



DATE: April 21, 2015

CATEGORY: New Business

DEPT.: City Manager's Office

TITLE: Feral Cats and Wildlife Stakeholder Working Group Summary Report

RECOMMENDATION

Receive a summary report on the work of the Feral Cats and Wildlife Stakeholder Working Group and approve associated staff recommendations to better control the feral cat populations and protect wildlife in the North Bayshore and creek areas.

BACKGROUND

For background reference, the current animal ordinance includes Section 5.8 which prohibits abandoning an animal in the City. It was intended to prohibit animal owners from simply leaving their pets, or litters, when the animals were old or ill or no longer convenient to care for. The City Code defines an abandoned animal as one that is left without proper and necessary care for the animal's well-being for 24 hours or an unreasonable period of time. The definition also includes animals which have been impounded for which the owner refuses to pay fees or charges related to the detention of the animal. The current City Code does not regulate feral cats. Feral cats are undomesticated and without benefit of an owner, and therefore are not considered abandoned under Section 5.8.

The chapter does not regulate feeding or releasing animals on public property, nor does it address trapping. When considering the proposed animal ordinance, Council declined to adopt language prohibiting the use of certain traps and defining humane conditions for when traps are used or the feeding and/or release of animals on public property. Additional provisions were also discussed which would have extended those prohibitions to private property for portions of North Bayshore and banned feeding of feral cats anywhere in the Shoreline Regional Park Community. Council did not adopt any changes.

As to Shoreline Regional Park, Chapter 38 of the City Code regulates activities in the park, and includes regulations that apply to feral cats. The language pertaining to

Shoreline Regional Park was crafted due to its particular nature as a large park, an area with an abundance of wildlife, and an area which is primarily undeveloped (as opposed to the remainder of the North Bayshore area). Specifically, Section 38.13(w) prohibits wild or domestic animals entering the park and further prohibits the release of any captured wild or domestic animals within the park. Section 38.20(i) states the park is a sanctuary for wildlife, and generally prohibits feeding, hunting, trapping, killing, wounding, frightening, or capturing any wild birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, or invertebrates within the park.

At the April 1, 2014, City Council meeting, during the discussion of changes to the City's Animal Control Ordinance (see City Code Chapter 5 for animal provisions), staff was directed *"to collect information in order to quantify the feral cat population problem in North Bayshore and the creek areas, and to convene a stakeholders group, to be defined, to make recommendations on how to better control the feral cat populations and protection of wildlife."* The stakeholders were not directed to address specific ordinance changes.

ANALYSIS

Quantify the Feral Cat Population

City staff was asked to quantify feral cats (the term used with the Council direction from April) living in the North Bayshore and the creek areas. Shoreline Regional Park staff estimated the cat population within Shoreline Regional Park and along Stevens Creek and Permanente Creek as follows:

- Based on cat sightings, staff believes approximately 15 to 18 cats currently live or forage within Shoreline Regional Park. Most are found near Michaels at Shoreline, the Sailing Lake Café, Coast Casey, and the public entry point at Terminal Boulevard.
- No cats were seen along Stevens Creek.
- A study of Permanente Creek was recently completed and a total of three cats were observed.

City staff was also asked to quantify the data on feral or one-time pets that are stray, lost, or abandoned in the North Bayshore and the creek areas as gathered from the City's animal care provider, Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority (SVACA). According to SVACA, the Mountain View stray cats received in 2014 were:

- 41 from the North Bayshore (includes 27 from within the Shoreline Regional Park), and
- 149 from Mountain View in total.

As part of the project, staff also summarized information on programs that were identified in the spring of 2014, with the consideration of the animal ordinance. These are included in Attachment 1.

Stakeholders Group Membership and Activity

The Working Group's scope of work was developed in spring 2014, and Working Group participants were sought during the spring and summer. Stakeholders able to advocate for the interests of cats and for wildlife protection were sought. Additionally, staff conducted recruitment for three "At-Large" members who were Mountain View residents: an individual with general interest in the issue, as well as one individual with focus on cat issues, and one on wildlife issues. Following extensive outreach for applicants, the City received 12 applicants for the At-Large openings, most of whom had cat-expertise backgrounds. The six appointed members selected the three At-Large members. The Working Group began meeting in fall 2014.

As the Working Group developed, the City received much correspondence from wildlife and feral-cat community stakeholders, expressing concerns about the group's balance. Extensive outreach was conducted to attempt to create a Working Group both familiar with the issues, and able to participate in a collaborative and respectful process with the ultimate goal of providing consensus recommendations to the City Council.

The City appreciated the willingness of the members noted below to serve on the Working Group:

- Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority (SVACA): the provider of animal care services to the City – Dan Soszynski, SVACA Executive Director
- Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD): While an official representative of the SCVWD was not appointed, Joe Chavez, Wildlife Fisheries Biologist II for SCVWD, served on the Working Group as a voluntary professional biologist

- Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society: Shani Kleinhaus, Ph.D., Environmental Advocate
- Palo Alto Humane Society: Carole Hyde, Executive Director
- Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge: Eileen McLaughlin, Board Member
- Cat Rescue Group: Denise Uriarte, Town Cats

The Mountain View Residents serving as “At-Large” members are:

- Casey Leonardo – Cat-related focus
- Alan Launer – Bird/Wildlife-related focus
- Carol Moholt – General/Neutral viewpoint

The goals and outcomes of the Working Group were initially set as follows:

- To review data and information;
- To discuss and brainstorm ideas and solutions;
- To hold a meeting(s) to share perspectives and discuss best practices;
- To refine solutions;
- To assist in drafting of a consensus report for the City Council; and
- To hold a public meeting to discuss a draft report for additional feedback.

