



In the Doghouse Breeders are yelping about proposed new fees

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L.A.'s dog-breeding lobby is outraged by a proposed \$100 fee on all unneutered dogs.

The high license fees are part of a proposal by Department of Animal Services General Manager Dan Knapp to combat the proliferation of unwanted cats and dogs in the city.

"For breeders to deny their contribution to pet overpopulation is like cigarette companies claiming nicotine is not addictive," said one local advocate of the proposal, at a public hearing last year on the proposal.

A dog owner shot back, "My dogs are less likely to get pregnant than a teenager in this city."

Across the city, the various sides in the debate have squared off at seven public hearings. The proposal, approved this month by the Animal Regulation Commission, is expected to be considered this month by the City Council's Public Safety Committee. The City Council could take it up in March.

Under the proposal, the cost of a dog license for an altered pet would remain \$10. But for dogs with working reproductive systems, the fee would jump from \$30 to \$100. A \$100 breeding permit would be required for each litter of cats or dogs; now, there is a \$50-per-litter fee for dogs only. The proposal does not require cats to be licensed.

Dog and cat breeders -- who refer to themselves as hobbyists -- are furious, and hired two lobbying firms to try to persuade the City Council to vote it down. Breeders insist that their hobby is not the source of pet overpopulation and that they should not be blamed for the roaming packs of dogs that terrorize residents in some council districts. "Because they can't get the irresponsible, they charge the responsible," says Mary Di Biasi, legislative advocate for the California Federation of Dog Clubs and the Coalition for Responsible Dog Owners and a breeder of Welsh corgis. "Raising dogs is a hobby -- we don't make money, no matter what you hear."

Hobbyists say that kennel and cat-club rules prohibit the showing of altered animals in shows. So, they complain, Los Angeles residents who enter their animals in competitions would, in effect, be forced to pay the higher fees.



Animal-welfare advocates praise the ordinance as a step in the right direction, though many think the best response would be a moratorium on animal breeding in Los Angeles. They point to this morbid statistic: Tens of thousands of cats and dogs -- 59,663 last year, more than 1,000 a week that came into Los Angeles shelters last year -- were given lethal injections, their carcasses shipped off to a rendering plant.

Breeders protest that their hobby has nothing to do with the problem. But humane-community activists counter that up to one-third of the dogs dumped at city shelters are purebreds, and point to the variety of pure-breed rescue organizations, including ones for pug-dogs, Chihuahuas and boxers, that have more animals than they can adopt out.

Activists have lined up behind Knapp, an ordained minister and former executive director of the Sonoma County Humane Society. "One faction is to save lives, one is to produce lives. For one group it costs money to save lives. One group profits from lives," said longtime animal-welfare activist Michael Bell in a phone interview.

Knapp downplays the differences. "Every single one of the hobbyists are good people," he says. "As the hearings have gone on, you keep hearing, 'Let's come together.' For the first time in Los Angeles, or maybe even the state, these various groups are recognizing that there is a problem."

It's a politic analysis by someone who, in just 18 months on the job, has tiptoed with some success through the local animal-welfare minefield. Knapp has reorganized a department that an activist once described as "treating animals like so much solid waste," and which had alienated the kind of animal-welfare organizations that have been essential to other municipalities' ability to reduce their kill rates.

He also weathered a potential disaster for a department that has been underfunded for years -- a state bill which came into effect last July that raises the standards for animal care at public shelters and requires a longer holding period before animals are killed. The city used to hold animals for 72 hours before putting them up for adoption, and for at least five days after that; now, the city can be required to hold them 30 days.

Knapp warns that it will take a six-month study to analyze the effect. "We're more crowded . . . and the more crowded we are, the more problems you see in the pound," he says.

Mayor Richard Riordan, during an interview last year at the East Valley Animal Shelter, credited the bill, authored by state Senator Tom Hayden, Riordan's former opponent for his mayoral seat, as the impetus for a 26 percent rise in the department's budget this year, to almost \$11.5 million -- the biggest increase in years.

Animal-welfare activists agree with Riordan when he also acknowledges pressure from his daughter, Kathy, whom he appointed to the Animal Regulation Commission in April. "My daughter, with Dan Knapp, is a leader," Riordan said. "She's the one who protests outside my house when she disagrees with me."

Perhaps as significant as the budget increases, Knapp has found, is the support of a humane

community that had been estranged from the department for years. Ongoing talks with the Coalition for Pets and Public Safety center on a deal in which the foundation will lease two mobile spayneuter clinics to the city for an as-yet-undetermined nominal fee.

"I used to see the department as a dogcatcher killing animals," says Bobby Dorifshar, who provides free dog-training seminars for people who adopt dogs from city shelters. "Now I see it protecting animals and supporting animals."

Not all animal-welfare advocates are as pleased as Dorifshar. At one public hearing, Lois Newman, of the Cat and Dog Rescue Association, angrily denounced the 10 goals that guided Knapp's reorganization, saying that the department "should spend \$3 or \$4 million dollars on spayneuter - - period!"

But the most daunting challenge to Knapp's reforms may be the acrimonious factions now squared off over the pet-overpopulation ordinance and whose bad blood was on vivid display at a public hearing last fall in West L.A.

There were groans of "Oh, come on!" when Kathleen Greenwald, a 15-year dog-rescue activist, protested, "This is a serious issue, and I wish these breeders would come up with some solutions other than 'Don't do it.' If they sold one animal, it would cover the cost of a license for a year."

The hisses went the other way when George Eigenhauser, regional director of the Cat Fanciers Association, protested that only 20 percent of L.A.'s dogs are licensed with the fee for unaltered dogs now at \$30. "Raise the dog tax to \$330 . . .? As long as we have license fees higher than people can afford and spayneuter fees higher than people can afford, you're going to have a low level of compliance."

One persistent theme was the charge that many of the breeders testifying at the meetings are not from within Los Angeles -- and department records bear that out. Statistics from the hearings show that 58 of the 171 individuals testifying against the ordinance, most of them representing breeders, were from outside the city.

The California Federation of Dog Clubs' Di Biasi responded in an interview that she herself is from Riverside but argues that her constituency resides within the city. But they apparently don't all comply with the present ordinance that requires a \$50 breeder fee for each litter of puppies put up for sale. Records show that only five breeders have bought permits in Los Angeles.

Breeders use their own noncompliance to argue that the new ordinance would be unenforceable -- another repetitive theme in the hearings.

"When I hear that, I want to scream -- and I'm supposed to sit up there with my mouth shut . . ." says Kathy Riordan. "If police officers couldn't respond to a number of armed-robbery calls, would we now say, because it's unenforceable, that should be legal? We do want to enforce it. I believe we won't have a problem enforcing it, but in the event that we do, we will work that out and fine-tune it. But that's not a good enough reason not to have it in place."

Knapp says the fee will be enforceable with the help of 10 to 15 new animal-control officers he

expects to have on board by March. But his approach is more complex than that. "What I want to do is take these mobile spayneuter clinics into the challenge areas, provide free spayneuter, but also blanket the area with education and use enforcement for the most egregious cases."

He explains how he would, neighborhood by neighborhood, make the services available. "Then," he adds, "if you have somebody in the neighborhood that's breeding pit-bull puppies for sale for 50 bucks a pop -- those are the ones who you know aren't interested in spayneuter, so you say, 'Okay, we've got a law. You have to comply.'"