

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

Community cat program moves forward

by Frank Bryce

Mar. 6, 2015

Positive steps were taken at a recent city council meeting concerning the implementation of the community cat management program, as defined in the revised city's animal control ordinance. In an almost three-hour discussion, and with considerable wrangling back and forth, the council determined new fees for several now-permitted activities, including enclosed and unenclosed community cat colony site and management. All of the fees adopted are now believed to encourage participation and gain compliance with the revised animal control ordinance across the board. The most dramatic, and clearly the most encouraging, was the significant drop in the unenclosed cat colony permit annual fee.

It went from \$150 a year to \$50, and all application fees total \$10.

A significant incentive provided by the councilors was the waiver of the application and first annual fee for cat colony managers who register their colony sites prior to July first of this year.

The discussion ranged from the thousands of feral cats killed annually at the Animal Service Center of Mesilla Valley, how many outside cat colonies are in existence, how to achieve compliance, record keeping and cost of operation — as well as consideration of the time and cost invested by the participants.

Two major concerns from animal advocacy groups, the ASCMV director and others were the possible discouragement of participation, and the likelihood that some colony operations would refuse to participate in the program due to the high fees originally proposed. Building trust between the involved entities will be key to the program's success too.

The purposes of the program are as follows:

- Allow residents to humanely manage the feral cat population
- Reduce unwanted litters of kittens
- Protect the public and other animals from disease and nuisance cats
- Document the size of the problem
- Continue to develop effective methods and resources to battle feral cat overpopulation issues
- Assist existing colonies to come into compliance. Community cat colony managers have already begun signing up with sponsoring organizations. The general requirements for compliance are to register the site and ensure each cat is spayed/neutered, vaccinated for rabies, microchipped and ear-tipped.

Managers must provide food, water and medical care and provide records as required for each colony cat. Registration and compliance in the program protects cats and managers, as well as the general public.

For early registration, prior to July 1, to take advantage of the cat colony fee waiver, or to learn more about the program or assistance, call the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico at 575-523-8020, email fvbryce@hotmail.com or write to HSSNM, P.O. Box 13826, Las Cruces, NM 88013.

Frank Bryce is president of Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. Interested guest authors may contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.