

The following is the Budget Advocates Report for the Los Angeles Animal Services Department, for fiscal year 2025-26, with the Addendum which starts on page 6.

ANIMAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Meeting of December 3, 2024

ATTENDEES

Los Angeles Animal Services Department (LAAS): Annette Ramirez, Interim General Manager; Curtis Watts, Assistant General Manager for Administration; Sharon Lee, Senior Management Analyst.

Neighborhood Council Budget Advocates: Jeffrey Mausner (Budget Representative); Sheryl Akerblom; Lynda Valencia; Michelle Cornelius (Shelter Volunteer).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase funding for the Animal Sterilization Fund to reduce shelter overcrowding, achieve and maintain No-Kill, and save the City tens of millions of dollars in the future [major financial savings in the future]
- Expand funding for the Community Cat Program to meet the minimum requirement of the Environmental Impact Report, partially make up for no funding for 10 years, achieve and maintain No-Kill, and save the City millions of dollars in the future [major financial savings in the future]
- Work with the State Fish and Wildlife Department and develop innovative programs to effectively and humanely deal with the increased presence of coyotes in our neighborhoods
- Purchase two-way radios for staff and volunteer safety
- Raise funding for food for the animals (see addendum for further details, *)
- Augment funding for medicine and medical supplies (see addendum for further details, *link to addendum).

Staffing

- Boost funding for the Animal Services Department and expand staffing to adequately and humanely care for stray, homeless, and surrendered animals; to enforce the spay/neuter laws; and to provide safety in our neighborhoods
- Recruit additional volunteers to care for, socialize, and exercise the dogs and cats [major financial savings]
- Continue funding for Dogs Playing For Life (DPFL) to provide enrichment and exercise for the dogs
- Start the Reserve Animal Control Officer (RACO) program [financial savings]

DISCUSSION

The Los Angeles Animal Services Department (“LAAS” or “the Department”) is one of the largest municipal animal shelter systems in the United States with 6 fully functioning municipal shelters and two leased-out shelters, annually serving approximately 40,000 to 45,000 animals and responding to approximately 43,000 service calls involving animals or people in danger and

other animal matters. LAAS promotes and protects the health, safety, and welfare of animals and people.

Underfunding

For fiscal year 2023-24, the adopted operating budget of LAAS was \$31,699,537. This department budget represented approximately **one quarter of one percent of the City budget**. That small share of the City budget had to cover the care for all of the animals in the City including those in the six fully functioning municipal animal shelters. LAAS's funding comes mostly from the General Fund, with a small amount coming from Special Funds.

Chronic underfunding of the Animal Services Department led to conditions at the shelters that resulted in several critical exposés in the *Los Angeles Times* and other news media. For example:

'It's Inhumane': Dogs At L.A. Animal Shelters Go Weeks Or Months Without Being Walked, July 14, 2022: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-07-14/la-city-animal-shelters-dogs-sit-in-kennels-weeks-months-without-walks>

'Horriified': L.A. City Council Members Call For Action On Overcrowded Animal Shelters, July 16, 2022: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-07-16/l-a-city-council-members-called-for-action-city-shelters>

LA Animal Services Officials Blame Staff Shortage, Pandemic Challenges For Issues At City Shelters, July 20, 2022: <https://abc7.com/animal-shelters-la-city-council-concerns-emergency-meeting/12061158/>

Public Support

These exposés created strong support from the public and Neighborhood Councils for a significant increase in the operating budget of LAAS to improve the conditions in the shelters. Leadership of the Animal Services Department made adequate funding for the Department and shelters a top priority.

LAAS's **proposed** budget for fiscal year 2024-25 reflected this outcry, requesting \$91,718,443. The Neighborhood Council Budget Advocates supported this request. See Budget Advocates Animal Services Department Report: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yXUcaZ0KB0fk4Myrls34HLRjf1ZdxJf/view_pages_14-26. If this full amount had been appropriated, LAAS's budget would still be well under one percent of the total City budget -- approximately seven tenths of one percent of the City's budget -- to care for all animals in the City, including those in the City animal shelters.

A large increase in funding was necessary to humanely and properly care for animals in the shelters and for the safety of people and animals throughout the City, due to severe underfunding of the Department for over 40 years. In addition, increased costs and inflation have severely impacted LAAS. Some animal supplies and veterinary care have increased in cost much more than general inflation, some items becoming several times more expensive than they were in 2018.

Despite the many news stories which highlighted the terrible conditions in the City shelters, the CAO (Chief Administrative Officer), Mayor, and/or City Council actually reduced the

Department's budget from the inadequate 2023-24 amount. The actual budget for the Animal Services Department for the 2024-25 fiscal year was \$30,307,409, approximately one third of what the Department requested and less than the previous year's budget.

Shelter Conditions

As a result of the failure to adequately fund the Animal Services Department, conditions in the shelters have deteriorated and euthanasia has increased, including killing dogs for lack of space. See: *Mayor Bass Said She'd Save L.A.'s Shelter Animals. More Dogs And Cats Are Dying*, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-11-22/la-animal-shelters-more-dogs-and-cats-are-dying>:

"The number of dogs euthanized in animal shelters run by the city of L.A. has skyrocketed this year. From January to September, 1,224 dogs were euthanized at the city's six shelters — a 72% increase compared with the same period a year ago, according to a Times analysis. ... About 1,517 cats were euthanized through September— a 17% increase from a year ago. ... The city's euthanasia list, available on its website, shows that Jake and some other dogs are being sentenced to death not because they are seriously ill or arrive with severe behavioral issues but because the chronically understaffed and underfunded shelters cannot meet their basic needs."

