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Council Districts: All
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The Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Room 395, City Hall

PROPOSED ELIMINATION OF ANIMAL SERVICES' GRAVEYARD SHIFT

RECOMMENDATION:

The General Manager of the Department of Animal Services respectfully requests that the Mayor and City Council:

NOTE AND FILE this report.

SUMMARY:

Over the last several years, Animal Services has seen its overall staffing levels decline, while the number of kennels built has increased. This imbalance required the Department to look at ways of effectively staffing for six shelters when, at times, its effective workforce should only staff four.

After fielding complaints from kennel staff and the public, and consulting with shelter management and the City's budget and human resources experts, it was determined that, rather than close a shelter, reduce hours or days of operations, the most practical solution seemed to be to redeploy the graveyard shift staff to day and swing shifts. This influx of staff onto day shifts would promote both animal and employee safety, while providing better customer service. In lieu of having a skeleton crew of Animal Care Technicians staff the graveyard shift, a security guard would be stationed at each of the

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six shelters. (It is important to note that security guards would not be expected to perform any animal care.)

However, after various stakeholders voiced concern over this proposed change, on Thursday, March 21, 2013, the General Manager deferred its implementation to allow community input. A motion (C.F. 13-0345) was introduced the following day instructing the Department to address various questions. This report addresses those questions.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the time when the expanded North Central kennels (the first of the new facilities) were opened in 2006, Animal Services received approval from the Mayor and City Council to begin expanding its kennel staff (primarily Animal Care Technicians [ACTs]) in anticipation of the increased number of kennels that would have to be served and maintained once all the new facilities were built.

The Department recruited several "classes" of ACTs over the 2007 and 2008 fiscal years, expanding those ranks. Then the recession hit and the City budget began contracting as revenues fell and legal requirements to make payments to the City's pension funds forced decision-makers to divert hundreds of millions of General Fund dollars to that purpose. At that point, Animal Services not only stopped hiring new ACTs but had to scramble to hold onto the ones it had. Budget cuts in FY 2009 threatened several dozen ACTs with layoffs until the Council identified funds to save those jobs.

Since then, ACTs have not been laid off but there has been no new hiring. The latter has been mandated by the citywide hiring freeze that has been in place for about three years. In fact, on March 15, 2013, the Department was given permission to hire six new ACTs, the first such new-hires in recent memory. However, six new ACTs amounts to only one new body per shelter, not nearly enough to solve the staffing shortage that motivated the proposed change to the graveyard shift.

In 2005-06 the Department had 120 ACTs to care for animals in 759 kennels and cages throughout the shelter system as it existed at the time. With the February 2013 opening of the new South Los Angeles shelter, Animal Services had 134 ACTs available to care for animals in 2029 kennels and cages. So, although there was a modest increase of 14 ACTs (12%), there was an increase of 1270 animal spaces (167%). The result is that the Department is operating six facilities with a staffing level that would be, according to national shelter management standards, just about ideal for four.

The staffing conundrum is made worse when factoring time off: on any given month, there are, on average, 30 ACTs out sick, on Injured-On-Duty (IOD), on vacation, and on paid/unpaid leave. *This equates to two shelters without ACT staffing.* This creates yet another problem. Due to the staffing shortages, some vacation requests cannot be approved because employees are needed to maintain minimum staff levels. This

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results in people losing vacation time and the accumulation of overtime, which leads to cash payouts.

These changes are creating significant challenges to our staff and, consequently, the animals. One employee recently logged between nine and 13 of miles of walking per day at the new and larger South Los Angeles center. It was critical to address the staffing shortfall immediately at the South Los Angeles shelter, so the Department transferred three ACTs each from West LA and East Valley to South Los Angeles. This shifting of resources elicited complaints from volunteers and affected shelter captains. One captain believed that moving three ACTs from West LA would cripple the shelter. Another captain believed that moving staff from East Valley to South Los Angeles would result in reduced cleanliness, increased odor, and fewer adoptions.

Unfortunately, some of these concerns have been borne out. The Department has experienced increased complaints about the shelters not being clean, having phones go unanswered, and difficulty in finding staff to show animals to adopters or to help rescue partners.

While the Department is pleased to have bigger, newer facilities in which it can save more animals, no one could have anticipated that these facilities would begin opening just before the onset of the nation's worst economic crisis since 1929. Animal Services recognizes that it is easy to say, "In 2000 we were promised" fully staffed facilities as long as we ignore the economic realities of what has happened since the facilities began coming on line.

The fact is that the recession has precipitated several years of budget cuts at a time when renegotiated union contracts were raising the cost of employing each individual staff member. (Some in the public object to these contracts, but the fact is that many City staffers had gone without raises for several years before 2005 because negotiations for new contracts were years overdue, so the negotiated increases then were larger than they otherwise might have been.)

