

LEGISLATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Thursday, April 13, 2023
City Hall Conference Room 301B

Committee Members Present:

Commissioner Carol Myers, Chair
Commissioner John Culpepper
Commissioner Jesse Houle

Committee Members Absent:

Commissioner Ovita Thornton
Commissioner Allison Wright

Staff:

Niki Jones, Assistant Manager
Sherrie Hines, Deputy Chief Attorney

Kristall Barber, Animal Services
Sarah George, Manager's Office

Commissioner Myers called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

A. **Approval of Minutes:**

Commissioner Culpepper made a motion to approve the February 2, 2023 minutes. Commissioner Houle seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

B. **Public Input:**

- No public input was received.

Commission Identified Items of Interest:

C. **Review of Chapter 4-1 Animal Control Ordinance**

Assistant Manager Niki Jones introduced Animal Services Director Kristall Barber and the charge to review the animal control ordinance pertaining to the Pet Registration Program. Kristall Barber presented an overview of the licensing and registration program benefits including: encourages microchipping, provides a central repository for rabies vaccination information, tracks breeding of animals and encourages compliance with State law limiting yearly litters of animals, and helps to limit costs associated with animal control to pet owners, rather than those who do not own pets.

Commissioner Houle inquired about the penalties associated with ordinance violations. Kristall Barber explained that citations result in appearance before a judge and result in mandatory animal welfare class attendance, resulting in better outcomes for pets.

Deputy Chief Attorney Sherrie Hines added that registration works with veterinarians to provide another resource to ensure people vaccinate and register their pets.

Program requires residents register their pet and their pet's rabies vaccination with the county. With proof of vaccination, Athens-Clarke County Animal Services provides pet owners with a tag verifying current vaccination status (available online, by mail, in person and possibly with partner veterinarians). The program will assist in covering some of the costs for the Animal Services Department. For example, a \$10 tag from Animal Services will recoup \$8.00 for Animal Services and \$2 for the veterinarian issuing the tag.

The program will require all dogs and cats 3 months or older to have registration. Registration period will be directly tied to the vaccination of one year. State law requires rabies vaccination at

this age. There would be a 60-day grace period for registering. There is a possibility of waived fees for low-income pet owners. Program will require notification when a litter is whelped – fee free. ACCAS will work with residents to comply.

Commissioner Houle inquired how low-income residents will be determined for fee waivers. Kristall Barber said the vetting process is to be determined.

Deputy Chief Attorney Hines commented on the care that must be applied in the development of reduced costs programs. Assistant Manager Jones explained that tonight's discussion was review of a possible registration program. The complete program (including waived fees) is to be determined. Commissioner Houle stated their support for a waived fee for low-income pet owners.

Fulton and DeKalb are two of the largest Georgia counties employing a registration program. Kristall Barber described how these programs function, as examples of existing programs in Georgia. Commissioner Culpepper stressed that buy-in from local veterinarians is critical to the creation of this program. Commissioner Myers inquired about the fee structure. Kristall Barber explained that the fee she used in this presentation was based on the vendor used as an example and provides several valuable services for the pet owner. Commissioner Myers suggested that registered pets could have a \$10 reduction on impound fees.

Kristall Barber responded to questions from the Commissioners regarding current practices. She mentioned that vaccines and heartworm tests can be administered to impounded pets that do not need them, because they do not have a registration system in place now. Commissioner Culpepper expressed concerns that people will not want to comply with yearly registration. He recommended including something that will motivate pet owners to comply.

Commissioner Houle inquired about the cost of the service. Kristall Barber explained that most the registration programs charge per license actually issued. Our costs would be based on registration. Commissioner Houle also wanted to know if counties' databases are able to interact with each other. Kristall Barber said this does not happen directly, but Pet Data could act as a liaison between counties to provide information.

Commissioner Culpepper wanted to know if registration will apply to college students. Kristall Barber affirmed that they would be required to register their pets within 60 days.

To move forward, Commissioner Myers requested to a cost breakdown, return rates or vaccinations in places where this is currently used, what outreach to veterinarians will be implemented, and a plan for low-income waiver policy development. She also requested information on how many residents are pet owners.

Assistant Manager Jones said that next steps will be to provide the Commissioners with costs for pet registration, what percentage will go to the third party, research on state vs. local reduction on fees, comparative analysis or hurdles that other people have faced, before and after data on vaccination, and general pet owner statistics related to vaccinations.

Commissioner Houle requested information on costs related to people who are raising animals for profits, as well as information on sliding scale reductions. Commissioner Myers requested information on how this will apply to service animals. Kristall Barber explained that these pet owners are most likely to employ this program, due to the value of the animal. Deputy Chief Attorney Hines cautioned the group to remember that this is a public health issue. Rabies is not treatable.

Commissioner Myers wanted to know if this program was intended equally for return rates or for easy accessibility of knowledge of rabies vaccination status. Kristall Barber replied that the primary purpose of the program is public safety. She added that the return rates are an added benefit. Deputy Chief Attorney Hines added that the lack of space in the shelter means that quick pet returns to owners results in more pet lives saved. Commissioner Culpepper commented that it will be important to publicize the benefits of this service to the community to educate them about the fee costs vs. value return.

In summary, Assistant Manager Jones verified with the group what the next steps from the Manager's Office are requested by the Commissioners. The following points for follow-up were emphasized:

- Commissioner Myers: costs and benefits for the program - including existing information follow-up and additional information.
- Commissioner Culpepper: requested email follow-up prior to the next meeting.
- Commissioner Culpepper: input from local veterinarians - including the UGA School of Veterinary Medicine.
- Commissioner Culpepper: percentage of the University students that are pet owners.
- Commissioner Houle: advisement of any public aversion or opposition by local veterinarians to the program.

Deputy Chief Attorney Hines commented that the costs to victims of bites from unregistered pet bites range in the thousands of dollars.

D. **Schedule/Agenda Changes**

The next LRC meeting is scheduled for May 16, 2023 at 1:00 p.m.

Commissioner Houle made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Culpepper seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 2:29 p.m.