According to LAAS's animal welfare consultant Kristen Hassen, Los Angeles City's Animal Services Department is among the lowest-funded large shelter systems in the country. *Id.*

See also *L.A. Times Editorial: Let's stop killing animals in shelters and get more of them adopted out*, 12-18-2024: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2024-12-18/los-angeles-animal-shelters-overcrowding-euthanasia>: "Los Angeles Animal Services ... is one of the largest shelter systems in the country and shamefully underfunded, according to advocates and rescuers and some elected city officials."

Cal/OSHA Citation

The severe underfunding of the Department of Animal Services was decisively brought home on December 17, 2024, when Cal/OSHA (California Division of Occupational Safety and Health) cited and fined the Department of Animal Services \$563,250 for "willful serious accident-related violations" after an employee was mauled at the Harbor Shelter on May 31, 2024.¹ One of the key findings was that the City "failed to evaluate and mitigate risks caused by overcrowding, which led to employee injuries from animal attacks."

The overcrowding of animals means that the shelter was exceeding its capacity for care which includes not only an organization's number of humane housing units, but also shelter personnel, resources, and available outcomes.² This violation must be corrected, regardless of the City's financial health, otherwise the City risks future penalties by Cal/OSHA.

¹ [Cal/OSHA cites Harbor Animal Services Center \\$563,250 for willful serious accident-related violations after worker mauled | California Department of Industrial Relations](#)

² The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, Second Edition, December 2022: [View of The Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#) (see page 8).

If the Department cannot provide enough employees to properly care for animals at maximum capacity for care (e.g., all available humane housing units occupied), then the Department may have to kill for space, an outcome which is directly contrary to the City's No-Kill policy. That is the choice facing the City – adequately fund the animal shelters in the 2024-25 budget or kill healthy adoptable animals!³

Next Year's Budget

The Animal Services Department Requested Budget for 2025-26 asks for a moderate increase from the previous fiscal year budget. **The total requested departmental budget for 2025-26 is \$34,884,699.** This is a very reasonable request, taking into account the City's dire financial condition, but also considering the chronic underfunding of the shelters for years, the overcrowded conditions, the insufficient staffing, the Cal/OSHA citation, and the life and death situation faced by dogs and cats in the City shelters. This amount is less than three tenths of one percent of the City budget (less than 0.3%), to care for all of the animals in the City.⁴ We very strongly recommend that this amount not be reduced!

Spay/Neuter

The Non-Departmental request for spay/neuter funding is for \$12.2 million; \$9.9 million for the Animal Sterilization Fund and \$2.4 million for the Citywide Cat Program. This is an increase of \$5.7 million over last year's funding of the Animal Sterilization Fund and a \$1 million increase for the Citywide Cat Program. While it is always better, and it always saves money in the long run, to spend more on spay/neuter, this is at least a significant increase. As discussed below and in the addendum (*link to addendum), failure to provide adequate funding for spay/neuter is penny wise and 'pound' foolish. We very strongly recommend that this amount not be reduced!

See: *Failure To Provide Adequate Funding For Spay/Neuter Is "Penny Wise And 'Pound' Foolish."* October 14, 2024, <https://www.citywatchla.com/animal-watch/29704-failure-to-provide-adequate-funding-for-spay-neuter-is-penny-wise-and-pound-foolish>

Crucial City Funding: Spay and Neuter Saves Money and Lives, December 2, 2019, <https://www.citywatchla.com/369-budget-advocates/18933-crucial-city-funding-spay-and-neuter-saves-money-and-lives?highlight=WyJtYXVzbnVylI0=>

See also Resolutions and Community Impact Statements passed by the Tarzana Neighborhood Council regarding adequate funding for spay/neuter, set forth in the Addendum, *link.

Monetary Restraints Imposed By The City's Poor Financial Condition

LAAS' Interim General Manager Annette Ramirez, Assistant General Manager Curtis Watts,

³ Another violation listed by Cal/OSHA was the "lack of an effective communication system [which] delayed critical emergency response and treatment for injuries." Given this violation, it is imperative that the City allocate money to purchase the 154 military grade radios for shelter and field staff to replace the current ones which have reached end-of-life and are no longer serviced by the manufacturer.

⁴ It is less than half a percent of the General Fund.

Senior Management Analyst Sharon Lee, and the other Animal Services Department employees who wrote the Proposed Budget have done a good job in creating a reasonable proposed budget, considering the monetary restraints imposed by the City's poor financial condition. While it appears that more money should be allocated to the animals of Los Angeles, particularly to spay/neuter, at the least, nothing should be cut from the Proposed Budget as it works its way through the appropriation process.

We completely agree with and support the following statement made by the Animal Services Department in its Proposed Budget: "We recognize that the current budget instruction calls for budget requests to be cost-neutral through the use of offsets, but as a small Department with limited resources seeking to address a number of shortcomings, we do not have the capacity to suggest offsets at this time." Please keep this in mind as you review the Proposed Budget – offsets will result in the deaths and suffering of dogs, cats, and other animals and unsafe conditions in the shelters and streets of Los Angeles!

CONCLUSION

While the Animal Services Department has been chronically underfunded, the proposed budget is reasonable, considering the monetary restraints imposed by the City's poor financial condition. More money should be allocated to the animals of Los Angeles, particularly to spay/neuter. Nothing should be cut from the Proposed Budget as it works its way through the appropriation process. Even with the modest increases requested by LAAS, its operational budget will still be less than three tenths of one percent of the City budget (less than 0.3%), to care for all of the animals in the City and provide safety to its residents.

