



CITY OF KIRKLAND
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MEMORANDUM

To: David Ramsay, City Manager

From: Erin Leonhart, Intergovernmental Relations Manager

Date: November 19, 2009

Subject: DRAFT RESPONSE TO VICKI HURLEY REGARDING ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL SERVICES

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Council authorize Mayor Lauinger to sign the attached letter to Ms. Vicki Hurley regarding animal care and control services.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION

On November 12, 2009 Vicki Hurley sent an email to the City Council about King County discontinuing animal care and control services. Ms. Hurley's correspondence requests that the City of Kirkland consider contracting with the Animal Control Officers' Guild for animal care and control services.

Current Animal Care and Control Services

King County Animal Care and Control (KCACC) currently provides animal care and control services for Kirkland, most cities in King County and unincorporated areas in the County. Through Interlocal agreements and contracts, the County provides animal related field services to 32 cities (excluding Seattle, Renton, Medina, Milton, Skykomish, Des Moines and Normandy Park) and sheltering services to 34 cities (excluding Seattle, Renton, Medina, Milton and Skykomish). Cities provide no direct payment for basic field services or sheltering because the County collects and keeps 100% of the pet license fees. Revenue to support the County's services comes primarily from pet licensing fees from residents and the County's General Fund. A small percentage of expenditures are covered by user fees, including pet adoption fees and impound fees. In 2009, the County's General Fund contributed \$1.5 million out of a total budget of approximately \$5.5 million.

It is not statutorily mandated that King County provide animal care and control services on a regional basis. Although the City has the legal authority to establish an animal care and control program, there is no state mandate requiring the City to provide such services.

A fundamental purpose of an animal care and control program is to protect the health and safety of the public. A program can provide protection from dangerous animals as well as reduce animal nuisances, both in neighborhoods and in public parks. Another primary purpose of a program is the humane care and treatment of animals in the community. Shelter services help to reduce pet homelessness, overpopulation and diseases by providing spay and neutering; vaccinations and other medical services; and adoption and rescue services. Finally, pet owners receive additional specific benefits from a program by licensing their pets; in particular, licensing increases the likelihood that owners will be reunited with lost pets.

Recent King County Actions Related to Animal Care and Control

On November 9, 2009 the King County Council passed Motion 2009-0594 "...requesting that the King County Executive:

- End the provision of animal shelter services provided by King County for contract cities and unincorporated King County as soon as possible, but no later than January 31, 2010;
- Establish a goal of April 1, 2010, for all contract cities to enter into full-cost-recovery contracts with King County for animal control services; and
- Establish a firm date of June 30, 2010 for all contract cities to enter into full-cost-recovery contracts for animal control services. Cities that do not enter into full-cost-recovery contracts by June 30, 2010, will need to find an alternate way to provide animal control services if they desire control services..."

Current Kirkland Activities

Kirkland staff became aware of King County's interest in discontinuing animal care and control services in September and Erin Leonhart, Intergovernmental Relations Manager, has been working with an Animal Services Work Group convened by King County and consisting of representatives from a variety of cities to examine options for provision of these services after June 30, 2010.

In addition to exploring options through this work group, staff is discussing a range of possibilities for Kirkland. Erin Leonhart has been meeting with Kirkland departments that have interests in the issue as well as with staff from Redmond and Bellevue. At this juncture, it appears the options would be:

- Amended contract with King County (through the work group process);
- Sub-regional consortium of cities; or
- City-provided service.

It now appears that any of these options will require a separate sheltering contract so staff from Kirkland, Redmond and Bellevue have been meeting with Seattle Humane Society.

The basic principles guiding analysis of options are:

1. Ensure the City has Good Animal Care and Control Services
2. Provide a Good Value
3. Control over Revenue
4. Self-Sustaining Program (License Fees and Other Revenues Cover Costs)
5. Ensure Future Sustainability

The Animal Control Officers' Guild has not made an official proposal to provide services for cities the region; however, if a proposal is received, staff will review and compare it against other options using the above principles.

ATTACHMENTS

A – Message from Vicki Hurley

B – Draft Response to Vicki Hurley

ATTACHMENT A

From: Vicki Hurley [mailto:rocketdogs3@yahoo.com]
Posted At: Thursday, November 12, 2009 9:36 PM
Posted To: Kirkland Council
Conversation: Regarding Animal Control Options
Subject: Regarding Animal Control Options

Good morning to officials of the city of Kirkland!

I am a volunteer at the King County Animal shelter and I am writing in regard to the threatened closure of King County Animal Services. I would like to share with you some information on the county's plans and propose an alternate course of action.

