

MINUTES
City of Los Angeles
BOARD OF ANIMAL REGULATION

October 14, 1999, 5:00 p.m.

The Board of Animal Regulation Commissioners convened in session on Monday, October 14, 1999 at the Boyle Heights Senior Citizens' Center, 2939 E. Third Street, Los Angeles, CA 90023.

Call to Order/Roll

The meeting was called to order at 5:15 p.m.

Commission Members Present: Vice President/Acting President Al Avila, Commissioners Florence Jackson and Kathleen Riordan, constituting a quorum. Commissioner Linda Harris Forster was excused.

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

Approval of Minutes

As Minutes were still in preparation, approval was continued to the next meeting.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Councilman Pacheco's arrival was delayed, and his greeting and introduction were continued pending his arrival.

Acting President Avila announced that anyone requiring Spanish language interpretation should see the evening's interpreter, Estela Barcasel for assistance. Sign language interpretation was also available. Mr. Avila reminded attendees they needed to submit speaker cards for each item they wished to address before the Board.

Old Business

None

New Business

A. Report on the Special Enforcement Unit (SEU)

Captain Tim Goffa reported on the activities of the Special Enforcement Unit from September 1998 through September 1999. Total from all six of the Departments districts included: 2535 dogs captured, 76 animals picked up, 361 citations issued, 219 warnings issued, and 6558 leash law investigations conducted during 244 days spent in the districts for the year.

Among Council Districts, the Ninth had the most stray dog problems in the City. The Special Enforcement Unit caught a total of 1064 dogs in that district alone. The next district in severity of problems was the Seventh Council District, with 289 dogs caught during the year. In the Eighth District 281 dogs were caught, and in this evening's District, the Fourteenth Council District, 263 dogs were caught. The Fifteenth District had 196 dogs caught, the First had 102, the Second had 50, the Tenth had 161, the Third had 3, the Fourth and Fifth had 6 each, the Eleventh had 19, the Twelfth had 17, and the Thirteenth had 54. The SEU team consists of three officers; sometimes only two officers were available, and in times of illness only one officer was available to perform these activities Citywide.

The major animal-related complaint received in the Boyle Heights area is dogs roaming loose, attacking and harassing adults, and children on the way to school. The SEU has made it a point to try to impound these animals from the streets. The team spends approximately five to six days per month just in the Fourteenth District. The situation is severe, but the team is concentrating efforts on solving the problem.

At this time the SEU patrols five days a week, eight hours a day. Six additional team members will be added soon, which will permit splitting the staff into two teams. One team will patrol the San Fernando Valley, both East and West, and the West Los Angeles area. The other will patrol the North and South Central Districts and the Harbor. Teams will probably be in the field seven days per week.

Commissioner Riordan asked if figures were available for the relative number of the stray collected by the SEU that were killed as opposed to those which were reclaimed. Captain Goffa indicated he did not have those figures, but that information he received, at least at the South Los Angeles shelter, indicated a 1-2% adoption rate among the dogs brought in by the SEU. He reminded the Board that the dogs they bring in are often quite sick, and very aggressive. These are the dogs most often complained about, and the most difficult to adopt out. Most are not suitable for adoption because of illness or temperament after years of living on the street.

Mr. Avila asked Captain Goffa to indicate for the Boyle Heights the typical types of dogs found in this area: the breeds found, their condition, etc. Captain Goffa indicated this area's dog problem is quite high, and comparable to the South Los Angeles area. The SEU team impounded 33 dogs from this area just today, 27 of which were so sick that it was doubtful the veterinarian would be able to do anything for them. The rest of the dogs were very aggressive. People in the area are very concerned to have the dogs picked up. They come to the SEU units when they are on the street and thank the officers for coming. Others flag down the units when they come through and turn over strays they have confined on their properties, and the team members take the animals away to be impounded. The SEU has received phone calls from school police concerned about dog packs on school properties. In one case teachers could not allow the children outside because of aggressive dogs on the grounds, and the SEU team rounded up about 20 stray dogs within a radius of about five blocks around the school.

Commissioner Riordan asked what breeds of dog are most often found in this area. Captain Goffa stated they are most often pit bull, rottweiler, or German shepherd mixed-breed dogs.

An audience member asked to speak to this topic. Stacy Arana asked, since the proposed ordinance affects cats and dogs, whether any unit is keeping these same kinds of records

regarding cats. Captain Goffa explained there is no law prohibiting roaming by cats, but that the SEU will pick up cats if requested, but the Department only impounds cats for certain reasons: if they are sick, if they are injured, or if they have bitten someone. If someone finds a stray and wants to turn it in, the SEU will pick it up. The Department does maintain records of how many cats are impounded and how long they are kept.

Commissioner Riordan inquired if it is correct to assume that most of the cats are picked up dead by Dead Animal Collection because of having been hit by cars, etc. She indicated she had heard stories from Sanitation Department drivers about picking up starved kittens and dead cats. Captain Goffa and Mr. Avila concurred that most dead animals are collected by the Department of Sanitation's Dead Animal Collection crews and records would have to be obtained from them. The Department will impound dead animals if brought in by a resident, and Caltrans picks up dead animals from the freeways and brings them in to the shelters. The Department maintains records of these transactions.