Addendum for Animal Services Department Report

Increase the Food Budget

We strongly support the increase in the budget for the purchase of animal food. In the current fiscal year, the food budget was cut by \$100,000, which represented a \$220,000 *decrease* from the amount allocated prior to the pandemic. While the total number of animals impounded in the last year is still slightly lower than pre-pandemic, the cumulative rate of inflation since 2020 is 22%⁵ so to keep up with inflation the \$400,000 allocated in FY 2020-21 would need to be approximately \$488,000 today.

As can also be seen in the last column in the chart below, although there has been 33% inflation between 2014 and the present, the amount spent for food per animal has actually decreased since 2014. (See table below for a history of the amount allocated to animal food and the total animals impounded.)

It appears that the recent budget cut for food was the impetus for the Department to switch brands of food. The dogs, in particular, do not seem to like the new food as much. We hope the requested increase of \$100,000, as well as assuring that there will be sufficient food, will be enough to switch back to Canidae (for dogs) and Felidae (for cats).

Table: Animal Food Budget Totals and Total Intakes FY 2014-15 through FY 2025-26

Fiscal Year	Food and Grain	Total Number of Animal Intakes	Average Amt. Per Animal (Food Budget Divided by Number of Intakes)
2014-15	\$518,210	57,222	\$9.05
2015-16	\$518,210	51,667	\$10.03
2016-17	\$518,210	52,460	\$9.88
2017-18	\$400,000	Complete FY data unavailable	
2018-19	\$520,000	Complete FY data unavailable	
2019-20	\$520,000	44,987	\$11.55
2020-21	\$400,000	33,327	\$12.00
2021-22	\$400,000	40,382	\$9.90
2022-23	\$304,000	45,225	\$6.72
2023-24	\$400,000	46,149	\$8.67
2024-25	\$300,000	Data incomplete but it appears from the WoofStat reports that intakes will continue their yearly increase	
2025-26*	\$400,000 requested	n/a	

*Proposed budget amount

Totals come from the White Books posted on the CAO's website and LAAS WoofStat reports.

⁵ According to The U.S. Inflation Calculator (<https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/> or https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

It should be noted that while intakes have somewhat decreased since 2014-15, length of stay in the shelters has increased for many animals, particularly for large dogs, so the table above does not reflect the current overcrowded conditions of the shelters compared to pre-pandemic conditions.

Augment the Medicine and Medical Supplies Budget

According to the White Books posted on the CAO’s website, the budget for medical supplies has not increased in over 10 years; in fact, in the FY 2024-25 budget the total amount was *reduced* by \$100,000 (see table below for the budgeted amounts and number of animals treated in-house since FY 2014-2015). The Department’s request for \$488,591 is simply a return to the amount allocated in FY 2014-15, which is a *decrease* given that the cumulative inflation rate since 2014 is 33%. If this budget line item were to keep up with the rate of inflation, the amount requested would be just over \$651,000.⁶ We strongly encourage the City to fully fund this request.⁷

Table: Medical Supplies Budget and Number of Animals Treated In-House
FY 2014-15 through 2025-26

Fiscal Year	Medical Supplies Budget	Number of Animals Treated In-House
2014-15	\$488,591	Data not available
2015-16	\$488,591	46,696
2016-17	\$488,591	46,555
2017-18	\$488,591	47,307
2018-19	\$488,591	48,868
2019-20	\$488,591	41,752
2020-21	\$488,591	27,968
2021-22	\$488,591	35,155
2022-23	\$388,591	44,469
2023-24	\$488,591	41,399
2024-25	\$388,591	Data incomplete but it appears that in-house medical treatments will continue to increase
2025-26*	\$488,591 requested	n/a

*Proposed budget amount.

Totals come from the White Books posted on the CAO’s website and the Department’s FY 25-26 budget proposal.

⁶ Percentage and total from The U.S. Inflation Calculator.

⁷ In the Mayor’s letter to departments, she encouraged departments to identify costs savings through new technologies and other innovative practices. The City Council may want to request a report back on how one-dose injectable medications like Convenia and Ivermectin and one-time ear infection treatments like Opti-pak could reduce the amount of time the Registered Vet Technicians currently spend dispensing medication once or twice a day to each sick animal. These one-time medications could also ensure the animal receives the medicine; currently pills are left in food balls which the animal may or may not eat.

Reserve Animal Control Officer (RACO) Program

LAAS should continue to work to start the Reserve Animal Control Officer (RACO) program. This is a program to train and utilize volunteers to serve as Animal Control Officers. This program will save the City money and provide needed assistance to the Animal Control Officers. Stray animals on the streets of the City are increasing; dead dogs and cats can be seen on the streets and pose a health hazard. RACO volunteers would also have an educational role, meeting with community groups to keep them apprised of Department activities. There are currently no volunteers for the RACO program. Recruitment for RACO volunteers should be stepped up.

LAAS Staffing

There is a shortage of Animal Care Technicians (ACTs), Administrative Clerks, and Registered Vet Technicians (RVTs) at City shelters. Patrons sometimes must wait over an hour to adopt animals and some patrons leave without adopting because they cannot find someone to help them. The desk in the animal receiving area is understaffed -- or not staffed at all -- because ACTs are cleaning, helping other members of the public, or have to pick up animals from pre-adoption spay-neuter. There is other work that goes undone because there are not enough ACTs. The Proposed Budget requests that additional funding be appropriated to hire and regularize ACTs, Clerks, and RVTs.

At times, ACTs are assigned certain specialties such as Volunteer Liaison and Life Saving Liaison. It should be made clear that all these specialties are categorized as ACTs and those hired will also have responsibilities to care for the animals and be responsible for performing all ACT tasks.