You have undoubtedly heard the alarming news that Interim King County Executive Kurt Triplet proposed cutting off all county funding for animal control services. The county council's decision this week of not only confirming that proposal, but summarily closing our animal shelters in January will, of course, affect everyone, not just pet owners. Not only will there be no one rescuing and restoring lost animals to their owners, but there will be no one to protect citizens from dangerous and nuisance animals. With no county animal shelter, people in financial difficulty who must give up their pets (and people who acquired animals and then found they couldn't handle them) will have no place to take those animals. There are several private animal rescue groups in King County, but most of them require an "owner surrender" fee to take pets (unlike the county shelter which accepts all animals at no charge). An impoverished family or disenchanted pet owner would not be likely to pay that. The result will be large numbers of abandoned animals including packs of hungry, desperate stray dogs roaming the streets without animal control officers to do anything about it.

Some hope that, with a new King County executive, there will be a new plan. Not likely -- for two years Dow Constantine has led an unreasonable and inexplicable crusade to destroy the King County Animal Care and Control system. This is astounding, considering that KCACC is the largest and most successful animal rescue organization in this area. KCACC cares for 13,000 animals each year --- more than twice as many as the next largest rescue, Seattle Humane Society. KCACC's euthanasia rate is 20% or less per year --- less than almost any shelter in the entire country. Eighty percent of the annual cost of KCACC is paid by licensing and pet adoption fees and the remaining 20% amounts to \$1.5 million per year -- a bargain when compared to other county agencies. In a recent PetFinder.com "Best Shelter" contest, conducted over the space of 13 weeks, KCACC's Kent shelter was voted NUMBER ONE out of more than 300 Washington shelters every week for almost the entire contest! Clearly the public is pleased with KCACC. The KCACC shelters in Kent and Bellevue are very accessible and welcome visitors. Anyone who goes there will quickly see that the officers and staff love their jobs and are consumed with caring for the cats, dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, turtles, chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, birds, and other animals that come to the shelter. In addition to a veterinary and veterinary technicians employed by the shelter, PIMA Medical Institute, which TRAINS veterinary technicians, conducts classes in a building on the grounds of the Kent shelter and helps with animal care. An army of volunteers provide exercise, playtime, and affection for dogs and cats awaiting adoption. Outside the shelter, more than 200 foster families care for dogs and cats with special problems. WHY would anyone seek to close down this wonderful and compassionate public service?! I don't know, but Mr. Constantine refers to his vendetta as "reform" and pursues it relentlessly in spite of thousands of pro-KCACC letters, mountains of positive facts, and

countless invitations to visit the shelters and see for himself.

This letter is intended to offer a solution to the disaster that will occur if King County Animal Care and Control is destroyed. King County Councilwoman, Julia Patterson, keeps sighing that, "It's time for King County to get out of the animal sheltering business." I wholeheartedly agree. Throughout KCACC's 37 year history, the King County Council has consistently denied sufficient funds for basic operations. Private citizens can donate to KCACC, but the bequest fund is controlled by the council and they will not let the shelter use the money. In spite of the HUGE population growth during those 37 years, the council has CUT funding for animal control over and over again. Meanwhile, various council members have been receptive to extremist "animal rights" type groups with whimsical ideas about animal sheltering. Many of these fad ideas have been turned into mandates that KCACC is expected to comply with in addition to their normal duties -- in spite of personnel reductions forced by the council's budget cutting. What a mess!

However, consider this: The people who actually do animal control and sheltering work are the KCACC animal control officers. These men and women are the members of the Animal Control Officers' Guild (the ACO). As you know, 32 local cities contract with King County for animal control and sheltering services. Remember the part about KCACC being 80% solvent because of licensing and adoption fees? If, instead of going to the King County general fund, that money went to the ACO and if those 32 cities contracted directly with the ACO and divided the remaining \$1.5 million dollar yearly cost of KCACC, we could all continue to enjoy competent and compassionate animal care and control services WITHOUT the continual interference and problems caused by the county. Right now much of the money allocated for KCACC is wasted on redundant audits and studies fishing for some excuse to close our animal shelters. At the demand of an extremist group consisting primarily of TWO people, the council voted to waste \$15,000 installing spy cameras in the animal shelter so the activities of the animal control officers could be streamed onto the internet. Yes, I know that's ridiculous --- and think of all the pet food and vet care that \$15,000 could have purchased!

Yes, the Animal Control Officer's Guild, operating as your city's animal control and sheltering entity could provide the animal services you need without the waste of money now being practiced. Furthermore, the present animal control officers have YEARS of experience in their field. They are familiar with this area and are well known to the people who live here. They are the ideal people to be doing this work.

The King County Council has put forth proposals to discontinue KCACC and give all animal control field work to the King County Sheriff and hand over our animal shelters to the Seattle Humane Society. Sheriff Sue Rahr has firmly rejected that plan on the grounds that she does not have sufficient funding and personnel to handle all the PEOPLE problems, let alone adding animal problems. Also, sheriff's deputies would all need to have extensive training in animal handling to successfully perform that extra work. As far as giving our shelters to the Seattle Humane Society, there are several problems:

The first and most obvious is logistics. Seattle Humane Society (SHS) has a capacity of 6,000 animals per year. HOW would they care for an ADDITIONAL 13,000? SHS operates largely on donations --- which is not a reliable source of revenue -- and on its exorbitant adoption and "owner surrender" fees. One of the King County Council's excuses for

terminating our county animal shelters is money, yet Brenda Barnette, CEO of SHS, wants millions of dollars to upgrade SHS to take over KCACC's workload. (How silly! If those millions were used to upgrade the present KCACC buildings, our excellent KCACC would be better than ever! --- Another example of why it would be good to have the county NOT involved in animal control.) Furthermore, SHS is in BELLEVUE. The majority of King County animals are in the southern part of the county --- Kent, Auburn, Black Diamond, Enumclaw, etc. Bellevue is NOT the ideal location for a shelter that is supposed to serve the entire county.