Mr. Avila thanked Captain Goffa for his report. Councilman Pacheco arrived at this point, and welcoming the Board, and thanking them for coming into the community to allow residents to express their concerns, and their opinions about how the Department is handling animal-related problems in the Fourteenth District. He reminded the Commissioners that people in the community often feel the system is slow in responding to their needs, so the Board's coming out to meet with residents is important. Mr. Pacheco stated he lives in Boyle Heights, and that everyone there is aware of and concerned about the stray dog problem. Many of his constituents have expressed different views about the solution to the problem. Many people are concerned about animals being put down after being picked up and held for a period of time, but in this area, residents' main concern is about the safety of people using public transportation and children on their way to school who are attacked by stray and packing dogs. Mr. Pacheco explained that he has a rule in his meetings when receiving comments from his constituents: there is no such thing as a negative comment, because residents have a right to demand service of their government, and everything is fair game. He always encourages people to speak up and be heard, and hoped the Board would be equally open to learning about the District and hearing all the concerns of the people of the Fourteenth District.

Mr. Avila thanked Mr. Pacheco for welcoming the Board to his district, and indicated that Mr. Pacheco's staff had been very helpful in setting up this venue, and in sending a mailing out to the constituents of the area to publicize the meeting.

Mr. Avila called for comments on the Special Enforcement Unit report. Rosalie Garolo stated she lives on Chicago Street, and has lived in Boyle heights her whole life. She thanked the Board for coming to the District, indicating that the issue of packing dogs is a very serious one in the area, affecting children, senior citizens, and adults. She feels the City is satisfied as long as the dogs are licensed. She feels the problem of dogs defecating on other people's property is a great one, and that there are laws in other areas making owners responsible for walking dogs on leashes and picking up after their animals. Many families try to keep their homes nice, but loose dogs make a mess. At this point a member of the audience informed Ms. Garolo about the City's leash law. Ms. Garolo stated that she felt this law needed to be enforced more strongly, forcing owners to be more responsible with their pets.

Update on Hiring for Positions Authorized in 1999-2000 Budget

General Manager Dan C. Knapp asked Captain Robert Pena to report on deployment of staff in the SEU as based upon the hiring plan. Captain Pena reported the SEU was deployed about two and a half years ago by the Department. Its primary purpose is to enforce the leash law in the City of Los Angeles, going into selected troubled areas as identified by the Department's district managers. There are six shelter districts in the City, and the SEU is sent into the areas of highest number of complaints in each to enforce the leash law and licensing laws as well. If officers observe dogs defecating on other peoples' property or on public property, they will issue citations. He emphasized, however, that officers must see the violation take place; other wise, they issue a warning. Officers typically chase a loose dog home, and issue a citation, which begins at \$76.00, and goes up from there depending on the number of violations the officer is citing for. The program has been successful. The team presently consists of one team of one captain and three officers working five days per week, but it is planned that in early December the unit will expand to include two teams of 10 officers. The teams will continue to be under the command of Captain Goffa, who has been its commander since its beginning. One team will concentrate on the metropolitan area: North Central, including the Boyle Heights area, South Los Angeles, and the Harbor. The second team will concentrate on the East and West San Fernando Valley, and the West Los Angeles area. If there is a special problem, it will be possible to bring both teams together to concentrate on solving that problem. Current plans include having at least one team on duty all seven days of the week, so that it is possible always to respond quickly to any incidents that may happen. It is hoped that the two teams will have a significant impact on loose dogs in the City, and that through tools such as citation sand warnings they will get the attention of dog owners and remind them of the need to be good owners and good neighbors and keep their dogs confined to their own property, get them licensed, and hopefully get them spayed or neutered.

Commissioner Riordan asked about the requirement for officers to personally witness violations and whether videotape of the incident would be valid. Captain Pena explained that if the complainant takes a picture or is willing to testify, a City Attorney's Office hearing can be scheduled. This is a lower level hearing which attempts to work out an agreement between the parties to solve the problem. The next level is a criminal complaint, a misdemeanor filing in the courts. If there is a conviction, a fine is imposed.

Mr. Knapp explained the Mayor is committed to public safety in neighborhoods, and this year granted a 25% increase in the Department's budget, predominantly in staffing. The Department has been under-resourced for many years, so that even a 25% increase is insufficient. The Mayor has committed to a multiple-year investment in the Department. There a number of people to be hired this year, and a hiring plan has been developed and is being followed. Much of the funding given for staff is six-month funding, so that even though the authorization to hire has been given, not all staff can be hired up front, because there are not the funds to pay them for the full year. In addition, even if the funding were present, it would be extremely difficult to hire and train 51 people within a few short months. Mr. Knapp directed the Commissioners' attention to the hiring chart submitted to them by Senior Personnel Analyst Bernie Leichter.