The Department has also requested four new District Supervisors to help oversee all operations at the shelter-level. According to Kristin Hassen, the consultant hired to perform a safety audit, having a single person perform this task at each shelter is the number one thing which must change in order to guide strategic planning. ([Consultant Assesses Problems at LA Animal Shelters – MyNewsLA.com](#)).

Ms. Hassen also stated that supervisors are too busy surviving day-to-day and therefore do not have time to examine protocols or solve overarching problems. This is why it is important to fund the Department's request for more ACT supervisors. If the request for more ACT Supervisors to cover swing and/or grave shift is approved, this will not only ensure better supervision of the work done on these shifts, it will also have a positive impact on the operations of the day shift in that some of the administrative work could be assigned to the swing/grave ACT supervisor (see below for a list of administrative responsibilities which could be shifted to the night supervisors), thereby freeing up the day shift supervisors to perform more walk-throughs of the shelter to ensure the work is being done and done humanely, as well as identify problems and correct them. Lastly, having a supervisor on the swing shift may open up the possibility of allowing volunteers to come in after 5pm, something which volunteers have been requesting for several years.

Here are several tasks which could be shifted to a swing/grave supervisor, thereby freeing up the overburdened supervisors on day shift to provide more oversight as well as assist the public:

- Inventory
- Ordering of supplies
- Monthly schedule for Animal Care Technicians
- Respond to emails (e.g., complaints, requests from New Hope rescue partners)
- Facilitating rescues by New Hope partners
- Prepare paperwork for animals going to spay/neuter the next day and make sure signs are placed on kennels
- Assist the public who come to the shelter when staff is feeding the dogs (feeding is a very time-consuming process and interruptions because the public is at the front door is not beneficial to the hundreds of hungry dogs waiting to be fed)
- Decide what to do if an employee calls in sick for the grave shift
- Cover the phone if the only Animal Control Officer on-duty must leave to respond to an emergency.

Coyotes in Our Neighborhoods

A common issue Neighborhood Council representatives hear from stakeholders is coyotes roaming the neighborhoods. As raised in previous Budget Advocates reports, dogs and cats are being killed in people's backyards. Coyotes are stalking people in highly urban areas. The citizens of many neighborhoods are afraid, both for their pets and their families. On December 2, 2022, a child was attacked by a coyote in the driveway of her house in Woodland Hills. The coyote was attempting to drag the child away; she was saved by her father scaring the coyote.

When this issue has been raised with LAAS in the past, the response was that coyotes are not the responsibility of LAAS, but of the State Fish and Wildlife Department. Because this has become such a significant problem in some neighborhoods, LAAS should increase its work with the State Fish and Wildlife Department to come up with an effective and humane way to deal with coyotes in the City.

Experts say that for every coyote that is trapped and removed to a safe location, one or two new coyotes will take its place. State Fish and Wildlife has stated that a Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) program will not be effective. If that is the case, State Fish and Wildlife should come up with another humane program to reduce the coyote population in urban areas. A possibility is to ask the Department of Water and Power to establish watering troughs for wildlife in the Santa Monica Mountains. It is likely that wildlife prey of the coyotes (as well as the coyotes themselves) have been forced into urban areas looking for water during droughts and the coyotes have followed their prey.

If this suggestion is not feasible or effective, what other programs might work? LAAS should determine whether a humane and effective solution to the coyote problem could be funded under the City's Innovation Fund. If the coyote problem is not humanely handled now, support will grow for rounding up coyotes and exterminating them, which probably won't be effective. If the coyote problem is not handled now, there is either going to be a child who is killed or seriously injured by coyotes, or a lot of dead coyotes, or both. LAAS should, of course, continue

to offer its seminars on dealing with coyotes to the public, but also explore additional innovative ways to deal with the growing coyote problem.

History and Future of No-Kill in Los Angeles

In 2017 the City Council passed and the Mayor signed City Council File 17-0170 to make the achievement and maintenance of No-Kill a high priority for the City. The City should not kill healthy, adoptable animals merely because of lack of kennel space. LAAS's 2025-26 budget request recognizes achievement of No-Kill as a long-term priority of the City and the Department.

Spay/neuter is the key to reaching and maintaining No-Kill. Spay/neuter also saves the City a great deal of money in the long run. It is much less expensive to spay/neuter dogs, cats, and rabbits than it is to care for generations of their offspring at the City shelters and ultimately have to put them to death when the shelters run out of space.

According to the Humane Society, female cats can breed three times a year and have an average of 4 kittens per litter. Dogs can breed twice a year with litters of 6-10 puppies. In 7 years, 1 unspayed female cat and her offspring can produce 420,000 cats and one unspayed female dog and her offspring can produce 99,000 dogs. While these are just the statistical possibilities and the numbers would be much less in the real world, failure to spay/neuter just a few dogs and cats will lead to the birth of hundreds, if not thousands, of homeless dogs and cats over several years and would be penny wise and "pound" foolish. See: *Crucial City Funding: Spay and Neuter Saves Money and Lives*, December 2, 2019, <https://www.citywatchla.com/369-budget-advocates/18933-crucial-city-funding-spay-and-neuter-saves-money-and-lives?highlight=WyJtYXVzbnVylI0=>

Prior to 2015, \$1.1 million was transferred annually from the General Fund to the Animal Sterilization Fund. This was decreased to \$500,000 in fiscal year 2015-2016 and then no transfers were made in fiscal years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. The Animal Sterilization Fund was about to run out of money which would have eliminated spay/neuter services for low-income pet owners. The City Council stepped in to provide \$850,000 in May 2018.

