

Memorandum



Date: August 26, 2013

To: Honorable Chairwoman Rebeca Sosa and Members
Board of County Commissioners

From: Carlos A. Gimenez
Mayor 

Subject: Animal Services Department – Update on No Kill Recommendation

My commitment to ensuring a transition to a no kill status by the Miami-Dade County Animal Services Department (ASD) remains steadfast. Upon taking office, the plans for a new animal shelter were underway but did not provide sufficient funding for the completion of an appropriate facility with more housing for dogs and cats, as well as the required disease control infrastructure and expanded clinic service facilities. In a clear statement of my strong commitment to the welfare of animals, with your support, over the last two years I have added \$9 million to this project to insure appropriate completion.

As I conveyed to the Board of County Commissioners (Board) on July 16, 2013, \$4 million has been identified, without increasing the flat millage rate, to support essential programs detailed in the No Kill Resolution (R-476-13) adopted by the Board. The aforementioned funds represent a 40 percent increase over the FY 2012-13 ASD budget and will provide substantial improvement for programs supported by our community as described below:

- *Decreasing the killing of adoptable dogs and cats*
- *Reducing stray cat population*
- *Funding free and low-cost spay/neuter programs, low cost veterinary care programs and responsible pet ownership educational programs*

Over the past two years the department has been able to achieve significant improvements in the animal save rate through the expansion and creation of new programs. The save rate for dogs has risen from 61 percent in 2010 to 78 percent this year to date. The increases for the cat save rate are without precedent and have risen from just 18 percent in 2010 to almost 60 percent this year to date. Our focus must be directed towards ensuring that funding is directed to support programs that help achieve no-kill status. The recommendations to achieve a 90 percent save rate include targeting any newly available resources towards eliminating the euthanasia of thousands of savable pets annually by:

- *Increasing animal lives saved through adoption, rescue and transport*
- *Reducing shelter intake through targeted sterilization of dogs and cats*
- *Providing access to resources aimed at surrender prevention and programs for responsible pet ownership*

The programs selected for enhancement are those ASD currently has in place that are resulting in the greatest number of lives saved. Rescue, transport, foster, spay and neuter, Trap-Neuter and Give Back (TNG), and adoption are the most significant programs linked to increased live release rates. Three of the four existing programs slated were created as pilot programs in 2010 with grant monies awarded by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). The grants associated with these programs are scheduled to expire within the first quarter of FY 2013-14. The pilot programs have proven to be very successful, contributing to the highest save rate in departmental history. The department will also work with the Humane Society of Greater Miami, The Cat Network, veterinarians and rescue groups in sharing these resources to maximize live release and spay and neuter surgeries.

The new programs proposed for implementation were determined after careful review of established best practices and recommendations from nationally recognized animal welfare organizations including the ASPCA, Alley Cat Allies, First Coast No More Homeless Pets and No Kill Nation.

The following is a summary of recommended essential internal and grant eligible programs. This will ensure a phased in approach which will build the foundation of a no kill community in Miami-Dade County.

Expansion of Existing Programs

- **Adoption/Special Events - \$317,000**

Offsite adoption events allow for delivery of services closer to the community. By hosting conveniently located events throughout the county, ASD is able to reach those that may not have otherwise visited the shelter. Through partnerships with Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces (PROS), ASPCA, Humane Society of Greater Miami (HSGM) and The Cat Network (CN), adoption and sterilization events are hosted throughout the county. In-house themed adoption events generate renewed public interest resulting in increased adoptions and awareness. Expansion of this program will provide the funding required to support 12 annual in-house adoption events and many more off-site adoption events. By only using existing resources the department has participated in 29 small off-site events in one year, which is a difficult task given that this taps in to regular operational resources at the shelter. Additionally, funding of this program will allow for large scale 24 hour adopt-a-thons to be held throughout the year. So far ASD has held 4 large-scale events in one year resulting in the adoption of over a thousand dogs and cats. Expansion of this program will increase the number of events and adoptions.

- **Animal Welfare/Return to Owner - \$62,000**

Currently there are 14 Animal Control Officers (ACOs) which represents a 40 percent reduction in staff since FY 2006-07. Increased funding enables the department to continue its effort in timely responding to 4,000 injured animals, 2,400 police requests for assistance and more than 12,000 stray dog-at-large reports received annually. The ACOs are the first line of defense in rescuing strays and injured animals in the field, and reuniting lost pets with their owners while in the field. Last fiscal year only 249 pets were successfully reunited with their owners. Increasing this return rate is important as it relieves pressure for cage space in the shelter. With additional funding, ASD will have the staff necessary to dedicate to field redemption resulting in a reduction in shelter intake while ensuring injured animals and police requests for assistance are promptly responded to.

