

Animal center: Maintain efforts

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A lot of different numbers come up when local discussion makes its way to the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley. But the bulk of energy and effort should be focusing on this number: 15,500.

That's the current annual number of animals being brought to the animal center.

At a public meeting Tuesday, some may have been frustrated to learn the center's revenues are under projections by about half. After a follow-up meeting Wednesday, it turns out part of the shortfall was simply because the city and county were behind on their financial commitments. Both are now hacking through some red tape to get those payments where they belong.

But even with that money, it's likely, in this economy, the center will have a tough time making revenues. And while that does limit somewhat the center's progress, again we say the critical number is the 15,500 animals brought in each year.

Compare that to the number in Albuquerque, whose population is five times greater than Las Cruces. Albuquerque's annual number is 27,000, a disproportionately smaller 1.7 times greater than the one here.

The long-term ideal for center director Beth Vesco-Mock and other local citizens is a center where no animals are euthanized. While that is an ideal that, realistically, might never be realized, we certainly have room to make a lot of progress in that direction.

In the past year, the city and county have joined forces on the center's board of directors, Vesco-Mock was hired, extraneous expenses have been cut, and a local legion of volunteers have been seemingly more active (at least more vocal) than ever.

We view these as positive steps toward reducing the 15,500.

Surely everyone can agree on the goal of euthanizing fewer animals. We would encourage all interested parties in lasering energies to that end.

The best tool in reducing the number is the spaying and neutering of animals. With the exception of professional breeders, it makes sense for most people to spay and neuter their pets, as well as any strays they adopt. The second best tool is, when seeking a pet, go to the shelter, or one of the frequent local adoption events. Those are key points to bear in mind: No matter how well or poorly the animal center is doing, the biggest burden in solving the problem lies with we the people, and our being responsible with pets.

The idea of an annual \$5 pet-licensing fee, presented by Vesco-Mock Wednesday, however, is not likely to be well received, particularly the part where the fee goes to \$50 if a pet is not spayed or neutered. While many would pay such a fee, it's likely many more would not, and enforcing such a plan would be next to impossible.

Despite setbacks and sidetracks, we believe there is positive progress and a lot of concerned people with their hearts in the right place. These problems did not happen overnight. They cannot be fixed overnight.

With continued effort, continued communication, continued education, progress will continue as well.