The City Council provided \$400,000 in the fiscal year 2018-2019 budget pursuant to the recommendation of the City Administrative Officer (CAO). In May 2019 they appropriated an additional \$498,000 pursuant to the recommendation of the Neighborhood Council Budget Advocates. See http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2019/19-0600_pc_5-7-19.pdf pages 5-6 and http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2018/18-0600_pc_4-28-18.pdf

LAAS's proposed budget for 2025-26 requests \$9.8 million from the General Fund to the Animal Sterilization Fund. This amount is necessary because of the severe underfunding of the Animal Sterilization Fund for many years, causing the dog and cat population in Los Angeles to get out of control. The \$9.8 million figure is based on the number of estimated sterilizations in 2025-26, and the recommended increased rates in the revised fee study released on 11/28/2023, Council File # 23-0452, https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-0452_rpt_das_11-28-2023.pdf. If increased funding is not provided now, the overpopulation of dogs and cats will just get worse and exponentially more money will be required to deal with the problem in the future. Again, failure to provide adequate funding for spay neuter is penny wise and 'pound' foolish.

The contracted cost with approved veterinarians for spay/neuter pursuant to City spay/neuter vouchers is currently \$125 per dog and \$70 per cat. Full-cost vouchers for spay/neuter are available to low-income families. The Animal Services Department and Tarzana Neighborhood Council have requested that the City Council raise the amounts veterinarians are paid for spay/neuter pursuant to the vouchers. As stated in the Tarzana Neighborhood Council Community Impact Statement:

“[The City should] encourage spay/neuter of pets by increasing funding for more free and discounted spay/neuter vouchers and increasing the amount veterinarians are paid for performing spay/neuters under the vouchers. The amount of payment to vets pursuant to the vouchers is ridiculously low and, as a result, there are not enough vets willing to perform spay/neuters under the vouchers. Increasing the availability of vouchers and raising the fees paid to veterinarians to encourage them to perform spay/neuters is a necessary step in solving the [shelter overcrowding] emergency.”

See: Tarzana Neighborhood Council Community Impact Statement
https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-1008_cis_10-26-2023.pdf, in City Council File 23-1008

<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=23-1008>

Tarzana Neighborhood Council Community Impact Statement
https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-0452_cis_12-20-2023.pdf in City Council File 23-0452

<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=23-0452>

On December 10, 2024, the Tarzana Neighborhood Council unanimously passed an additional Community Impact Statement regarding adequate funding for spay/neuter:

“Resolved, the Tarzana Neighborhood Council Board adopts the Animal Welfare Committee’s request that sufficient funding be supported by the City for spay/neuter, including sufficient funding for spay/neuter vouchers, and sufficient personnel in the Animal Services Department to enforce spay/neuter laws. This resolution shall be communicated to the City Council and other relevant City agencies. This resolution can be filed as a Community Impact Statement in support of any City Council resolution or motion on this subject.”

There is a severe veterinarian shortage in Los Angeles. There are not enough veterinarians who will accept the current low amounts to perform all the necessary spay/neuters. A normal spay/neuter for a member of the public costs in the range of \$400 to \$1000 so vets that accept the current vouchers should be heartily thanked, but there will not be enough such vets to handle all the vouchers issued.

The amounts proposed to be paid to veterinarians pursuant to the revised fee study released by the Department on 11/28/2023 are as follows:

- a. Free Certificate: \$120 for a cat, \$195 for a dog, and \$250 for a rabbit,
- b. Discount Voucher: \$70 for a cat, \$130 for a dog or rabbit,
- c. Mobile Spay and Neuter: \$150 for a cat, \$240 for a dog, and \$250 for a rabbit,
- d. Citywide Cat Program Voucher: \$120.

We hope that these amounts will be sufficient to induce enough vets to participate in the voucher program, to at least cover their costs. There is concern that these amounts may not be enough because the proposal to increase is already more than a year old and inflation has not been taken into account. These increased amounts should be finally approved by the CAO, City Council, and Mayor as soon as possible. If it turns out that these amounts aren't sufficient to get enough vets into the voucher program, the amounts should be promptly further increased.

After many years in which thousands of animals were killed in the City shelters for lack of space, the City achieved or came close to achieving No-Kill for dogs. (Over a 90% live save rate is considered No-Kill. The remaining 10% is a rough estimate of the proportion of animals who are too sick or injured to be saved or too aggressive to be adopted.)

This was a monumental achievement for which the Animal Services Department and the entire City can be proud. This accomplishment is now jeopardized, in large part because of lack of adequate funding for spay/neuter. Decreasing the numbers of dogs and cats who are born is the basis for achieving and maintaining No-Kill. If spays/neuters are not increased, the shelters will be killing many dogs and cats for lack of space. Housing and killing animals cost the City much more than the additional funds requested for the Animal Sterilization Fund.

The City has not yet achieved No-Kill for cats, in large part because of the former injunction against Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR). TNR is a program for controlling free roaming cats by trapping them, neutering them, and returning them to the place where they were trapped to live out their lives, but not produce additional offspring. Organizations that wanted to round up and exterminate free roaming cats obtained an injunction against the City's participation in TNR.

After many years, and the completion of an expensive Environmental Impact Report, the TNR Injunction was lifted in 2021. LAAS can now assist non-profit organizations and individuals in carrying out TNR, including providing vouchers to reduce the cost of spay/neuter for free roaming cats, also known as community cats. Because of the TNR Injunction and the inability of LAAS to assist in TNR for 11 years, the feral cat population greatly increased. The budget for spay/neuter of community cats will have to be greatly increased for the next few years to make up for this and get the community cat population under control.