- **Foster Program - \$38,000**

Foster programs are essential for neonate pets entering the shelter unable to eat on their own. Bottle feeding programs provide lifesaving round the clock care for the youngest and most vulnerable shelter pets. Pets in need of medical or behavioral intervention benefit from the one-on-one attention available through the care of a foster parent. This year alone ASD has recruited over 250 foster parents and has placed over 800 dogs/cats in foster care. Funding of this program will support the addition of a foster care coordinator responsible for ensuring at-risk pets are provided with the lifesaving alternatives.

- **Rescue Partnership - \$65,000**

ASD rescue partners save more than 4,500 shelter pets annually. Expansion of the rescue program will meet the staffing needs required to recruit new partners and serve the rapidly increasing number of rescue partners currently working with ASD. Currently there are more than 60 rescue agencies in the ASD rescue database. Expansion of the rescue program is

critical as the most at-risk shelter pets are pulled by rescue organizations. Rescue groups are uniquely qualified and capable of providing for medically and behaviorally challenged shelter pets that are not suitable candidates for adoption.

- **Spay/Neuter Program - \$362,000**

Expansion of spay/neuter services for shelter pets will allow for every animal leaving the shelter to be sterilized prior to release, unless excluded for medical reasons. Funding of this program will provide the capacity required to meet the demands of performing more than 16,000 sterilization surgeries annually for shelter pets that have been adopted, or selected for rescue or transport. Approximately 150 shelter pets are currently released prior to sterilization each month. The release of intact animals from the shelter leads to reproduction opportunities (either intended or accidental), contributing to existing overpopulation issues.

- **Trap Neuter and Give Back/Return Program - \$327,000**

Free roaming and community cats represent 41 percent of the shelter's intake. These cats are not adoptable due to their feral nature and lack of socialization with humans. As such, prior to the creation of this program feral cats had little to no chance of being released alive. This percent translates into 6,000 to 7,000 cats each year. The adoption rate for dogs is four times higher than the cat adoption rate despite lower cat adoption fees and no licensing requirements. Through transport and trap-neuter, give back/return (TNG/R) the cat save rate this fiscal year has climbed to almost 60 percent representing approximately 1,064 cats (1/3 of all cats saved) that have been saved this calendar year alone. TNG/R is the most humane and sustainable means of reducing cat overpopulation currently estimated at over 400,000 in Miami-Dade County. In just three years, the department went from saving 2,559 cats to saving 4,658 cats (an overall 82 percent increase). This funding would allow for the capacity to sterilize and return 90 percent of feral cats entering the shelter.

- **Transport Program - \$307,000**

In just over a year, more than 40 out-of-state adoption guaranteed agencies have joined forces to work with ASD to alleviate overcrowding, saving more than 3,000 shelter pets. Since inception, 90 dog transports alone have taken place. Cats and large mixed breed dogs are among the pets commonly saved through the transport program. This program is working within the premise of supply and demand and helps to move many hard to place pets to other areas where they are more highly sought after. This calendar year-to-date over 1,100 dogs have been transported to adoption guaranteed agencies accounting for a significant amount of the lives saved. To ensure the save rate continues its upward trend, the transport program must be expanded as this program helps to save many large dogs that languish and are overlooked at the shelter. Grant funds currently support the ASPCA funded position of pet placement coordinator. ASD is in the process of securing a transport vehicle through grant funds awarded by the ASPCA to ensure the program is sustainable. Funding for off-site boarding, medical and transportation-related expenses are required to ensure continued expansion and success of the transport program.

- **Volunteer Program - \$93,000**

Volunteer programs are an important component of shelter operations. Approximately 780 volunteers donated 12,300 hours last year to assist with special events, walking and bathing dogs, providing socialization, networking and assisting adopters. These hours represent 1,537 work days in support of shelter efforts. Grant funds currently support the ASPCA funded position of volunteer coordinator. New funding will allow for the addition of two full-time volunteer coordinators.

New Programs

- **Animal Care & Disease Prevention - \$504,000**

This program supports the department's effort to prevent the spread of disease and ensure basic veterinary care is provided for all animals housed at the shelter. The goal is to increase the number of savable animals that otherwise would be euthanized due to medical issues or the spread of disease. This new program will fund the additional positions required to provide the level of care required to properly evaluate and treat the shelter population.

- **Free and Low Cost Sterilization & Low Cost Veterinary Care Program - \$1.213 million**

Accessible veterinary care and sterilization are essential to reduce shelter intake of treatable pets. This program is interlinked with the pet retention program for income qualified participants. Through funding of this program free and low cost sterilization will be made available to ensure dog and cat populations do not continue to grow. ASD will explore community partnerships to ensure the greatest number of accessible and affordable sterilizations are available to the community.

