



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.

"World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats"

A Lesson in Political Reality – The City of Los Angeles

Passage of LA's mandatory spay/neuter "Pet Overpopulation Ordinance"

What this means to breeders:

After an over 2 year battle, the City Council approved a breeding permit ordinance on March 22nd (finalized on March 29th). The ordinance will require \$100 unaltered dog-licensing fees plus a \$100 breeding permit for each animal. Cats are not licensed in LA, but a \$100 permit is required for each cat an individual "plans to breed", giving "permission" to do this. We do not know when this tax is due to the city - at the time the breeder thinks about a potential mating, when a cat is in heat and ready for mating? When a stud cat accepts a visiting female? What if a queen does not become pregnant - is another plan-to-breed fee due? Only one litter per household is allowed each year. That hardly represents a conscientious breeding program. Up to 2 litters can be approved for a dog or cat with permission from the Animal Services Manager. There are no criteria to determine the basis for this approval or the procedure to apply. When animals are transferred, new buyer's names and addresses must be submitted to the city. We have no idea exactly how this ordinance can be enforced but 5 new animal control officers have been hired with vehicles and equipment worth over \$300,000 specifically to enforce the ordinance. Because of existing limits on the numbers of animals allowed without a kennel permit and the fact that LA zoning laws do not allow catteries/kennels in residential areas it is unlikely that any cat breeder with a breeding program would be able to comply with this ordinance even if they wanted to. It has become clear that the intention was not to permit breeding, but instead to force dog and cat breeders to discontinue their breeding activity all together. Much of the support for the ordinance came from national organizations with local members who saw their chance to advance the message of the "immorality" of breeding companion animals. The climate in LA was ripe.

What about homeless cats:

No cats may be outside unaltered and an individual is deemed an "owner" if they harbor a cat for 30 days. Non-profit organizations who have feral colonies are exempt if they have an adoption and spay/neuter plan; however, individuals would be in violation if they feed but can not capture a feral cat for sterilization on their property and are turned in. We believe this will be enough deterrent for business/restaurant owners and homeowners to not even attempt to trap/neuter/return a neighborhood feral cat. Many feral cat advocates chose to align with Animal Services and the Coalition To End Pet Overpopulation based on implied promises to overlook feral caregivers in non-compliance.

Was this ordinance needed:

LA has had a breeder permit law on the books since 1977. In March there were only 15 permits issued. All of this draconian new legislation is for the revenue from the 1000 dog/cat breeder permits Dan Knapp, Director of Animal Services, stated he projects as a result of the ordinance and the revenue he expects from dog license increases to help pay for animal services. In reality none of this will impact the actual

problems of LA and Knapp admits the Department's costs to administer the program will rise from \$2.35 million to \$3.17 million or 35%. Think of what almost \$1 million could do for positive programs targeting low income areas in LA. Dog licensing is already low in LA and, based on every other City that has tried high unaltered animal "differential" licensing, it will go down further in our estimation.

A "crisis" platform is endlessly used as the rationale for coercive measures and in LA there were two stated factors - vicious dogs running in the streets endangering the health and safety of residents and severe overcrowding in the shelters. Both were attributed to uncaring owners and those who purposely breed animals for money. A closer look at the facts clearly indicated that the stray and dangerous dogs in LA are limited to two low-income areas and data from the 6 shelters showed both overcrowding and high euthanasia rates primarily in these same two districts.

LA difficulties did not appear suddenly as a crisis. They have resulted from poor shelter management for 10 to 15 years, lack of adoption outreach or cooperation with the veterinary community, recent years of no low cost spay/neuter services, discontinuing of the neuter voucher program, little attention given to free-roaming/feral cats and no targeted programs for the districts with the most animal problems. Dog licensing rates have been historically low and there is weak dog leash law enforcement especially in the low-income districts. There has been little to no education or services specifically targeted to help low income pet owners. An ordinance, with threats of criminal punishment, was a quick-fix, media attention draw designed to instill fear rather than go through the long term process of positive programs.