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Community Cat Program recommends that 20,000 free roaming cats be spay/neutered each year to humanely decrease the number of free roaming cats. Vouchers for spay/neuter of cats are currently \$70 per cat. As noted above, the Department and Tarzana Neighborhood Council are requesting that this amount be increased to \$120, so more veterinarians will participate. This is reflected in the request for \$2.4 million in LAAS's 2025-26 Citywide Cat Program proposed budget. The more that is appropriated, the

better the Department can expedite the goals of the Community Cat Program.

It is noted in the 2025-26 Proposed Budget (page 186) that the estimated free roaming cat population of the City is approximately 341,000 cats. It is also recognized in the Proposed Budget that at the rate of 20,000 spay/neuters per year, it will only reduce the free-roaming cat population by 47,719 cats at the end of 30 years. So basically, the Citywide Cat Program is just a maintenance program, not a reduction program. In future years, we recommend that the amount spent for spay/neuter of community cats be increased, so that the reduction in the community cat population is accelerated. The sooner we take care of this problem, the fewer cats will have to be neutered in the long run.

LAAS entered into a contract with the organization Spay4LA, Inc. to provide mobile spay/neuter operations for the contract term of 11/1/23 through 10/31/26. LAAS is currently looking for other providers to run mobile spay/neuter operations. This is a highly effective way to increase spay/neuters, bringing the medical facility to areas of the City most in need of spay/neuter services. As noted above, spay/neuter not only saves lives of animals, it saves the City millions of dollars in the long run. <https://www.citywatchla.com/369-budget-advocates/18933-crucial-city-funding-spay-and-neuter-saves-money-and-lives?highlight=WyJtYXVzbnVyllO=>

LAAS is working to divert more animals from entering the shelters by assisting pet owners to keep their pets or, if that is not feasible, by helping them to find an adopter without the animal coming into the shelter. LAAS has implemented the Pet Food Pantry program, which uses donations to purchase dog and cat food for low-income families; shelter volunteers are involved in distributing the pet food at three of the City Shelters. LAAS's Home to Home program gives pet owners who can no longer keep their pets the opportunity to find new homes without having to surrender them to the shelter.

LAAS should explore further avenues to increase adoptions. One idea is to produce a weekly commercial television show about the exploits of Animal Control Officers (ACOs), Animal Care Technicians (ACTs), and volunteers caring for and aiding the adoption of animals. Additionally, there might be a revenue opportunity here. While LAAS's efforts to divert animals from entering the shelters is commendable, LAAS must make sure that no one who really needs to bring an animal into a shelter is turned away, which has happened on occasion because of misunderstanding an LAAS policy regarding animal intake. LAAS is taking steps to ensure that all employees fully understand the policy.

It is also important that animals in the shelters receive proper and sufficient exercise and enrichment. Dogs should be taken out of their kennels every day for activity in the yard or for a walk. However, despite the best efforts of staff and volunteers, that is not happening. Many dogs only get out of their kennels once a week, some even less. As well as increasing the number of volunteers and staff, the Department is hiring organizations to provide enrichment activities for the animals.

The organization Dogs Playing for Life (DPFL) does an excellent job of conducting play groups for dogs at the shelters, getting a large number of dogs out for exercise at one time. As discussed below, DPFL's contract should be funded so that it provides regular services at all of the shelters. Regular exercise and enrichment makes the dogs more adoptable and thereby contributes to achieving and maintaining No-Kill.

Northeast Valley Animal Shelter

The Northeast Valley Animal Shelter in Mission Hills was built with funds from Bond Proposition F. When Proposition F was passed by two-thirds of voters in 2000, residents were told that the Department of Animal Services would operate 8 animal shelters, including the Northeast Valley Shelter. Voters were told that additional space was needed for Animal Control Officers to “solve problems of stray, abandoned, and dangerous animals” and the new facilities would improve response times. The Prop F voter guide also acknowledged that additional funds would need to be appropriated to staff the two new animal shelters. However, instead of operating the Northeast Valley facility as a municipal shelter as contemplated by Prop F, the Animal Services Department contracted the facility to Best Friends rescue organization in 2012.

Best Friends publicly announced on June 29, 2022, that they intended to vacate the Northeast shelter when their contract expired on December 31, 2022. The Board of Animal Services Commissioners (BASC) did not publicly announce their intention to release a new RFP for another rescue organization to run the Northeast Shelter until July 8, 2022 and they placed the item on their meeting agenda for July 12, less than 2 business days later. This short time frame did not allow the affected Neighborhood Councils to provide any input regarding whether the Northeast Valley Animal Shelter should be operated by the City or by rescue organizations or the terms under which a rescue organization would operate the facility. Nevertheless, on July 12, the BASC approved releasing an RFP for rescue organizations to operate the Northeast Shelter. This was done even though LAAS had a shortage of kennel space.

The Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (VANC) consists of the Neighborhood Councils throughout the San Fernando Valley, including all the Neighborhood Councils in the vicinity of the Northeast Valley Animal Shelter. On July 14, 2022, VANC passed a resolution as follows:

“This shelter [Northeast Valley] is a City facility built with Proposition F funds to be a municipal animal shelter, open to the public. It was not meant to be a private facility to house rescue organizations. Nevertheless, the Board of Animal Services Commissioners has issued an RFP (Request for Proposal) to do just that, lease the Northeast Valley Animal Shelter to rescue organizations to operate. The Board of Animal Services Commissioners and LAAS did not provide an opportunity for the affected Neighborhood Councils to provide input into this decision. Therefore, it is RESOLVED that VANC takes the position that the Department of Animals Services and City Council should receive input from the affected Neighborhood Councils before releasing the Request for Proposal for rescue organizations to operate the Northeast Valley Animal Shelter.”

