

June 19, 2016

Dear Members of the Legislative & Rules Committee, City of Stamford

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I am writing to offer my comments for the public hearing scheduled for Monday, June 20, 2016. Unfortunately, I cannot attend this meeting but would like to ask that my comments be included as part of the public record and to be considered as part of the public hearing.

I am opposed to the ordinance section that addresses a mandatory spay/neuter enforcement policy for the outdoor/roaming cat population.

Section 111-7B (1a) indicates that roaming cats must be neutered or spayed. More than once, these cats' owners have been labeled, "irresponsible". This is offensive toward the population of Stamford residents that may truly be in need and "POOR". The majority of the people that are not sterilizing their cats are not those that have the financial means to do so, but rather are those that are in fact, at poverty levels. We ourselves may be financially stable but there are people that live paycheck to paycheck. They earn a minimum wage, may be working two or more jobs to feed their family and some give up their own necessities to feed their children. Yes, some of us can afford vaccines and sterilization for our cats, but not everyone can. It doesn't mean they don't love their cats or that they are doing wrong by them, it simply means they can't afford the cost of sterilization.

An interesting report (attached and linked here) pertains to the subject of poverty in Connecticut. Stamford is highlighted: <http://www.cafca.org/files/CT%20Poverty%20Report.pdf>

An excerpt of the report, page 21 says: "Even in Stamford, a city with a median household income above \$60,000 and a per capita income greater than \$30,000, 11% of its residents lived in poverty in 2010—nearly double the 6% of Stamford residents who lived in poverty in 1990." That was 13,301 "very poor" and 15,929 "poor" residents. How many of those people could own cats?

The ASPCA says, "*mandating spay and neuter for owned pets can have the unintended consequences of increasing shelter intake and impeding the return of strays to their owners when the cost associated with spay and neuter are prohibitive*". They go on to say "*one of the main barriers to spaying and neutering of pets is accessibility of services, which is not addressed simply by making spaying and neutering mandatory. Cost is one of the primary barriers to spay/neuter surgery*".

The fact is, **without an adequately funded, readily accessible, safe, efficient, affordable spay/neuter program in place, the homeless pet overpopulation problem will not be solved.**

At a past Legislative and Rules Committee meeting, Ms. Heaphy and Officer Cobb offered four solutions meant to address the concerns of the ASPCA. I offer the following comments for your consideration:

- 1. State vouchers – Good while they last. But unfortunately, as in past years, the vouchers have already run out. It's not unusual that about mid-year this is the case. There will be no more issued again until 7/1/16, if even then. There is rumor that this program may go by the wayside due to State of CT deficit concerns. Reference the Dept of Agriculture website: <http://www.ct.gov/doag/cwp/view.asp?a=1367&Q=259104&doagPNavCtr=|#51263>
Message from the website: "Effective January 19, 2016, the Animal Population Control Program will no longer be accepting applications for the low-income portion of the program for the remainder of the current fiscal year (6/30/16)."**
- 2. Spay/Neuter Clinics – Easier said than done - not readily accessible. The closest clinics mentioned are H.O.P.E. in Plantsville, CT and Nutmeg in Stratford. These clinics are between 40 minutes and 1 hour/15 minutes drive from Stamford. They require payment up front before an appointment is given. The cat must come in a hard plastic carrier, one cat per carrier so a person would have to buy or borrow one if they didn't have one or have multiple cats. Drop off is early in the morning so that a person would have to take time off from work to get their cat sterilized. Pick up is the same day and should the cat have post surgical complications, another trip has to be made. Many low income people use public transportation so getting to these facilities is difficult. There are no clinics close to Stamford. The animal welfare organizations don't even use these clinics because of lack of accessibility.**
- 3. Rippowam Animal Hospital low cost program - While this may be affordable to us, it's not to everyone. A quoted price of \$96.83 (males) to \$176.00 (females) was mentioned. This price will only be extended by the vet with a referral. Is Animal Control up to this additional task of assessing the person's need for low-cost and making contact with the vet's office? Add to this cost the price of vaccines that may be needed, about \$50.00 (rabies and distemper). Add possible medications should there be an issue requiring anti-biotics, flea treatment, etc. If the cat is pregnant upon spaying this may be problematic. And what does Animal Control do when someone says, I can't afford the cost? What is the plan other than a fine?**
- 4. The CT Humane Society program – This was the 4th solution given, however this pertains to feral cats ONLY so does not help low-income cat owners. But in regard to this program, has the Dept. of Agriculture been contacted? I would think they would frown upon Stamford Animal Control running a spay/neuter program through their books. This would distort the impound numbers and inflate the adoption figures. And as the feral cats do not have owners, would they have to come into the shelter and be advertised as do all pets that do not have owners identified? That would then require a 7-day hold before they could be sterilized. As Officer Cobb mentioned, Animal Control would do the transporting of the cats to Westport. Is that really good use of time and salary?**

Microchipping of cats – Section 111-7B 1C requires a cat to be microchipped or otherwise identified. While it would be wonderful if everyone microchipped their cats, Chairman Heaphy mentioned a few times that the reason the microchipping clause had to be removed from the dog sections was because the City can't force owners to microchip their dogs. Perhaps it was just overlooked, but shouldn't this then be taken out of the cat section as well?

Forcing owners to perform surgery - In line with what we are requiring of owners to do and not do, does it make sense when we say, we can't force owners to microchip, yet we propose forcing owners to perform elective surgery on their cats? Are these animals not the property of the owner, and although not what we would do with our own cats, don't they have the right to make the surgery decision about their own cats?

Nuisance Complaints - Section 111-11D currently reads: The ACO "may" respond to a complaint, etc. I don't believe it's a may or may not option. I believe Animal Control is obligated to respond to all complaints. Therefore, the word "may" should be changed to "shall".

Thank you for the time you have taken to read this letter.

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