The Working Group’s efforts began with an introduction to the project as well as to each other. The project direction, goals, and group ground rules were reviewed and discussed. Then they received background reports and presentations by Shoreline staff and SVACA, and thereafter began their process of brainstorming ideas for recommendations to address the issues and how to assign tasks for deliverables. They also ranked their recommendations for speakers at a community roundtable event, which ultimately was not able to be held due to a lack of available speakers. A Google Group was also established for the sharing of information and recommendations (used by some members).

The Working Group met informally for three working sessions on October 30, December 9, and January 9, and held an open meeting for public comment on February 12. The Working Group meetings included the expression of a wide variety of ideas and at times the meetings were contentious. At the February 12 meeting, about 40 community members attended. Thirteen (13) attendees made public comments, and two comments were received by e-mail. As was true for other Working Group meetings, the February 12 meeting elicited vigorous dialogue on this topic.

Working Group Outcomes

Based on the Working Group prior meetings and the dialogue at the February 12 meeting, staff suggested that potential Working Group recommendations could be placed along a continuum of “Possible Consensus,” “Possible Majority,” “Likely Non-Consensus,” and “Non-Consensus.”

Areas staff believed could represent “Possible Consensus” were: identify feeding stations and conduct education outreach to people feeding cats; outreach to members of the public generally; education campaigns (such as how to properly care for cats, humane treatment, who to call for abandoned cats, etc.), and expansion of spay and neuter programs. On the other hand, staff did not believe a consensus existed to support the following ideas: the expansion of testing cats for various diseases, and zoning the North Bayshore as a no cat-feeding zone with active enforcement mechanisms.

Ultimately, the Working Group could not establish a consensus or majority recommendation for any action at the meeting. Instead, the Working Group asked that all the input they provided be presented to the City Council for consideration as individual ideas. The group did express that subsets of the Working Group could work together in the future. Individual ideas and “best practices” on how to better control the feral cat populations and protect wildlife are included in Attachments 2 and 3.

FISCAL IMPACT

Enhancing communications as proposed in the recommendations below would require staff time and is expected to be relatively low and can be absorbed into regular operations. There is no significant cost to implement the Shoreline recommendations noted below. While some recommendations are currently in practice, the cost of new items and staff time can be absorbed within existing Shoreline funding.

CONCLUSION

Although the Working Group did not establish recommendations through this process, there are several steps that staff recommends could be undertaken to address some of the concerns raised.

1. *Increase Public Education on Animal-Related Topics*

Since the new contract for services with SVACA was established in 2013, the Police Department and SVACA have been working closely together to enhance animal care operations. One area for further enhancements is communications and outreach. A more robust effort could be made to advise the public of important animal-related topics including spay and neuter services, promotion of animals available for adoption, and not feeding animals at Shoreline Regional Park, which is prohibited by law. Several Citywide communications tools could be used to disseminate the information, including:

- City website
- Web calendar for SVACA events
- News release or news advisories
- KMVT – Cable TV Channel 26 government bulletin board
- City Hall and Police social media (Facebook, Twitter, and other social media channels)
- SVACA flier distribution at City facilities
- Targeted use of multilingual translations (English, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese)
- Provide educational information to employees in the North Bayshore.

Enhancing communications as proposed would require staff time within both the City Manager's Office and Police Department. While the costs are expected to be relatively low and can be absorbed into regular operations, conducting additional animal-related education and communications activities will affect staff capacity for other initiatives.

2. *Address the Feral Cat Population in Shoreline Regional Park*

The following actions to further address feral or one-time pets that are stray, lost, or abandoned at Shoreline Regional Park could be incorporated into Park operations:

- Continue trapping within Shoreline Regional Park in accordance with the Burrowing Owl Preservation Plan.
- Continue to work with SVACA to not release cats back to Shoreline Regional Park.
- Continue to work with SVACA and animal control professionals for advice on present trapping methods.
- Continue to work with Shoreline Regional Park tenants to ensure trash on leased property is disposed of properly.
- Continue to ensure trash dumpsters have working lids with no holes and remain closed at all times.
- Review signage, which currently only states “No feeding wildlife.”
- Replace the trash cans that are not animal resistant and replace with animal-resistant cans. (New trash cans have been ordered and Shoreline is waiting for delivery at present.)

These measures as proposed for Shoreline would require staff time and the use of existing funds for purchases. The costs are expected to be relatively low and can be absorbed into regular operations and existing funding.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Accept Working Group summary report, but do not proceed with staff recommendations.
2. Provide other direction.

PUBLIC NOTICING

Agenda posting. Information was also posted on the project website page and sent to the project e-mail list.

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- Attachments:
1. Summary of Information for Programs Identified in the Spring of 2014
 2. Recommendations Submitted by the Working Group Members to the Project's Google Group
 3. Highlights of the Working Group Individual Recommendations – Summaries from February 12, 2015 Meeting
 4. References and Resources that were sent to the City during the Course of the Working Group Project