The Resolution passed with 24 in favor, none against, and one abstention. Nevertheless, the Board of Animal Services Commissioners did not receive input from the affected Neighborhood Councils before approving the RFP. At that point, VANC passed the following resolution on August 11, 2022:

“RESOLVED, that VANC believes the Northeast Animal Shelter should be a full service Animal Shelter as anticipated in its funding authorization and we urge NO ACTION on the request for proposal to grant it to a rescue organization until alternatives and feasibility of a municipal shelter be considered.”

Individual Neighborhood Councils passed similar resolutions. In response to VANC and Neighborhood Council resolutions, the City Council introduced a resolution in Council File 22-0897 to amend the City Charter to require the commission associated with any department contemplating the issuance of an RFP hold a public hearing or the department hold a public meeting to provide members of the public an opportunity to offer relevant ideas for consideration by the department prior to the RFP's being drafted.

While the proposed amendment to the City Charter is needed, it will have no retroactive effect regarding the Northeast Valley Shelter. The Animal Services Commission proceeded with the RFP, awarding a contract to the organization Paws for Life. The contract with Paws for Life is for three years. During that time, or as soon as feasible, LAAS should prepare for transitioning Northeast Valley to a fully functioning municipal shelter.

It should be noted that Paws for Life is a good organization and they are doing good work at the Northeast Valley Shelter. However, they do not have the resources to run all programs and activities, and to intake and adopt out all of the animals that would take place at a municipal shelter. Because of the current financial situation of the City and the very limited budget of LAAS, the current situation with Paw for Life running the Northeast Valley Shelter is the best that can be done for now and Paws for Life should be thanked for the work it is doing there.

Shelter Volunteers

LAAS volunteers provide tens of thousands of hours of free labor to the Department. Without the volunteers, it would cost the City millions of dollars more to run the animal shelters. The volunteers greatly improve the quality of life of the animals in the shelters, taking dogs for walks, providing training, bringing dogs into play groups, providing recreation for the cats, allowing rabbits out of their cages for exercise, caring for the animals, assisting with adoptions, cleaning kennels and cages, feeding the animals, etc. The animals would receive much less of this care if it weren't for the volunteers.

From approximately March 2020 to May 2021, volunteers were not allowed into the six City animal shelters because of COVID. Some of those volunteers have not returned. LAAS must continue to work to bring back the pre-COVID volunteers as well as to recruit new volunteers.

As noted above, the surge in public sentiment for improving conditions in the animal shelters took place because of exposés in the press regarding those conditions. Much of the information in those articles came from shelter volunteers. Volunteers who spoke with the press and others about conditions at the City Animal Shelters were suspended or terminated. As well as likely being a First Amendment violation subjecting the City to potential liability, this harmed the animals who were deprived of the essential care given by these volunteers, making the conditions exposed in these articles even worse.

At its monthly meeting on August 11, 2022, the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils passed the following resolution:

“RESOLVED, that the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (VANC), representing the 34 Neighborhood Councils throughout the San Fernando Valley, strongly condemns the suspension or termination of Volunteers for speaking with the press

about conditions in the City Animal Shelters or exercising their First Amendment rights.”

Individual Neighborhood Councils passed similar resolutions. Nevertheless, it took the threat of a lawsuit against the responsible City officials to get the City Attorney’s Office and Animal Services Department to recognize that Shelter Volunteers have First Amendment rights, including the right to speak to the press about conditions in the shelters, so long as they do so in their individual capacity and not on behalf of LAAS. *See Animal Shelter Volunteers Win First Round In Fight For First Amendment Rights*, October 30, 2022:

<https://citywatchla.com/index.php/cw/animal-watch/25845-animal-shelter-volunteers-win-first-round-in-fight-for-first-amendment-rights>

It is commendable that LAAS has recognized this without the necessity of filing the lawsuit. In addition, most of the volunteers who were wrongfully terminated have been reinstated, although there are still some volunteers who were terminated after speaking with the press who have not been reinstated. In response, the City Council passed a resolution in Council File 22-1176 to instruct the Legislative Analyst to make recommendations regarding removing the ability of LAAS to suspend, terminate, and discipline volunteers.

https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2022/22-1176_PC_PM_10-20-2022.pdf

At the same time, the Animal Services Department was inexplicably restricting the number of new volunteers it was onboarding. See: *Why Does L.A. Animal Services Reject Thousands of Volunteer Applications?*, June 2023, <https://www.citywatchla.com/animal-watch/27029-why-does-l-a-animal-services-reject-thousands-of-volunteer-applications?highlight=WyJtYXVzbnVyllo=>. This article reported that the Animal Services Department was only accepting 19% of applicants who were processed during a 5 month period; 2,379 applicants, 81% of those applying, were rejected. These applicants are willing to do hard and dirty work for the City for free, but were nevertheless rejected as volunteers.

As a result of this information being revealed, the new General Manager of LAAS at that time, Staycee Dains, did a complete overhaul of the volunteer application, on-boarding, and training process. The new process was developed by Volunteer Liaison (now Director of Volunteer Programs) Jake Miller, which he describes as follows:

“A person can go onto our website and fill out a newly streamlined application. It takes between 10 and 15 minutes to fill out and submit. The applicant will receive an email reminding them about the next steps which would be signing up for an orientation session. The applicant is also provided an opportunity to sign up for an orientation while they are filling out the application. Orientation classes are 2 hours in length and go over the basics of what volunteers do to help at our centers. An applicant can take an orientation class at any center and begin volunteering at any center they choose moving forward. Classes are available every day at multiple locations (and attendance now appears in the WoofStat report). Once the orientation class is complete, the approval is done within 48 hours and the new volunteer can sign up for their first regular shift.

