

Pet licensing fee and microchipping sought

By Diana M. Alba Sun-News reporter

Posted: 04/03/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT

LAS CRUCES — The Doña Ana County-Las Cruces animal shelter director recommended Wednesday that the city and county adopt a pet licensing fee and microchipping requirement for all animals countywide.

Also, a budget report presented to shelter officials showed the animal shelter is operating in a deficit because the city and county have yet to increase payments to the facility, as they agreed to do in February.

Owners of a spayed or neutered pet would pay an initial fee of \$5 to obtain a license, along with a \$5 fee annually after that, under a proposal presented by Beth Vesco-Mock, director of the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley. Meanwhile, she said, owners of animals not spayed or neutered would pay an initial fee of \$50, and then \$50 annually after that.

"We need to start encompassing the entire county with what we are and what we are doing," she said.

Vesco-Mock said Las Cruces already has a pet licensing fee on the books, but it's not effective. She cited figures from the 2000 census that indicated about 21,000 cats and 22,000 dogs lived in the city limits. Last year, however, the shelter issued just 577 cat licenses and 2,410 dog licenses, she said.

"We need to work toward improving that number," she said.

Doña Ana County does have a requirement for a one-time pet license in the unincorporated areas, but it doesn't appear that officials are enforcing it.

Vesco-Mock also recommended that officials adopt a requirement for mandatory pet microchipping, an ordinance that already exists in the unincorporated areas of the county, but that doesn't exist in Las Cruces.

Vesco-Mock proposed the changes to the eight-member city-county board that oversees the shelter, but any ordinance changes must be approved by the respective city or county government before they'd become effective.

Because of that, shelter board Chairman Scott Krahling, a Doña Ana County commissioner, asked that the proposed changes be taken back to the shelter board at its next meeting. The board, he said, would then forward its recommendations to the local governments.

Doña Ana County Animal Control supervisor Curtis Childress said he's not necessarily opposed to the proposed pet licensing requirement, but he believes forcing pet owners to pay a license fee and have their animals both microchipped is going overboard.

"I can tell you I'll never be a proponent of "Let's start a licensing program so we can make money for the shelter,"" he said.

Las Cruces department of finance director Mark Sutter presented figures to the animal shelter board, showing the county and city haven't been funding the shelter operations at an increased budget level adopted by the shelter board in early February.

The county in February contributed just 7.3 percent of its share, and the city contributed 7.1 percent. However, each should have contributed about 20 percent by this point.

Meanwhile, Sutter said, the shelter has spent just 16 percent of the increased budget. He said it wouldn't be operating in the red, if the city and county were funding it at the budgeted levels.

County Manager Brian Haines said he wasn't aware the county was behind on its contributions to the facility. He said the city had been billing the county according to an outdated, lower rate. But Haines said there is revenue in the county sheriff's department budget to handle the increase in payment to the shelter, so that will be fixed.

Councilor Nathan Small said city officials would look into the matter.

Diana M. Alba can be reached at dalba@lcsun-news.com; (575) 541-5443