



King County

Metropolitan King County Council

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September 27, 2007

The Honorable Ron Sims
King County Executive
701 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3210
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Executive Sims:

We have received the findings and recommendations from the King County Animal Care and Control Citizen's Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee), which earlier this week finalized its comprehensive report on how King County might become a model program for the humane treatment of animals and improve conditions in our shelters. This report was requested by the Council on May 29, 2007 (Motion 12521) out of concern for the humane levels of care of animals in our shelters.

We have begun our review of the citizens' report, and some of us have observed the Kent animal shelter. Although we did not visit the Crossroads Shelter, the volunteers at the shelter with whom we have spoken believe that dogs and cats are consistently suffering from neglect. We are writing to urge you to take immediate and emergency action to correct the unacceptable conditions that exist in King County animal shelters.

Of the Advisory Committee's 47 recommendations, perhaps the highest priority and most serious concern is disease control and the provision of sanitary shelter services to the animals in our custody. We strongly urge you to take immediate action to address the following:

- King County animal shelters must be renovated in order to provide a basic level of humane care for the animals housed there. The Crossroads shelter is unsuitable for the sheltering of animals, while the Kent shelter has been badly neglected for many years, and is plainly inadequate to provide for the animals' most basic needs.

We also urge you to act immediately on two other top recommendations made by the Advisory Committee.

- King County must promptly hire a shelter consultant to provide further, detailed advice on how to improve the Animal Services Program's (ASP) standards of care and to revitalize ASP policies and programs. Funds to hire the consultant were appropriated by the King County Council on August 3, 2007 (Ordinance 15873).
- ASP programs, policies and practices must be overhauled to bring them in line with a model animal welfare program.

The Council finds the Advisory Committee's cover letter and recommendations revealing of the inadequacy of our current Animal Services Program and the substandard conditions of our shelters. The Advisory Committee writes, "One point on which we are unanimous is the deplorable state of KCACC's shelters. We found King County's animal care program to be well beneath the standards that should be expected in a prosperous, compassionate, and generous community such as King County."

The Council has clearly stated its policy objective to develop a model animal services program with low euthanasia rates, high live-release rates and safe, sanitary, healthy and humane conditions. In Motion 12521, the Council specifically asked for recommendations that included how King County could: 1) implement a no-kill policy; 2) include an animal bill of rights to set standards for medical attention, hygiene, behavioral evaluation, nutrition, socialization, exercise and appropriate facilities; 3) develop performance measures on standards of animal care, adoption, euthanasia rates, and the investigation of animal cruelty.

To address the requests outlined in the Council's Motion, we also urge you to take prompt action to implement these Advisory Committee specific recommendations:

- Ensure sanitation conditions with immediate new training (and auditing) for staff on hygienic cleaning protocols in alignment with those developed by the UC Davis Veterinary College to reduce rates of disease.
- Ensure all animals are provided a full examination to determine their current health status and vaccination to prevent illness within the shelter.
- Directly notify all owner-surrender candidates of the conditions and disease rates of the shelter and offer information about other local shelters and rescue organizations until all outbreaks are controlled.
- Transmit a budget that will support a model Animal Services Program.

- Develop a capital plan conducive to the humane care of animals, to include both shelter facilities and animal transport equipment.

The Council has historically supported your budget recommendations for the Animal Service Program. In fact, in the last five years, the Council has approved every request to fund the Animal Services Program. In 2006, the Council provided \$137,375 when you requested \$100,000 for facilities improvements to the Kent shelter. And in 2007, the Council provided additional funds to support an independent review of shelter operations. To date, neither the shelter improvements nor the hiring of the independent consultant have been completed. Furthermore, your staff has stated that over \$500,000 in "benefit" funds, donated by the citizens of King County for the purpose of providing additional resources to the Animal Services Program have accumulated, unspent for years, when these funds could have been used to address many of the shelters' current inadequacies.

The Advisory Committee's report clearly demonstrates that King County is out of step with our community's values and capacity to provide humane care for the animals who have been entrusted to our care and to whom we have a moral obligation. King County's Animal Services Program should be a reflection of the tremendous compassion, prosperity and generosity that is found in the citizens of King County.

You are currently in the process of interviewing candidates for the position of Animal Services Program manager, a position that was originally advertised in January of 2007. The leadership skills required for this position fundamentally changed when the Council adopted its new policy directive on May 29, 2007. This position is still in the process of evolving as the Council seeks to further refine its policy objectives in the upcoming months. As it is clear that this position will require a candidate that is innovative, visionary and an agent of change, we would recommend that you do not fill this position permanently until the roles and responsibilities of this position are more clearly defined.

Thank you in advance for keeping the Council apprised of your progress to address this very serious matter. We look forward to receiving your report and budget recommendations that will allow King County to become a model program for the humane treatment of animals.

The Honorable Ron Sims
September 27, 2007
Page 4 of 4

Sincerely,



Julia Patterson
District 5



Dow Constantine
District 8



Bob Ferguson
District 1



Larry Phillips
District 4