If the person is internet-form savvy, over 18 (underage volunteers require extra documentation that sometimes does not get submitted correctly), and takes the

first available orientation class, they could potentially become a full volunteer in as short as 72 hours after going to the volunteer recruitment page on our website. Liaisons also assist those struggling with technology as needed and we do have a paper version available upon request for those that do not have internet access. Printing and scanning documents are no longer needed. The only document the applicant needs to upload is a picture of their ID which is as simple as a 'drag and drop' when your phone turns on its camera and submits it."

It appears that this streamlined process has resulted in an increase in the number of volunteers.

LAAS General Manager

General Manager Staycee Dains went on a leave of absence in August 2024 and then resigned on November 30, 2024. Annette Ramirez was named as Interim General Manager, a position that she has previously held. She has worked for LAAS for 25 years, as an Animal Care Technician (ACT), Animal Control Officer (ACO) and Lieutenant, and in the Animal Cruelty Task Force. She helped organize the Mobile Animal Rescue Team. So she has a very broad knowledge and background in the Department's operations. IGM Ramirez has re-instituted regular General Manager meetings with the volunteers, which is an important step in keeping the volunteer program growing, getting input from the volunteers regarding shelter operations and occurrences, and keeping the volunteers apprised of Department occurrences.

Department Long Term Goals

In last year's (2024-25) proposed budget, the Department of Animals Services set four long term goals. Those goals should not change because of the poor financial condition of the City:

1. Reduce the number of animals in the shelters. The shelters are terribly overcrowded. The number of dogs taken into the shelters continually exceeds the number of dogs that are adopted out. As a result, multiple dogs are housed per kennel and pop-up cages are used to house dogs. The key to reducing the number of animals in the shelters without killing large numbers of animals is through increased spay/neuter. The increased requests in the Department's 2025-26 Proposed Budget for the funding of its spay/neuter programs are absolutely necessary.

See also Tarzana Neighborhood Council Community Impact Statements in support:

https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-1008_cis_10-26-2023.pdf in City Council File 23-1008

<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=23-1008>

https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-0452_cis_12-20-2023.pdf in City Council File 23-0452

<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=23-0452>

2. Fill Staff Vacancies/Retain Staffing. As discussed above, increased staffing is necessary for the shelters to operate in an efficient and humane manner.

3. Increase Community Resources/Education.

The Department hopes to increase public awareness of spay/neuter as well as other humane and public welfare issues through in-shelter communications with customers and via its public platforms and community engagement. The Tarzana Neighborhood Council has stated the following in Community Impact Statements, as part of its suggestions for dealing with the overcrowding emergency at the animal shelters:

“[The Department should] deploy an advertising/email/social media/news media campaign for spay/neuter vouchers. As part of this campaign, make clear that the City is going to **start enforcing spay/neuter laws more vigorously, much more vigorously**. Publicize that you can use a free or discounted spay/neuter voucher to avoid a severe fine. There should be severe fines for failure to spay/neuter, with minimal or no waivers.” [emphasis in original]

In particular, backyard breeders have to be stopped.

See https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-1008_cis_10-26-2023.pdf

in City Council File 23-1008

<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=23-1008>

https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-0452_cis_12-20-2023.pdf

in City Council File 23-0452

<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=23-0452>

4. Increase Animal Enrichment Activities.

As stated by LAAS in last year’s proposed budget, “[t]he Department has been publicly criticized in the media and by the community for not providing sufficient enrichment activities for the animals in its care. Animal enrichment is an important part of animal care especially in a shelter environment. Enrichment provides mental stimulation to maintain the mental health of the animals, which has an impact on the behavior an animal exhibits in the shelter. ... [Enrichment activities] increase the likelihood of adoption for many shelter animals.”

LAAS has made budget requests to increase and improve volunteer involvement, increase staffing levels, and enter into agreements with animal enrichment experts and other contractors to provide enrichment activities for the animals and to train staff and volunteers. The most important of these endeavors is the Department’s contract with the organization Dogs Playing for Life (DPFL) and we support the expansion of the services DPFL provides to the shelters, adding more days and more shelters.

Dogs Playing For Life does an excellent job providing out-of-the-kennel exercise and play groups for the dogs. Two of the authors of this report (Cornelius and Mausner) are volunteers at the West Valley Shelter and have observed and participated in play groups conducted by DPFL, in which 40 to 60 dogs were taken onto the play yard in several hours by DPFL, assisted by the volunteers.

Increasing the number of days and the shelters that DPFL works, as well as increasing numbers of volunteers at the shelters, will help to alleviate the prior situation in which dogs were not sufficiently walked or taken onto the play yard. DPFL has requested modifications to the play yards at some of the shelters, such as fencing dividing the play yards into separate areas, in order to increase the utility and safety of the yards, allowing more dogs to be taken out at a time. The General Services Department should expedite this work, since this is a safety issue as well as an animal welfare issue.

The Department has also hired Outcome for Pets Consulting, headed by Kristen Hassen, to provide safety and animal welfare guidance. Ms. Hassen has been meeting with and getting input from the volunteers and staff regarding these matters.

Additional Citations Regarding Inadequate Funding of the Animal Services Department

Head Of Troubled L.A. Animal Services Steps Down Amid High Euthanasia Rates, Overcrowding,
<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-12-02/los-angeles-animal-services-general-manager-steps-down>

Best Friends, LA Animal Services Factual Findings & Observations,
<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25212589-la-animal-services-factual-findings-observations/>

The Animal Services Department lacks sufficient staff to enforce the spay/neuter laws and to stop the importation of dogs from out-of-state puppy mills.

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-09-23/puppy-mill-pipeline-serious-alarms>