What happened - why didn't they listen:

Except for three council members who understood the detrimental implications and ineffectiveness of this approach, the rest of the council solidly backed Knapp who had the support of well-funded Hollywood oriented individuals and rescue groups, known as "The Coalition to End Pet Overpopulation". One supporter openly promised hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations if the ordinance passed. Knapp had recently been hired and the Animal Services Commission and the Mayor wanted to give him and this aggressive approach a chance. Because of years of inaction the attitude in LA was to just "do something".

Our opposition strategy was always difficult for many reasons. With an existing breeder law already on the books, though never enforced, breeders were portrayed as villains who ignored the law. At the seven public hearings set up by the Animal Services Commission, repetitive one minute "sound bite" testimony was tiring for both sides and this forum did not allow any meaningful dialog or presenting of facts that was imperative for our position. The Commission was hand selected by the Mayor (including his daughter) and fully in support of Animal Services, giving advantages to the supporters of the ordinance throughout the process. Those pushing the legislation had the benefit of a paid high-powered PR expert giving advantages with media access. The goal of all the local humane groups and rescue organizations from the beginning was to convince the media and public that all breeders are in business and should pay and that "irresponsible breeding" is the cause of all the problems in Los Angeles. It was a simplistic message that had an effect on both the general public and Council members.

When the ordinance was ready to go before the Council our side had prepared excellent binders full of convincing information about what did and did not work in other areas. An alternative proposal, prepared by Chuck Ober, specific to LA and supported by both the dog and cat fanciers, was presented that would set up an animal services outreach program targeted to the low income areas.

The cat fancy mounted a huge outpouring of opposition at all of the Commission hearings. Letters, faxes, emails were running 50-50, but ours were mainly from outside LA while the supporters were from within the City. Logic did not work. Facts did not impress. The dog fanciers hired a professional lobbyist, a

move that also could not turn the tide. Council members did have some concerns and they liked the alternative suggestions proposed but finally stood in support of the Knapp ordinance designed to deter accidental and careless animal matings through fear.

What happens now:

Dan Knapp and supporters now have their ordinance and the celebration is over. It is important to remember that this ordinance was a substantial compromise from where it started thanks to the CFA LA Legislative Team led by Chuck Ober, who came up with many of the ideas, coordination, strategy, alerts and reporting. Chuck also worked closely with the California Federation of Dog Clubs. George Eigenhauser, as CFA Regional Director, attended all the meetings and provided testimony on behalf of CFA at all the hearings. Many other individuals in the Southern California area contributed in numerous ways, motivating fanciers to be active, writing letters, giving media interviews, attending and speaking at the hearings - sometimes driving long distances. The CFA Legislative Group helped coordinate strategy, provide data, sample letters, general information, legal analysis and the majority of the content for the LA Council Members' Binders. I was able to attend several meetings, assist in Council member lobbying and to speak at the final Council hearing.

Good contacts have now been made with several of the Council members and continued communication will eventually be worthwhile. The Council voted at our insistence to require a full report and assessment of the effectiveness of the ordinance in 18 months. Dog and cat fanciers will continue to closely monitor the shelter operations and are attempting to obtain shelter data on a regular basis in order to establish an accurate starting point and history. We expect the City will find that misdemeanor prosecutions of those who can not pay the high fees and fines will not be easy. There are already signs that the Council is starting to ask tough questions concerning operation irregularities and delays in promised programs, such as microchipping.

Repercussions around the country:

We expect that Los Angeles may be used as a model for other communities eager to have the same attention and a seemingly easy solution to shelter overcrowding problems. Already in Northern California a spay/neuter committee has been formed in Santa Clara County by representatives from nine cities who plan to write uniform ordinances. The LA ordinance could be picked up by any city in the country and fanciers must be alert to this possibility. We have a great deal of information but we need motivated cat fanciers willing to give their all for the sake of preserving pedigreed cats. As Merritt Clifton said in his editorial for the May 2000 issue of "Animal People" publication, "Los Angeles Animal Services Department manager Dan Knapp and local activists celebrated victory. They should have mourned a self-inflicted defeat....." Clifton also said "The lesson should be obvious: just fix the animals. Never mind the licensing laws."

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