



# MEMORANDUM

Council Agenda  
Item No. IX.E.1&2.  
7/5/2017

## The City of OKLAHOMA CITY

TO: Mayor and City Council

MOTION TO APPROVE E.1.:  
FAILED.  
APPROVED E. 2.

FROM: James D. Couch, City Manager

1. Public hearing and action on proposed amendments to Ordinance relating to Animals. Councilman Greiner.
2. Ordinance on final hearing, relating to Animals, amending the Oklahoma City Municipal Code, 2010, Chapter 8, Article I, Division 5, Section 8-59, related to fees and charges; reclamation of impounded animals; abandonment; adoption; by providing an exception to the return of certain cats to their place of origin.

**Amendment** At the public hearing on June 20, 2017, Councilman Greiner requested that part of the existing exception (d)(1)(a) in Section 8-59 be kept in place with elimination of only the language referencing "the citizen complaining about the cat(s)...." The retained language will still allow a citizen "who brings the cat(s) into the...shelter" to object to their return. Accordingly, staff has prepared an amendment to the version introduced on June 13, 2017.

Councilman Greiner's proposed amended version of exception (d)(1)(a) would read as follows:

- (a) cats shall not be returned to their place of origin if the citizen ~~complaining about the cat(s) or who~~ bringing the cat(s) into the animal shelter objects to their return, unless reclaimed by their owner. If the cats are not being reclaimed by their owner and cannot be returned to their place of origin, the cat(s) may be turned over to a rescue organization or euthanized.

**Purpose** To eliminate the exception regarding the return of cats to their place of origin if the citizen complaining about the cat(s) or bringing the cat(s) into the shelter objects to their return, unless reclaimed by their owner.

**Background** In May of 2012, the Central Oklahoma Humane Society and The City of Oklahoma City entered into a "Community Cats" project, based on the successful "Feral Freedom" concept used to manage free-roaming, loosely-owned and feral cats in other cities. Free-roaming cats are owned, but roam at will. Loosely-owned cats are not owned, but are supported by one or more neighborhood residents. Most of those cats are abandoned cats. They are normally well-tolerated by residents, and generally do well and stay healthy in their natural environment. Feral cats are either born

wild or have reverted to a wild state.

A successful "Community Cats" project includes reduced costs related to the cats' care, euthanasia and disposal at the animal shelter; minimizing staff interactions with cats that require special handling; improving staff morale because of less euthanasia; improving our Live Release Rate; and ensuring that cats returned to the community are sterile and vaccinated against rabies. At one time, all unclaimed community cats were euthanized at the Animal Shelter. There are an estimated 97,000 cats in Oklahoma City that could be defined as "community cats".

Contrary to the fear some might have about such a program, a Community Cats program is not intended to "dump" cats into neighborhoods. Cats are only returned to their place of origin when they are likely to be cared for by someone in the neighborhood. Most residents support community cat programs in other cities and do not want cats that have been living safely and successfully in a neighborhood euthanized simply because a specific person doesn't claim ownership. This Project is not suitable for, and will not be used for, small kittens; indoor-only cats; friendly, socialized cats; owner-relinquished cats; cats who have a known or suspected owner who may claim them; unhealthy cats as determined by the Shelter Veterinarian; injured cats that require hospitalization, fosterage or long-term care; kittens under four months of age that are not able to be vaccinated and sterilized; declawed cats; and cats involved in unprovoked bites or attacks.

This ordinance change would allow all cats who qualify for the "Community Cat" project to be returned to their place of origin.

The Central Oklahoma Humane Society hired staff to canvas neighborhoods from which "community cats" are returned, placing door hangers on every house on the block from which the cat was returned to notify them that a cat was picked up from that neighborhood and that the cat has been sterilized, vaccinated and is being returned to the neighborhood. The door hangers briefly describe the program and refer questions back to the Central Oklahoma Humane Society.

Recently the grant that funded the staff responsible for managing this program for The Central Oklahoma Humane Society expired. This left The Central Oklahoma Humane Society with the tough decision to eliminate the program due to the number of cats being placed in the program being much lower than originally anticipated. When the program was originally proposed, it was estimated that approximately 2,000 additional cats could be saved. In 2015, only 920 cats were saved through this program. Amending this ordinance would ensure all cats eligible for the project could be saved by returning them to their place of origin.

Staff will continue to contact owners of tagged or microchipped cats to determine if the owner is going to reclaim them. When the cats come into the shelter, staff will inform the citizens about the Project.

Funding to sterilize community cats that come through the Animal Shelter will come from the Department's Special Purpose Fund, which derives its funding from one-half of the adoption fees collected at the Shelter, and is designated to fund the spaying and neutering of owned and Shelter pets. When needed, supplemental funding will also be used from the Department's Special Purpose Fund, Donations-Operating.

The Central Oklahoma Humane Society will fund services provided to cats trapped by their employees, will fund the employees who manage the project, and will fund the cost of marketing the project to the community, including the cost of door hangers and flyers if the ordinance is amended as proposed.

This program has been successful in many other cities across the country. These cities have seen decreases of cats in the shelter, cats living in the community, cat euthanasia and requests for field response regarding cats. Cities like Jacksonville, Florida; Indianapolis, Indiana; Huntsville, Alabama and Charleston, South Carolina cut the number of cats entering the shelter and living in the community in half within 5 years of implementing this type of program.

Estimated Cost                      No additional cost to the City

Review                                      Development Services

Recommendation: Public hearing be held, amendment be consider and Ordinance be adopted.

Attachment