

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: JASON NUTT, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF REVISED ANIMAL SERVICES FEES

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the City Manager's Office and Sonoma County Animal Services that the Council, by resolution, approve and adopt the Sonoma County Animal Services revised fees effective as of December 6, 2023.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sonoma County Animal Services (SCAS) is proposing several fee increases to help recover some of the costs of services delivered to residents in the jurisdictions served.

BACKGROUND

Sonoma County Animal Services provides sheltering and field services to areas within their jurisdiction, including unincorporated areas of the County, the City of Santa Rosa, and the Town of Windsor. Animal Services is also responsible for rabies control for the entire County. The SCAS service area is comprised of approximately 1,575 square miles with nearly 500,000 residents and includes an animal shelter that serves nearly 2,500 animals annually. The Department performs a mix of fee-funded work related to services provided to individuals and public benefit work, such as rabies control, that is not recoverable by fees.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

July 9, 2019 – Resolution No. RES-2019-092, approving and adopting the Sonoma County Animal Service Revised Fees

July 10, 2018 – Resolution No. RES-2018-117, approving and adopting the Sonoma County Animal Service Revised Fees

July 11, 2017 – Resolution No. RES-2017-134, approving and adopting the Sonoma County Animal Services Revised Fees

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September 15, 2015 – Resolution No. 28690, adopting revised fees and approving time-limited amnesty for dog license fee and penalties.

ANALYSIS

The proposed SCAS fees for FY2023-24 (Attachment 2) are based on estimated costs and a fee study completed by Wohlford Consulting in 2023 (Attachment 3). The study reviewed annual volumes of each fee, the amount of time spent by staff on each fee activity, the annual cost of each staff member, and the unit's overhead costs. Hourly rates were developed from this information and used to calculate actual costs and recommended fees.

Changes in fees range from -98% to 981% and generally reflect what it costs Sonoma County Animal Services to deliver each service. Research from neighboring and similar-sized jurisdictions also helped inform the fee rates. While full cost recovery is the goal, it is currently not achievable with community affordability considerations. Fees will be reviewed each year and adjusted accordingly as business costs increase. Labor agreements recently approved by the Board of Supervisors with County staff were taken into consideration in the develop of the fee rates. The following fees have been reduced: dog licensing fees, through our partnership with DocuPet; and vaccination fees, due to contractual cost saving and capturing accurate costs. Fees for potentially dangerous and vicious dog designations have substantially increased to reflect a more accurate consideration of animal control officer time for these cases.

Based on the information from the 2023 fee study, cost recovery is weighed against affordability and what SCAS partners are charging. Maintaining market affordability and encouraging animal owner compliance with applicable laws will supersede full-cost recovery in setting some of the fees proposed. In addition, some costs are nonrecoverable, such as the time spent by Animal Control Officers in patrolling the County and partner jurisdictions and checking on compliance with code in public spaces. This necessitates an adjustment to the subsidy for Animal Services allocated by the Board and reflected in the proposed fee schedule.

SCAS fees are broken down into five categories Adoptions, Board/Impound, Licensing, Spay/Neuter and Rabies Control. To ensure animals move through the system quickly and reach a positive outcome such as adoption or transfer, roadblocks must be removed and lesser fee amounts must be considered. If fees are not seen as reasonable and affordable, people will not adopt, reclaim their lost pets, or get them spayed/neutered, which would lead to SCAS warehousing animals for extended periods, which would increase costs and decrease positive outcomes for animals and the community. By subsidizing these fees, more animals will be reunited with their owners, find new homes, and SCAS will be able to continue its life-saving work for the community.

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For these reasons, it is recommended that the City adopt fees in alignment with the County that charge less than 100% cost recovery in some areas of work. Lowering fees to encourage adoption, neuter/spaying, and licensing would positively increase public participation in these programs and support SCAS's goal of shortening stays and getting animals into supportive homes more quickly. SCAS fees request therefore involves a request for ongoing support to subsidize fees in these areas to limit potential harm to the community and maintain the program's adoption and pet recovery appeal.

FISCAL IMPACT

The fee adjustments for animal impound and boarding fees, license fees and other health/safety related charges are estimated to decrease revenue for FY 2023-24 Animal Services by \$54,071. The City of Santa Rosa will receive credit consistent with its County of Sonoma animal services contract.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is not a project which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

A public hearing notice was published in the Press Democrat on November 25, 2023.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Animal Services Fee Study Report
- Resolution /Exhibit A – Sonoma County Animal Services Revised Fee Chart FY2023-24

PRESENTERS

Jason Nutt, Assistant City Manager
Brian Whipple, Director of Animal Services