



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:15-1386

Agenda Item Number: 3.

Agenda Date: 3/17/2015

In Control: Quality of Life Committee

DEPARTMENT: Animal Care Services

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Kathy Davis

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: City-Wide

SUBJECT:

An Ordinance amending Chapter 5 of the City Code.

SUMMARY:

An Ordinance amending Chapter 5 of the City Code of San Antonio, Texas, by requiring that a registered microchip replace a pet license tag as part of the City's licensing program.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In FY 2012, ACS began implementing its newly revised Strategic Plan by incorporating the three strategic priorities of: (1) enhanced enforcement; (2) controlling the stray animal population and; (3) increasing the live release rate. The initiative set forth in this proposed ordinance amendment is aligned with, and a component of, two ACS Strategic Priorities: Enhanced Enforcement and Increasing the Live Release rate.

History of ACS Licensing Program

Like many cities across the country, San Antonio utilizes a licensing program with the intent to assist ACS with returning pets to their owner, gauge the number of pets in our community and ensuring pets are vaccinated for rabies. Current ordinance requires any cat or dog 4 months and older be licensed with the City and requires a tag worn on the pet's collar or harness. Pet owners are also required to keep a corresponding certificate as part of their pet's paperwork. City licenses are purchased on a tiered-pricing schedule to incentivize and reward pet owners who have sterilized pets. Residents who own sterilized pets can purchase a City license at an aggressively discounted price. Owners must provide proof of current rabies vaccination in order to purchase a City license.

The City licensing program is separate from the State-mandated rabies vaccination program which requires all cats and dogs be vaccinated against rabies. A rabies vaccination can be obtained from any veterinarian. In addition to the license tag, vaccinated pets are required to wear a rabies tag to identify that the pet is vaccinated against rabies. No recommended changes to the existing rabies program are associated with this proposed ordinance amendment and pets will still be required to vaccinate their pet annually.

Animal Care Services utilizes a third-party vendor, Pet Data, to administer the City's licensing program. The City pays Pet Data \$3.85 for every license issued. Licenses are issued with every pet adopted from ACS. San Antonio residents can also purchase a new or renewal license at the Animal Care Services facility or online through the department and vendor websites at \$5.00 for a sterilized pet or \$50.00 for an unsterilized pet. Current ordinance requires residents to re-register their pets annually.

A successful licensing program is largely dependent upon owners re-licensing their pet every year. Over the last few years, ACS has proactively issued more licenses than ever before - over 23,000 licenses were issued in FY 2014 alone. Furthermore, the department provided over 30,000 in free pet licensing since FY 2012. However, the successes made in issuance of new licenses are not reflected in the renewal rates. Although Pet Data mails out renewal notices at 60-days and 30-days from pending expiration, only 25% of licensed pet owners renew their license. Based upon the renewal rate and the current cost to run the licensing program (over \$100,000 annually), ACS believes that focusing on the microchip instead of a pet license will be more effective to hold owners accountable and for returning lost pets to their owner.

History of ACS Microchip Program

Recent Departmental changes and initiatives have made the conversion from city licenses to registered microchip a natural step of progression. For example, current ordinance requires a microchip for any pet impounded and then outcome at ACS. Furthermore, the department streamlined internal processes for microchip scanning and identification by dedicating staff members to contact owners of pets found with microchips in ACS care.

In addition, in FY 2014, ACS upgraded our microchips to provide lifetime registration for all pets adopted or returned-to-owner (RTO). Lifetime registered microchips can now be purchased through ACS for only \$20.00 per microchip. When a microchip is registered, the owner's information is secured by the microchip company making it possible for ACS to locate a pet's owner when the pet is found. Lifetime registrations make it possible for the owner to update the contact information free of charge any time, even when ownership is transferred to another individual.

As a result of these efforts, RTOs increased 35% in FY 2014 over FY 2013 and an additional 21% in the first quarter of FY 2015 when compared to the same time period in FY 2014. Pets returned to their owner represent 14% of total live outcomes in FY 2015 compared to only 8% of total live outcomes in FY 2013.

The department's greater success in getting pets back home are, in large part, due to the increased focus on microchips in our operations. While the proposal to replace the existing pet license with a registered microchip has not been implemented in other cities, the many steps taken thus far by ACS demonstrates that greater success will come through an aggressive microchip program than through the existing and antiquated licensing program.

ISSUE:

This amendment to Chapter 5 of the City Code will require a registered microchip replace the City's existing licensing program effective June 1, 2015. Registered microchip shall mean "an identification chip implanted under the skin of an animal for the purpose of identifying its owner which has been registered with a microchip

registration company with current ownership information to include owner name, address, and phone number (if available), and the description of the pet.”

Under this ordinance, a current City license shall continue to be valid until its expiration at which point a pet’s registered microchip shall constitute compliance in the enforcement of the City’s licensing program.

This ordinance amendment will still require an annual permit (in addition to a registered microchip) for any pet deemed dangerous or aggressive under current City ordinance.

ALTERNATIVES:

ACS looked into potentially partnering with private veterinarians to also issue City licenses. However, private veterinarians who operate as a business would expect an incentive to take on an additional service as part of their practice. This is complicated by budgetary constraints, legal concerns, and City policy - which would require a contractual relationship be established with every private veterinarian issuing a City license. Because this would take substantial resources and capacity to effectively manage, this option is not recommended. Therefore, should this item not be approved, ACS would continue to utilizing existing licensing program as is.

FISCAL IMPACT:

ACS does not anticipate a significant reduction in revenue in association with this initiative. Although the proposed elimination of the licensing program will result in a \$41,000 revenue reduction from Pet Licenses in FY 2015, ACS will be able to offset this loss by an increase in revenue associated with the implantation and registration of microchips under the new program.

To help ensure minimal budgetary impact, ACS will include a targeted marketing/educational campaign towards those whose pet’s current city license is expiring to inform them about the ordinance change, the need for a registered microchip, and that ACS can provide this service at an affordable price. ACS will use existing resources to implement the marketing/educational outreach campaign associated with this initiative.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Quality of Life Committee approve of this ordinance amendment, which is aligned with ACS’s Strategic Priorities of enhanced enforcement and increasing the Live Release rate and concur that this item go before the full City Council for approval.