There are other significant problems with SHS itself. SHS employs 70 staff members. In the past 18 months, SHS has had 60 staff members quit. That is an alarming turnover rate that should raise some red flags to anyone. If nothing else, having people coming and going at that rate means that, at any given time, you have a large number of inexperienced people working there. The employees of SHS recently voted to join the Animal Control Officers' Guild because they felt they needed a union to represent them in dealing with their employer, the Seattle Humane Society CEO, Brenda Barnette. That's right, they turned to the officers the county council wants them to REPLACE to help them deal with the unacceptable working conditions at SHS. (I would take that as another red flag.) Ms. Barnette was recently cited for importing 180 dogs from a shelter in Kern County, California, without vaccinations or health clearances. If she had inadvertently brought in a dog with a contagious, life threatening illness and put it in a shelter full of other dogs, she could have sparked an epidemic ---- that's why we have the laws she broke. It's impossible that she could be running a shelter the size of SHS and be unaware of these laws. That should raise another red flag regarding both Ms. Barnette's integrity and her supposed great concern for homeless animals. (Why on earth do we need an extra 180 homeless dogs here in the first place?!) In an interview with the media, Ms. Barnette very publicly announced that she plans to "have volunteers do veterinary care" of the animals if she is allowed to take over KCACC's sheltering duties. If you are a pet owner, you realize how completely outrageous and irresponsible that plan is. I don't know about you, but, if my dog is ever lost, I don't want her to end up in the hands of these people!

Remember the fee situation at SHS? If an owner surrenders an animal, they are charged \$200 for that privilege (you can find this information on SHS's website). When SHS re-homes that animal, they charge another three digit dollar amount to the person adopting the animal. That means they are making HUNDREDS of dollars on EACH of the 6,000 animals they handle each year. SHS is registered as a non-profit organization. However, non-profits pay salaries to their employees. Remember Ms. Barnette's title -- CEO? Officially, she is an employee of SHS and she receives a salary. Non-profits are subject to financial disclosure laws and, if you research it, you will find that Ms. Barnette receives in excess of \$100,000 per year. Believe me, you could definitely get more than one well-trained, knowledgeable, compassionate KCACC animal control officer who follows health clearance laws for that kind of money! To me, these numbers raise more red flags. I don't believe that SHS should, for one moment, be considered as an alternative to KCACC.

Again, I hope this information is helpful to you and I hope it will cause you to strongly consider contracting with the ACO to provide animal control and sheltering services for your city. I realize that, although my proposed plan is simple and sensible, it has probably raised numerous questions in your mind about the details. The president of the ACO Guild is Animal Control Sgt. John Diel. He would be able to provide you with facts and numbers in a less impassioned context than I have presented here. Sgt. Diel can be reached at

acoguild@comcast.net. I sincerely hope you will contact him and explore this option further.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

---- Vicki Hurley

December 2, 2009

DRAFT

Vicki Hurley

RE: King County Animal Care and Control Services

Dear Ms. Hurley:

Thank you for your email to the Kirkland City Council of November 12, 2009 about animal care and control services, currently provided by King Council Animal Care & Control (KCACC). As you are aware, Kirkland is one of 32 King County cities that contracts with KCACC for services, including sheltering. Through an Interlocal Agreement, Kirkland currently makes no direct payment for basic field services or sheltering because the County collects and keeps 100% of the pet licenses fees.

Since Kirkland was made aware of the likely discontinuation of KCACC's services, our staff has been involved in a multi-city work group convened by King County. The group is exploring options for continuing services after June 30, 2010 – the date which the County enacted for cities to enter into full-cost recovery for animal care and control services. In addition to this regional work group, staff has initiated conversations with surrounding cities to explore sheltering options with the Seattle Humane Society. To my knowledge, the Animal Control Officers' Guild has not formally made a proposal to King County or the multi-agency work group.

We appreciate your insights and suggestions about how best to address animal care and control services for the City of Kirkland. Your commitment to pet care is commendable. The City is actively involved in this issue as the reduction in service impacts the thousands of pet owners in our City. Please contact Erin Leonhart, Intergovernmental Relations Manager, at 425-587-3009 or eleonhart@ci.kirkland.wa.us to keep informed of Kirkland's participation in resolving this issue to the extent possible.

Sincerely,
Kirkland City Council

By: James L. Lauinger, Mayor