

ANIMAL CONTROL ORDINANCE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS
PUBLIC MEETING COMMENTS
Manzano Mesa Multigenerational Center
7-23-08 6:00 – 8:20 P.M.

Approximately 25 people from the public attended, in addition to three Animal Control Department staff. Commissioner Archuleta was unable to attend; however, greetings were extended on her behalf. The meeting began at 6:00 p.m. and proposed changes were reviewed.

Following are general comments received:

It was requested that language be added to expedite animals being released from protective custody to enable them to be adopted sooner. Court orders often prescribe the time for animals to be held in protective custody. One person mentioned that Santa Fe County has a “workaround” system that limits protective custody of animals to 7 – 10 days. Another person stated that if an animal were not considered property it would benefit the animal.

People supported an animal bill of rights listing a minimum baseline for appropriate animal and health maintenance. One person stated the ordinance needs to be prescriptive to be enforceable in court.

The suggestion was made to add a field to the animal control license application for the applicant to include the microchip number. That way when a County resident microchips their dog and acquires a license, County Animal Control staff would be able to quickly verify who the owner is on a found dog. Currently, animals are scanned for microchips and two primary companies register the chips—Avid and Home Again. Those companies must be contacted to determine the registered animal owner. The software the County uses does allow entry of a microchip number.

One person suggested that a spay and neuter program be implemented that doesn't require a driver's license or proof of residence, so that people who may not reside in the County legally can still get assistance with spaying or neutering their pets, helping to reduce pet overpopulation. The County's partnership with the Alliance for Albuquerque Animals was described. This was a project targeted at the Pajarito Mesa area and drivers' licenses were not required.

Much discussion was held concerning pet stores. Pet stores should not be allowed to sell dogs or cats. All too often pets at pet stores come from animal mills and irresponsible breeders.

People asked about the process of seizing abandoned animals, of all types, from inside homes or yards. The County's 24 hour notice procedure was discussed, along with welfare checks, and the legal requirements for search and seizure.

An individual discussed her responsibilities in housesitting for both shelter animals and purebred animals. She states there is a difference of opinion between purebred hobby breeders and people who adopt or rescue shelter animals and how to prevent overpopulation. She said we need responsible breeders to assist in passing laws that assist all animals and that many animals do not have advocates.

A member of the New Mexico Department of Agriculture was present and asked about livestock and how the County works with the Livestock Board. County staff discussed the partnership and team approach used when dealing with livestock calls. Also, the livestock board representative asked if castration was going to be added to the cruelty section of the ordinance and how would this affect the long standing custom of ranchers and farmers castrating their own cows, pigs, horses, etc. It was stated that it is not the intent to add that at this time. The suggestion was made to differentiate between livestock and dogs and cats. Other people requested the ordinance include a requirement for some type of shade for horses and livestock.

Chaining was discussed at length. A representative of Animal Protection of New Mexico shared calls she has received in dealing with animal cruelty and stated that out of 80 calls for the unincorporated portion of Bernalillo County, 15 pertained to chaining, with problems including length of chain, weight of chain, entanglement, whining, barking, knocking over food and water bowls and animals becoming aggressive as a result of being chained. A number of people present expressed their strong opposition to chaining. One person suggested an animal should not be left unattended if it is chained. Another person suggested a 5-year phase in for totally banning chaining in the County. One person opposed this 5-year phase in saying that is too long. Many stated that chaining is a public safety issue.

Discussion was held about proper enclosure sizes and number of animals per site. A couple of people stated that limiting the number of allowed animals doesn't work. A limit of six animals may be appropriate in some instances, but there is no requirement for the amount of space required for the six animals in relation to their size. One person gave the example of six cats in a small apartment versus six large dogs in small apartment or six cats in a 4,000 square foot house that could accommodate more than six cats. Also, the Animal Control Ordinance should contain a reference to the zoning ordinance for the area describing space requirements for animals.

One person mentioned and several agreed that it doesn't matter what the law is, many people won't follow the law. Mandatory spay and neuter laws were discussed and one person said this just punishes the responsible pet owner and those who don't follow the law still won't get their pets spayed or neutered even if it is mandated. It was stated that such changes would turn honest people into criminals.

A couple people supported mandatory spay and neuter and one woman recommended a three-year phase in for this.

The hobby breeder permit fee increase was discussed. Currently, a person obtains licenses one time for their animals and obtains a hobby breeder permit at the same time. Under the proposed change, the hobby breeder permit fee increase and the hobby breeder must license each animal annually. A hobby breeder stated that when the site is inspected annually when the hobby breeder applies for the permit, at that time the inspector checks for rabies vaccinations for each animal. One reason for issuing licenses is the rabies requirement for obtaining a license to prove the vaccinations have been given and to prevent the spread of rabies. Since the site records are inspected for this, this hobby breeder feels he should only have to purchase the licenses upon first application, as is currently done, and then purchase the permit once a year without also having to purchase licenses for each animal.

A few people shared their concerns about mandatory spay and neuter and an animal's health. For example, in the Australian terrier breed, it is recommended to wait until the dog is 2 years old before spaying or neutering. Also, the size and weight of the animal in relation to the age at which it should be spayed or neutered was discussed.

Animals in the back of vehicles were discussed. It was stated that dark mats absorb heat and can actually burn or hurt an animal that lays or stands on them in the summer.

The proposal to required permitted premises to segregate dogs by gender was discussed and it was stated that dogs should only be segregated by gender when a female is in mating season.

The question was posed as to how a person who acquires animal that has already been de-barked or tail docked or ears cropped can prove that was done by a veterinarian when the person adopting the dog does not have that paperwork. This relates to the cruelty section.

The meeting ended at 8:20 p.m. People were thanked for attending.