

Joint Cities-County Work Group on Regional Animal Services

Background/Introduction on Agreement in Principle to Provide a Regional System

Animal control, sheltering and licensing are discretionary local services that historically were provided by individual jurisdictions and King County. While discretionary, the services address public health, safety, and animal welfare outcomes that are important to our residents. After being approached by leadership of the Suburban Cities Association in the mid 1980s, King County agreed to provide animal control, sheltering and licensing functions on behalf of cities on a regional basis, in exchange for keeping all pet licensing revenue.

Current Service Arrangements

Thirty-five cities have an animal services contract with the County (Seattle, Renton, Skykomish and Milton do not have contracts). Most cities contract for all three service components: control, shelter, and licensing. Two cities contract for shelter only (Des Moines, Normandy Park); one city contracts for shelter and field only (Newcastle). Five cities currently purchase a higher level of animal control services (Auburn, Shoreline, Kirkland, Tukwila, SeaTac).

The service arrangement has not been revisited since its inception and, over time, the gap between system revenue and system cost has grown to a level that is not sustainable for the County. In recent years, the County has contributed in excess of \$2 million annually from the County general fund to support the services. Based on direction from the County Council to enter into new cost-recovery arrangements with the cities, the County recently issued termination letters to cities for the existing animal services contracts, effective July 1.

Joint Cities-County Work Group

In anticipation of the termination of contracts, a Joint Cities-County Work Group has been meeting since January to develop a proposed “Agreement in Principle” for a new regional animal control system. This “Agreement in Principle” is intended to define a new basis for animal services contracts that could, if adopted by a sufficient number of cities, preserve the benefits of a regional animal services system (see Attachment 1). The alternative to a regional model is that cities will have to either operate their own individual systems or create subregional arrangements for service delivery. Under any delivery option – local, subregional or regional – cities will have to begin paying something for animal services to continue.

As the Work Group reviewed data about the present system, it became clear that cities face very different circumstances with respect to animal services: some are very heavy users of the shelter and control operations; others use it much less. The reasons could relate to demographics, behavior, the geographic proximity of the County shelter or nonprofit shelters, or some combination of factors. The licensing revenue generated by the system

also varies dramatically among jurisdictions on a per capita basis, in part based on where the County has in the past focused marketing efforts.

Economies of scale exist in providing animal services: the more cities that participate in a regional system, the lower the costs are for everyone. Conversely, if the geographic distribution of cities participating in the regional system starts to look like a patchwork, the service delivery becomes more challenging and inefficient; at some point, the County will not be willing or able to effectively provide service.

Summary of the Agreement in Principle

The “Agreement in Principle” represents a departure from “business as usual” in the delivery of animal services by the County (see Attachment 2). The primary difference in **control** services will be having animal control officers dedicated to each of four districts 5-days per week (see Attachment 3), while allowing cities individually or collectively within each district to contract for higher levels of service. Operations at the Kent **shelter** will be improved with limited resources through closing the Crossroads shelter and concentrating staff resources in Kent, expanding the foster and volunteer network, and instituting practices to reduce the number of animals and their length of stay (such as fees for owner surrenders, utilizing capacity at PAWS, and seeking collaboration with other private animal welfare partners). **Licensing** functions will continue to include licensing administration as well as marketing and education, with more incentive for cities to participate in increasing licensing revenues.

The proposed system costs to be allocated are \$5.6 million (annualized for 2010 – see Attachment 4). This reflects a reduction of about \$800,000 from estimates provided to cities in early 2010, achieved through cost reductions and the County absorbing some costs. The “Agreement in Principle” seeks to balance the different situations of cities by proposing a cost allocation methodology based on both population and usage factors (a 50-50 split). Licensing revenues (\$3.2 million) are credited to jurisdictions based on the residence of the person buying a pet license. A variety of allocations were considered before arriving at this methodology. The County is proposing to provide transitional funding to those participating cities that have the highest per capita costs. The County is also proposing to provide enhanced licensing marketing support for cities with the lowest licensing revenue per capita.

The Agreement in Principle proposes a 2.5 year agreement, during which time the parties, through a Joint Cities-County Committee, will focus on increasing system revenue and reducing system costs. The Agreement in Principle identifies several of these collaborative initiatives, including an exploration of alternative licensing systems and ways to further reduce shelter operation needs. Parties would be allowed to terminate for convenience upon six months notice. Contracts could be extended by mutual agreement for an additional 2 years.

The Work Group concluded that to maximize system efficiency, a “menu” approach to the purchase of services is not practicable. For example, it is not efficient for a limited number of field officers to drop animals at multiple shelters. Similarly, the more licensing systems

or different field systems the County shelter must interface with, the greater the administrative complexities, inefficiencies, and costs.

The Agreement in Principle is described in the attached tables and map, together with a timeline and steps for adoption, and related information.