

County of Santa Clara

Consumer and Environmental Protection Agency

Department of Agriculture and Environment

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Vector Control District

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<http://www.cepascc.org>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 30, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith M.D, J.D., County Executive

FROM: Sylvia Gallegos, Deputy County Executive/Acting CEPA Director

SUBJECT: **Off-Agenda Report Relating to a Voucher Program or Other Options to Address Demand for Kitten Spay/Neuters in the Feral Cat Population**

At the May 17, 2022 Board of Supervisors' Budget Workshop meeting (Item No. 23), the Board, at the request of Supervisor Chavez, directed staff to provide an off-agenda report related to consideration of a voucher program or other options to address the demand for kitten spay/neuters in the feral cat population.

This report responds to Supervisor Chavez's request by providing information on the current demand for spay/neuter in the cat population and associated efforts to offer appropriate veterinary care to the community.

Background

While Animal Services programs throughout Santa Clara County work collaboratively on initiatives to benefit the homeless pet community, there are areas of geographic responsibility that are specific to each Agency. The chart below depicts the jurisdictions in which the County and partner Animal Services Agencies provide care:

City of San José Animal Care Center	Cupertino, Los Gatos, Milpitas, Saratoga, and San Jose
Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority	Campbell, Monte Sereno, Santa Clara, and Mountain View
Humane Society of Silicon Valley	Sunnyvale
County of Santa Clara	Gilroy, Morgan Hill and Unincorporated
City of Palo Alto Animal Shelter	Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, and Palo Alto

Spay/Neuter Services

The County’s Animal Services Program has been providing an average of 320 spay/neuter surgeries to cats monthly since our new Animal Services Center opened in February 2021. Our state-of-the-art Center not only modernized our clinic but also provided a larger space with a second surgery suite so that we could offer spay/neuter services to our trap, neuter, and return (TNR) community. To ensure equitable availability to spay/neuter services, the Animal Services Center Clinic provides a walk-in clinic for community cats four-days-per-week at no cost.

Due to industry-wide staffing and, in particular, veterinarian shortages and the non-competitive salary for the veterinarian position, we have not been able to retain staff in the second veterinarian position, which was added in FY2019-20. The last veterinarian was recruited away from the position with a five figure signing bonus.

ESA recently completed a salary study and found that the position was under market. As a result, and with concurrence by SEIU 521, a 15% salary adjustment will be submitted for the Board’s approval at the June 7, 2022 Board meeting. When the second veterinarian position is filled, we anticipate expanding spay/neuter services beyond 320 cats and 76 dogs-per-month to include a greater number of owned pets. **Currently, the Animal Services Program has been able to meet the demand for spay/neuter services of community cats within our service area through walk-in community cat clinics.**

Stresses on Spay/Neuter Services

The City of San José is currently experiencing even greater staffing shortages that is causing pressure in the county-wide system. The following message on its website explains its circumstances:

“The Shelter is experiencing severe resource challenges and is unable to offer public spay/neuter services at this time. As soon as this is remedied, the website will be updated

accordingly. Please consider other Bay Area agencies at this time. We are very sorry for the inconveniences we know this is causing.”

This has caused concern in the TNR community, and some City of San José TNR community members have contacted other animal care organizations, including the County, seeking alternatives.

Staff does not recommend implementing a voucher program at the County to solve the City of San José’s temporary staffing shortage. Staff are in regular communication with City of San José animal services leadership and understand that City staff plan to start offering spay/neuter services when they stabilize their veterinary staffing. San José is also considering alternatives, such as, relief and mobile veterinary services to provide immediate help to its service area. The substantial cost is the main challenge that the City faces in finding veterinary clinics willing to participate in a voucher program.

A routine cat spay/neuter surgery has increased from \$25 - \$100 to \$300 and higher at private clinics in the last two years. In addition to the increased cost for services, private practice veterinarians are also backlogged by months in requests for spay/neuter services.

County staff, through partnerships, have offered and will continue to offer technical assistance to mobilize these programs. In addition, after we have hired our second full-time veterinarian, we may be able to provide short-term transfer services to cats needing spay/neuter surgeries. If the Board of Supervisors wishes to fund such an effort, we estimate a cost of \$100,000 to subsidize these services for twelve months.

c: Chiefs of Staff

Tiffany Lennear, Clerk of the Board

Miguel Márquez, Chief Operating Officer

James R. Williams, County Counsel

Kristina McCaffrey, CEPA Administrative Services Manager

Lisa Jenkins, Program Manager, Animal Services

Tony Filice, Budget and Financial Planning Manager