Mr. Leichter reported that although the goal is to have the new positions filled by January 31st, 2000, the Department has taken an aggressive approach in regard to starting the hiring as early as possible. As a result, a number of the positions have already been filled, and it is expected that

others will be filled before the first of the year. Mr. Leichter went through the chart. The Management Assistant position was to be filled by 9/27/99 and was actually filled by 9/12/99. The Chief Management Analyst position was to be hired by 8/1/99, and that deadline was met. Veterinary Assistants were to be hired by 9/27/99; to this point three of those positions have been filled, and additional interviews will be held in the next few weeks to fill the remaining vacancies. Senior Animal Control Officer II position was filled at the beginning of the fiscal year, on July 1st. It is anticipated the Management Analyst II position will be filled by November 15th. Veterinarians will be interviewed sometime next month, and it is hoped they will be on board by December 1st. Interviews for Senior Animal Control Officer I will take place in the next week to 10 days, and it is hoped two positions will be filled by November 1st. It is hoped the next class of Animal Control Officer will be started on November 1st, and it will consist of six to eleven officers. Job offers have been made pending medical results to 8 applicants for Animal Care Technician. Additional interview will take place in the next few weeks to fill the additional openings. A new list for Clerk Typists should be out within the next few weeks; the goal is to fill the 7 vacant positions by 1/1/00. The estimated hire date for Management Analyst I was 12/1/99; the position was actually filled on 10/10. It is anticipated that additional Veterinarian positions plus the existing 3 vacancies will be filled within the next three weeks, and the new hires will be on board by 11/22. It was estimated the Systems Analyst II position would be filled by 7/18, and that deadline was met. Director of Field Operations is now open for filing. The last date to file is 10/28/99, with an additional advisory written session on 11/20/99, and the list will be established in early January and interviews and hiring will take place by 1/31/00. Chief Veterinarian is presently being advertised, with a deadline of 12/3/99 for submission of applications. It is hoped there will be a list established by early January, and interviews and hiring will take place by 1/31/00. It is hoped that authority to hire 5 additional Animal Control Officers will be in place by 1/1/00.

Mr. Avila reminded the Board that the Department has been in need of additional positions for several years and that 50 plus positions were authorized in the new budget. He was struck by the fact that the Department is so far ahead of the anticipated 1/1/00 date scheduled for bringing staff aboard in the new positions authorized, and wanted to publicly thank the Personnel staff for all their hard work.

Mr. Knapp pointed out that Captain Pena has been serving as Acting Director of Field Operations for some time without compensation for some time, and he wished to publicly acknowledge his gratitude to him and to Dr. Casandria Smith, who is the emergency appointee for Chief Veterinarian. The Department is very fortunate to have several very qualified individuals working in these emergency appointments.

Public Hearing on Pet Overpopulation Ordinance

Mr. Avila reminded those present that they needed to submit a speaker's card in order to address the Board, and that they would have one minute to speak. Before opening the floor for the actual hearing, the Board heard special testimony from Mr. John Appleton, a resident whose five-year old son was attacked by a Dalmatian on 10/4/99 at 11:30 a.m. at Whitman Field Airport in Pacoima. The dog was an unattended, intact, aggressive animal. Mr. Appleton found it difficult to talk about the episode, as his son still faces another operation and is still being given counseling as a result of being grabbed by the face by the dog. He lost a large portion of lip and several teeth, and still suffers from nightmares. He required 50 stitches to his face. He listened

to the reports this evening, and had not realized how widespread the problem was until now. He supports any efforts to solve the problem of stray dogs in the City so that this kind of thing will not happen to other children. His son may never appear the same again. If neutering the animal that attacked him would have changed its personality and made it less aggressive, things might have been different for his son.

Twenty-two other individuals addressed the Board regarding their concerns about the proposed ordinance. A complete transcript of all testimony will be part of the permanent record of the hearing. The public hearing portion of the meeting was closed at 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners had no additional comments. Mr. Avila explained that the Board has conducted hearings throughout the City on the issues and that it will conduct one additional hearing next week in the South Los Angeles area, and then begin deliberations on the issue beginning the following month. He invited attendees to stay for the additional business to be conducted, or to leave at this time.

No cards were submitted by persons wishing to make general comments.

General Manager's Report

Mr. Knapp indicated the only item for discussion was the Partners for Life Program, which will kick off on Saturday, October 30th at the East Valley District shelter. Among the exciting things planned for that event, the Mayor will announce the program and the consortium of groups coming together to support the event will include the California Federation of Dog Clubs, among many of the groups that have participated in these hearings. The Department is delighted that so many groups are coming together to help the East Valley shelter to adopt out animals to good homes.

As Board members had no additional comments, Mr. Avila declared the meeting adjourned without objection at 6:35 p.m.

February 7, 2000
ATTEST

[Signature]
PRESIDENT

Carmella [Signature]
COMMISSION SECRETARY