building. Mr. Dyer indicated the activity was not taken inside or stopped. He would like to see all departments cooperate in stopping the abuse of animals.

Gary Kaster presented flyers and pictures of the ritual to the Board for review. Mr. Kaster is a member of the Jewish community who considers the practice abhorrent, and anti-Jewish in spite of its being conducted by a rabbi. He read from a book, Judaism and Animal Issues, which indicated that the Jewish religion forbids cruelty to animals, and states that it is forbidden to cause pain to animals, including on Yom Kippur. He equated the practice with satanic practice, and stated it has nothing to do with Judaism. Another respondent submitted additional pictures of the ritual and testified she saw baby chicks being slaughtered. She indicated children were being exposed to violence, and that she had tried to speak to the rabbi, but had not gotten anywhere. She had had results in Santa Monica by asking its Animal Regulation Department to deal with the same rabbi. She felt that the local congregation needed to be informed about the ritual, and the fact that animals must be treated humanely even if the ancient religious rituals are followed. The Supreme Court in Texas ruled that local ordinances must be enforced even in cases of religious practice.

Lois Newman testified she had consulted with her landlord, a retired rabbi, concerning the ritual. The practice appears in the Torah, and used to involve using a goat to receive the sins of the congregation, ritual slaughter of the goat, and distribution of the goat meat to the poor. In the U.S. Supreme Court, Justices Kennedy and Blackmun ruled regarding the Church of Hialeah that anti-cruelty laws could be generally applicable even in religious ritual. The state has the goal of protecting animals. The City of Los Angeles has section 53.67 regarding animal sacrifice. Slaughter of animals for food is exempted, but this slaughter is for ritual purposes, even though the meat is given to the poor as food.

Michael Bell, Vice President of the Wildlife Protection League discussed a recent article citing coyotes as carriers of various diseases. He contacted State and County Boards of Health regarding coyotes and the plague. Dr. Shirley Fannen and Dr. Frank Field both indicated coyotes are not reservoirs for the plague. They actually create a barrier between humans and animal

carriers of the plague such as ground squirrels by controlling the rodent population, and indicated that coyotes do not get plague from eating those animals. Coyotes do get rabies, but there has not been a documented case of a coyote passing rabies to humans. Mr. Bell has distributed books on this issue to all members of the Council.

General Manager's Report:

Mr. Knapp presented a commendation Tia Torres of Villalobos Pit Bull Rescue, for her work in helping to give informational classes to the public at a time when many pit bulls were being turned in to the shelters by owners who needed information on how to handle them. Ms. Torres thanked the department for offering her the opportunity to show the good points of pit bulls. She thanked the kennel staff, and District Manager Louis Dedeaux for their support.

Acting Director of Field Operations Robert Pena gave an update on the classes that have been conducted so far in West Los Angeles. There have been five so far; 100 dogs have gone through obedience and socialization training. Three hundred-five people have attended informational meetings, and there have a large number of telephone calls. Department staff has referred residents to other trainers as well, have reassured them it is possible to keep their dogs and train them properly.

Training was offered to the Police Department on September 20-21. Sixty-five officers were trained on how to handle dogs without resorting to shooting them. The department brought trainers, bite suits and dogs. Robert Ferber of the City Attorney's Office, recently out of the hospital, volunteered to don the suit and be attacked. Unruly dogs from the shelter were to demonstrate ways to handle dogs. The department hopes to continue this cooperation and bring this course to the Police Academy.

Officer Dave Rivera reported on Department activities in the West Los Angeles area. There have been leash law enforcement efforts as part of the Oakwood Beautification project, in cooperation with LAPD. There has been a handicapped access project at the WLA shelter, providing ramps, counter and bathroom updates. Staff is enforcing a zero tolerance policy for leash law violations, especially in parks and at the beach. Staff does outreach to children at local schools, where they talk to all ages of children, and their parents.

Steve Cunningham, head of Volunteer Services, gave a report indicating the program is doing well, and orientations are being offered frequently, with mobile adoptions each weekend. Since June 73 people have gone through orientation. The average number of volunteers is about 33 per shelter, and there will be over 100 mobile adoption events this year. There is now a volunteers' newsletter. The emphasis at mobile adoptions will be on helping prospective adopters to decide if adoption is right for them, so there will be few returns of animals. And the section will concentrate on producing statistics to note rate of growth in volunteers and adoptions. Volunteers come mostly from East and West Valleys and West Los Angeles, but recruitment is going on all over the City.

As there were no more comments from the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

February 7, 2000
ATTEST

[Signature]
PRESIDENT

Carmella [Signature]
COMMISSION SECRETARY