
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: BROOKE CHRISTENSEN

SUBJECT: PROPOSAL REGARDING COMMUNITY CARETAKERS

DATE: OCTOBER 16, 2020

CC: IAN WILLIAMS, ANIMAL SERVICES DIRECTOR

BACKGROUND

In 2015 the City Council enacted significant revisions to the Animal Services Code to create a “No Kill” shelter. A key component of this change was the implementation of the Trap Neuter Release (TNR) program for stray/feral cats, also known as community cats. Prior to the implementation of the current community cat program in 2015, the traditional animal control strategy for managing or “controlling” feral cat populations centered on the trap-euthanize method.

TNR is a “No-Kill” methodology where feral cats are trapped, neutered (sterilized), and returned to the location from which they were trapped. Cats that appear to be feral or are so scared as to be difficult to handle are held for observation and appointments are scheduled for sterilization with a participating veterinarian. In addition to sterilization, cats are also marked by “tipping” and ear, which is considered a universal identifier that a free roaming cat, is in fact, a sterilized community cat. After surgery those cats are held overnight for a brief recovery and are then released in very close proximity to their point of origin.

The cats, who typically live together in a group called a colony, are often monitored and supported by a community cat caretaker. Colonies may also exist without a caretaker due to available resources in the area and because feral cats shun human interactions, including those of colony caretakers. The idea behind TNR as a control methodology is that the community cat colonies are increasingly unable to reproduce, and the colony will naturally diminish in size over time. Consequently, TNR is a long-term control strategy.

Resident wanting to participate in the TNR program or for those seeking relief from stray, nuisance, and feral cats and wildlife, Sandy City Animal Services provides humane live capture traps. Traps may be checked out from the Sandy City Animal Shelter where

a \$75 returnable deposit is required. Nearly all cats enter the shelter through this citizen-initiated trap program because the vast majority of activity takes place on private property. The result is that the Sandy City animal shelter receives between 400 - 500 cats annually. The following numbers were provided by Animal Services:

Year	Cats	Returned	Transferred	Adopted, Redeemed or Euthanized
2016	421	174	136	111
2017	404	139	128	137
2018	442	105	137	200
2019	448	136	154	158

ISSUE

District 1 residents have increasingly complained about nuisance cats. As a long-term control strategy, TNR does not provide the immediate abatement many residents expect. Complaints center on:

- **Property Damage:** The most frequent complaint received about the community cats has been the damage caused to personal property. Cats have climbed under boat tarps and ruined seats and lifejackets, while others note damaged patio furniture and more. Feces and urine odor are also common complaints.
- **Trespassing:** Independent trappers take it upon themselves to enter private property and set traps.
- **Overfeeding supports vermin:** Good Samaritans, well-meaning individuals with no attachment to the colonies, have observed the cats in concentrated areas and brought large bags of food that they open and empty on the ground. Having already been fed, or having more than they need, the extra becomes a resource for raccoons, skunks, rats, mice, and all manner of vermin causing population increases.
- **Impacts to the bird population:** Residents have suggested that an increase in community cats has led to a reduction in bird species.
- **Growing colonies:** Available research indicates that TNR is more effective as a long-term control strategy when colony populations are isolated, and the colony naturally reduces to match available resources. Despite sterilization efforts, cat emigration from surrounding communities and abundance of natural or caretaker provided resources have increased, rather than decreased colony populations.

Discussing these concerns with residents and Animal Services staff, the primary issue centers on food. Cat colonies are being overfed and it is unclear who has the right or responsibility to feed. A complicating factor is that Sandy colonies have no oversight mechanism, and little to no communication between caretakers, residents, and animal

services. Colonies are established sometimes on private property, particularly in commercial or industrial areas, without owner permission. Additionally, there is no communication or tracking with regards to the number of cats being cared for in these colonies.

PROPOSAL

In conjunction with Animal Services and the City Attorney, I propose to:

1. Develop and bring back for Council consideration, code amendments to allow for a permit or colony registration process. The purpose not to create a code to penalize or collect revenue, but to facilitate communication between stakeholders in our community involved in TNR and community cat colonies. It would provide a means to monitor and manage colony size, provide education, and create metrics to measure success. Such a program is currently envisioned in Utah state law §11-46-304(1): "A county or municipality may create a permitting process for community cat colonies."
2. Develop amendments to expand options for the disposition of cats who have proven to be repetitive nuisances such as relocation to different colonies.