These circumstances have hurt just about every City department in terms of staffing. The CAO stated that the staffing levels in this Department have been reduced by 21% since 2009-10, a reduction that is far greater than the citywide reduction of 14.4% (C.F. 12-0600-S171). The constituencies for parks, libraries, senior centers, street sweeping and countless other services are just as concerned as animal lovers are. The General Managers of every City department are struggling with similar challenges.

THE DECISION TO ELIMINATE THE GRAVEYARD SHIFT

The Department continuously looks at ways of better allocating available staff so that each worker is not overburdened and all of the crucial work gets done as efficiently as possible. In discussions with the Mayor's Office and the Office of the City Administrative Officer, the Personnel Department, and Animal Services staff, the

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Department weighed the pros and cons of various solutions to the dilemma of reduced overall staffing and increased kennel space. The Department did not want to close a shelter, nor had a private partner to operate one of our six shelters appeared in response to an RFP circulated in 2012.

Animal Services polled neighboring jurisdictions and reviewed their business practices relative to graveyard shift operations. The Department learned the following:

JURISIDICATION	IS THERE A GRAVEYARD SHIFT?
County of Orange	No kennel workers between 7PM - 6AM
Long Beach Animal Control	No kennel workers on swing or graveyard
Pasadena Humane Society and SPCA	No kennel workers between 7PM - 6AM
SouthEast Area Animal Control Authority	No kennel workers between 7PM - 6AM
Inland Valley Humane Society and SPCA	No kennel workers between 7PM - 6AM
County of Riverside	No kennel workers between 7PM - 8AM
Irvine	No kennel workers between 7PM - 6AM
County of Los Angeles	Varies. No kennel workers generally after 10PM. One Animal Control Officer takes in animals between 10PM - 6AM, cares for kennels, and responds to emergencies.

Since this information was first reported at the March 19, 2013 meeting of the PAW Committee, some have questioned its applicability to Los Angeles due to the large size of our shelter system and number of animals we deal with. It should be noted that many of the individual shelters cited are similar in size and number of animals to those in our system and, since each shelter in our system is on any given day a stand-alone operation (especially during graveyard shift), the operational conditions at any given shelter mentioned and any one of our shelters are roughly comparable. Thus, the procedures and protocols in place to handle specific situations may reasonably be compared as well.

Under the City Charter¹, the General Manager has not only the authority but the obligation to administer matters concerning employees, but neither exists in a vacuum.

¹ City Charter Section 509 sets forth the authority of the General Manager: (a) administer the affairs of the department or bureau as its chief administrative officer; (b) appoint, discharge, suspend, or transfer the employees of the department or bureau, other than the secretary of the board and the chief accounting employee of the department, all subject to the civil service provisions of the Charter; (c) issue instructions to employees, in the line of their duties, all subject to the civil service provisions of the Charter; (d) expend the funds of the department or bureau in accordance with the provisions of the budget appropriations or of appropriations made after adoption of the budget.

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Civil Service provisions and procedures set forth in union contracts must be adhered to, and the Department's chain of command should be involved.

Regarding the decision to eliminate the graveyard shift, management has been working closely with the Personnel Department to make sure it followed all appropriate steps and procedures. Additionally, Animal Services consulted with shelter managers, who have been dealing with the impact of the overall staffing shortage over the last few years.

This decision regarding the graveyard shift is a step the Department is proposing in conformance with the constraints of the budget adopted for this fiscal year by the City Council and signed by the Mayor. Certain City Councilmembers have questioned whether a department has the authority to do even this. The Department believes that it is required to provide the best service it can within the constraints of the adopted budget.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE ELIMINATION OF THE GRAVEYARD SHIFT

On Friday, March 22, 2013, a motion (C.F. 13-0345) was introduced instructing the General Manager to report to the Personnel and Animal Welfare Committee on its proposal to eliminate the graveyard shift. The Department was also instructed to address six questions. The questions, and answers, follow:

- 1. Will kennel cleanliness standards be maintained without ACTs on duty from 12 AM – 6AM?*

Management believes that by redeploying the graveyard shift to day and evenings - during which shifts the vast majority of cleaning and maintenance work is accomplished - that the Department would see improved cleanliness in the shelters, more staff available to assist the public and rescue groups, and an improved ability to answer phone calls promptly.

- 2. What will happen to unsupervised animals that show signs of distress or engage in fights with other animals from midnight to 6:00AM?*

Shelter staff does a good job of "reading" the animals and not placing animals together that are likely to fight. This is particularly important with the medium- and large-sized dogs, so staff would need to continue to avoid overcrowding and mis-matching. Most fights center on food and occur at mealtimes when ACTs are feeding rather than at night when the dogs are sleeping.

