



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

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Agenda Item Number: 23.

Agenda Date: 4/30/2015

In Control: City Council A Session

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.

This initiative is not just an aspect of the ACS strategic priority of *Increasing Live Release* rate. ACS is able to *Enhance Enforcement* through allowing Animal Care Officers the opportunity to educate and have critical conversations about responsible pet ownership and modify behaviors of residents with their owned pets roaming City streets and subsequently reunited from the field or the shelter and provide additional enforcement, if needed, for repeat offenders. This initiative also allows us the ability to return owned pets from the shelter sooner, freeing up valuable kennel space for Officers to impound “lost pets and true strays.”

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 outcomed 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 FY 2014, ACS also upgraded our microchips to provide lifetime registration for all pets adopted or returned-to-owner (RTO) from ACS. Basic lifetime registered microchips can now be purchased through ACS for a one-time fee of \$20.00 per microchip which provides owner information in a microchip database and owner contact if a microchip company is alerted with an owner's found pet. While microchip companies may offer premium recovery services for an additional nominal fee, the premium recovery services are not required as part of this ordinance.

When a microchip is registered, the owner's information is secured by the microchip company making it possible for ACS and varying professional partners such as veterinary clinics and other animal shelters 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. Most microchip companies, including HomeAgain (ACS' current contract microchip partner) *will not sell* owner information to third parties and will only provide owner information if a professional partner (veterinary clinic or other shelter) contacts HomeAgain with a found pet. While pet owners may receive periodic newsletters from the microchip companies, customers may 'opt out' at any time, should an owner elect to do so.

Microchipped pets have a higher chance of being returned to their owner through the scanning of a pet for a microchip and the subsequent investigation and return to owner via an Officer in the field - preventing a pet from even entering the shelter and taking up valuable kennel space. For pets with an identified microchip already in the shelter, ACS employs dedicated staff to investigate, make contact, and even deliver an owned pet

back to their owner. As a result of these enhanced microchip efforts, RTOs increased 35% in FY 2014 over FY 2013 and an additional 25% in the first half of FY 2015 when compared to the first half of FY 2014.

The department's greater success in getting pets back home is, 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 major 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. ACS has reached out to and received the support from a multitude of animal welfare organizations in San Antonio including the San Antonio Humane Society, Animal Defense League, SpaySA, Helotes Humane Society, Animal Welfare Society of Bandera County, and Green Dog Kennels, just to name a few.

ISSUE:

This amendment to Chapter 5 of the City Code will require a registered microchip replace the City's existing licensing program effective June 30, 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.

In order to incentivize owner compliance, the City will reduce the total cost of a lifetime registered microchip purchased from ACS to \$5.00 for the first year of the ordinance's implementation. This will ensure that no added financial burden will be placed upon a pet owner who wishes to be a responsible pet owner.

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 examined the possibility of 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 utilize the existing licensing program as is.

FISCAL IMPACT:

ACS anticipates a reduction of revenue due to reducing the purchase price of the microchip to \$5.00 for the first year. This anticipated reduction of \$73,000 in revenue will be included and accounted for in the City's 6+6 budget and in the 5 year financial forecast.

To help ensure minimal budgetary impact, ACS will include a targeted marketing/educational outreach 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 the approval of this ordinance amendment, which is aligned with ACS's Strategic Priorities of enhanced enforcement and increasing the Live Release rate. This item was presented to and recommended by the ACS Advisory Board on December 3, 2014 as well as the Quality of Life Committee on March 17, 2015. This item was also presented in the City Council B Session on April 15, 2015.