Community sterilization programs are the most important method for ensuring the long-term viability of a no kill community. We must look for more resources to expand this first ever fully-funded community program. The \$1.213 million in funding will allow for four veterinarians and support staff to perform between 16,000 and 20,000 sterilization surgeries of owned dogs and cats. This is a significant improvement over the current approximate 13,000 surgeries being performed today. I am committed to a continued review of this function to ensure effectiveness and expansion, as needed.

- **Socialization and Enrichment Program - \$29,000**

Behavioral issues resulting from the boredom and stress associated with being housed in a shelter environment decrease the likelihood of positive outcomes for shelter pets. The physical appearance of dirty, matted or malodorous pets often serves as a deterrent to adopters. Funding of this program will support the position of a behavioral hygienist to provide bathing, grooming, de-ticking and training support to ensure neglected shelter pets receive the care required to increase their likelihood of adoption. On a daily basis there are dozens of shelter pets in need of socialization and enrichment activities that will greatly benefit from this program.

- **Community Outreach - \$146,000**

The department recognizes that encouraging more people to visit a shelter or rescue organization is key to achieving increased adoptions. Approximately 45 percent of these funds are allocated towards community outreach programs. The balance is earmarked for the addition of a position that will lead the department's fundraising, marketing and media effort. Funds will be used to conduct marketing efforts geared towards adoption and shelter services. Rescue organizations have a similar need for exposure to find permanent homes for shelter-rescued pets and may also be eligible for funding.

Additionally, County staff is in the process of implementing Commissioner Bovo's resolution for the creation of a plan for mail-based fundraising for charitable contributions to fund improved animal services.

Grant Programs for Non Profits

- **Surrender Prevention/Pet Retention - \$71,000**

Over the course of FY 2011-12 more than 6,500 pets were surrendered by their owners to ASD. The goal is to have accessible programs in the community to prevent pet relinquishment at the

shelter. Grant funds are recommended to be made available to qualified outside organizations for education, pet training and other resources to prevent pet surrender. Resources should be aimed at pet care for qualified owners on the brink of surrendering their animals to increase pet retention. Determining an amount of dogs and cats that will be deferred from shelter intake is difficult as this is a new program for the shelter.

- **Large and At-Risk Dog Rescue Program- \$190,000**

ASD partners with more than 60 rescue groups which collectively pull more than 4,500 pets from the shelter annually. Rescue groups incur significant expenses related to feeding, vetting, networking and boarding at-risk pets pulled from the shelter. The financial burden of caring for these pets limits the number of pets they are able to pull. The department relies heavily on rescue organizations to pull the most at-risk segment of the shelter population comprised of large mixed breed dogs. Rescue support is critical to sustain and generate an increase in the current save rate. It is recommended that grant funds be made available to qualified rescue groups pulling at-risk or special needs savable pets.

One third to half of dogs euthanized are large breeds and less likely to be adopted in comparison to small breed-types. The single most challenging focus for saving lives is amongst this population of shelter dogs. This program will improve our success rate in saving large dogs over the next few years with the goal of significantly reducing large dog euthanasia by half.

- **Large Animal Rescues - \$75,000**

ASD lacks the resources required to care for large animal victims of cruelty and neglect. It is recommended that grant funding be made available to qualified non-profit agencies caring for large animals, livestock victims of cruelty, and neglected animals confiscated from within Miami-Dade County.

- **Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) Education Program/Responsible Pet Ownership Program - \$38,000**

The department has successfully joined forces with MDCPS to develop a "Caring for Pets Lesson" plan currently being taught in schools targeting grades 3-5. Continuity of the program will be assured through joint programs developed in partnership with MDCPS to reach additional grade levels. Funding will be utilized to develop grant opportunities aimed at increasing responsible pet ownership educational programs.

Program Support

- **Grants and Contracts Management - \$163,000**

The administrative workload associated with the new and expanded programs and grant opportunities will require staffing support. The increased number of vaccinations, income qualified wellness care, sterilization surgeries, adoptions, offsite events, grant monitoring and rescue/transport contracts will require three support staff to track and monitor the effectiveness of programs associated with the No Kill Resolution.

I am fully committed to supporting the work of ASD and independent animal welfare and rescue groups in achieving a No Kill shelter. The programs I have outlined will provide the first steps towards reaching that goal. The department is equally dedicated to ensuring these programs are successful and will work diligently to achieve the goals set forth by the No Kill Resolution. I have asked ASD Director Alex Muñoz to provide a timeline associated with the work ahead. Over the next few weeks we will provide you with regular updates.

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In addition, I continue to support the creation of an Animal Services Advisory Board to oversee the implementation of these programs. I will task the Board with assessing the success rate and making recommendations for further programming. At that point, we will collectively be better able to review future budget recommendations that will get us to our No Kill goal.

If you have any questions, please contact ASD Director Alex Muñoz at 305-418-7128 or me at 305-375-1880.

c: R. A. Cuevas, Jr., County Attorney
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