- 3. What happens to animals, especially those which are pregnant or newborns, left at the shelters by the public during the graveyard shift?*

The law regarding abandoning animals will be posted on site as well as the telephone numbers for the two Animal Control Officers working the graveyard shift. The

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Department is also assessing whether there will be a need for a third ACO on the graveyard shift. The ACOs would assess the condition of the animals and see that additional care is provided if needed up to and including transfer to an emergency veterinary clinic partner.

Pregnancy or even giving birth is not usually an emergency. The birthing mom is usually put in a cage with a towel draped over the front and allowed to do her job. In the case of a birthing mom needing a cesarean there is time and this event becomes a late-term spay.

- 4. How will 9-1-1 calls from the public regarding dangerous or injured animals be handled? What City agency will respond to these calls and at what cost? Will this responsibility fall to LAPD?*

There are no reductions recommended for the Animal Control Officers (ACOs) on the graveyard shift. They would continue to be on duty and available to deal with dangerous or injured animals. Animal Services will equip them with cell phones to ensure 24-hour emergency calls for the public. ACOs currently answer night calls when the ACTs do not hear the phones. The proposed graveyard shift change would have no impact on LAPD, with no additional calls and no increased burden on law enforcement.

- 5. How will care be provided to animals that have undergone surgery and cannot be left alone from midnight to 6:00 a.m., or to animals that are on medication, such as anti-seizure drugs, and require regular monitoring? Will they be sent to a hospital? What is the annualized cost?*

The Chief Veterinarian reports that, over the course of a year, the Department will probably get a handful of animals on anti-seizure medications. They are given their medications by the Registered Veterinary Technicians and swing and graveyard shift employees will monitor them overnight. If a seizure were to occur, there is not much the ACT can do, other than observe. Generally, a seizure is over by the time the ACT is able to contact a veterinarian. (Most seizures last less than a minute). It is rare for a seizure to occur in the middle of the night when the animal is sleeping and for a seizure to actually cause an animal's death.

The Chief Veterinarian added that surgical patients generally recover from the anesthesia by the time the medical staff leaves for the day. Swing and graveyard staff monitors and feeds these animals. Only rarely do they need to contact the veterinarian for an issue, such as bleeding from the incision. In these cases the veterinarian will instruct the ACT on a course of action that may include taking the animal to a private veterinarian. But this occurs very infrequently. Most non-emergency room veterinary hospitals do not have overnight monitoring. If the veterinarian believes that the animal is stable, clients are given the option of transferring the animal to an emergency room for overnight monitoring or keeping the animal at the hospital. Many clients will opt for the latter as it is generally much cheaper.

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Currently, swing and graveyard shift ACTs are expected to monitor the medical animals intermittently throughout the night. As with any animal in the shelter, if they note a problem they can elect to bring the animal to a private veterinarian or they can call the shelter's veterinarian for more instructions.

The Chief Veterinarian believes that if there was no graveyard shift, the swing shift ACTs would need to be more diligent in monitoring all of the animals and more proactive in making decisions to take any sick/injured animal to a private veterinarian before the end of their shifts. The additional impact could be more late-evening phone consultations with veterinarians. To accommodate this, the Chief Veterinarian recommended having a swing shift ACT supervisor work from 12PM – 8PM or 2PM – 10PM and to ensure that kennels are not overcrowded with medium- to large-sized dogs.

6. What is the cost to employ security guards to replace ACTs?

The cost quoted for contracted security at six shelters for one year is \$256,000. This can be paid for via expense and salary savings, and from budgeted funds. The Department would not require the approval of Managed Hiring to do this. Moving 15 to 22 employees onto day shifts would save from \$31,000 to \$56,000 (depending on the salary level of each employee) because the 5% “night” bonus would not be paid.

NEXT STEPS

Since the General Manager's decision to defer the elimination of the graveyard shift, the Department has received meaningful input. For example, on Wednesday, March 27, at a regularly scheduled meeting of departmental supervisors at all levels, management again entertained alternate options to redeploying graveyard shift ACTs or closing a shelter. There was consensus that the Department's shelters are understaffed, but there was no consensus as to the best possible solution beyond expanding staff levels.

There is room to make a different decision if the resources become available. A town hall meeting is scheduled on Monday, April 8, from 7:00 to 9:00 at the East Valley shelter to explore other options with members of the public. The Department believes that by working with key stakeholders, it can identify the best solution under very difficult financial times.

FISCAL IMPACT

There are no salary savings when redeploying staff from the graveyard shift to day and swing shifts. However, since graveyard staff receive a 5% night bonus, moving 15 to 22 employees onto day shifts would save from \$31,000 to \$56,000 (depending on the salary level of each employee). There would be additional security costs incurred by the Department. Security costs for one guard for each of the six shelters from April to June 2013 would be about \$64,000. This amount would be paid for with budgeted

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funds derived chiefly from salary savings and savings from other management efficiencies accomplished in the last couple of years. Full-year security costs are \$256,000.

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