

August 26, 2016

Councilmember Paul Koretz
5th Council District
200 North Spring Street, Room 440
Los Angeles, CA 90012
BY FAX: (213)-978-2250

Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson
8th Council District
200 North Spring Street, Room 450
Los Angeles, CA 90012
BY FAX: (213)-979-1442

Councilmember David Ryu
4th Council District
200 N. Spring Street, Room 425
Los Angeles, CA 90012
BY FAX: (213)-473-2311

Re: Council File #16-0585, "California Department of Fish and Game/Coyote Sightings"

Honorable Councilmembers:

I write to you concerning the current state of the record on the above-referenced motion by Councilmember Joe Buscaino.

To the extent it is comprehensible, the major premise of the coyote management "Program" submitted by the Department of Animal Services ("Department") is that attempting to change the habits of more than four million people is, without more, the most efficient and promising approach to maintaining equilibrium in our relationship with habituated, threatening coyotes. At the very least, that premise is naive.

While public education is an indispensable element of a coyote management plan, it cannot do the entire job. Rather, it must be complemented by actions that deal directly and firmly with the small subset of the animals whose behavior is abnormally aggressive, suggesting they may attack humans.

A case in point occurred in Beachwood Canyon on August 9, and is described in the following email I received from a neighbor:

“About an hour and a half ago, my husband took one of our dogs (a 19 pound bichon frise) out for a walk. Our dog was wearing a big Puppia harness and a regular leash (not a flexi-leash). They walked up Detour together and [the dog] stopped across the street from a neighbor's house to smell some foliage. Seconds later, my husband felt a tug on the leash. When he looked up, he saw that a coyote had grabbed [the dog] and had his jaws around him - right near his neck. My husband screamed, threw a rock at the coyote, and picked up [the dog] (who had somehow escaped the harness by then). [My husband] chased the coyote away and ran home. When he arrived back at our house, the coyote was standing in the street, and he had to chase it away again.

Fortunately,[the dog] appears to have escaped unscathed. He is very shaken up, but he has no physical injuries. [My husband] is shaken up as well, and he sprained his ankle. I wanted to let you know that this happened, so that you will be alert and vigilant when walking with your pets. [My husband] said the coyote looked very well fed. And, clearly, it was very bold and unafraid of humans. Our dog was on a short leash- standing no more than two or three feet from my husband when the coyote attacked him.”

*Email of August 9, 2016, 8:21 AM, from [] to Mark R. Steinberg.
Subject: Coyote Incident.”*

I counselled my neighbor to immediately contact the Department Of Animal Control to report the incident. She did so several times and roughly a week later received a reply counselling future precautionary action.

Without question, this unprovoked attack on a tightly-leashed dog within a few feet of its human is dangerously aberrant coyote behavior. Yet in the face of such an event, the Department's "Program" calls for nothing but talk, telephone calls, reports, and reports on reports. In short, unless the attacking coyote is demonstrably injured or sick, Department policy (to the extent it can be discerned from what has been submitted to this Committee) is to avoid "troubling" the

animal with even the slightest unwanted touch. This “hands-off” approach not only defies common sense, but stands in direct conflict with the recommendations of the Humane Society of the United States (“Society”), an organization that the Department holds out as uniquely equipped to advise on the peaceful coexistence of humans and wild animals.

In its June 24 “Report Back on the Coyote Management Program,” (“Report”), the Department refers approvingly to the Society’s recommendations on dealing with coyotes. The Report omits, however, any reference to the Society’s “Template Coyote Management & Coexistence Plan,” (“Template”), a document whose preface recites that it is “[B]ased on scientific research, a thorough understanding of coyote ecology and biology in urban settings, and the best known management practices and management tools.” Template pg. 4. (I have submitted a copy of the Template as a separate filing.)

For present purposes, the relevant section of the Template is a chart entitled, “Human-Coyote Conflict Classification & Recommended Responses.” Template pgs. 13-14. The chart sets out 16 categories of coyote behavior ranging from benign to an unprovoked attack on a human, and matches each category to a recommended response.

The 13th behavioral category on the chart reads, “Coyote injures or kills pet on leash.” Though the dog in the encounter reported above luckily escaped injury, the fact that the coyote had the animal in its mouth obviously places the reported incident within this category.

The Humane Society’s chart recommends the following response when a coyote exhibits category 13 behavior:

“Gather information on specific animals involved and report circumstances. Educate on pet management, coyote attractants and hazing. Perform yard/neighborhood/public area audit. Post educational signs and/or send educational materials to residents in the area. **Implement high-intensity hazing techniques (by ACOs, police, etc.)—using rubber bullets, paintball guns, etc.**” (emphasis added)

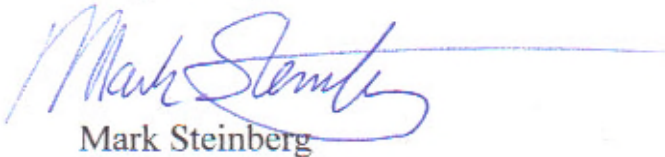
Thus, the most respected animal protection organization in the country, one that the Department itself cites in its June 24, 2016 submission, has sanctioned the use of “high intensity” hazing techniques in response to dangerous coyote behavior that falls just short of an attack on a human.

In light of the foregoing, I submit that any coyote management plan approved by the Committee contain the following language, or its equivalent, adapted from a 2008 letter coauthored by a representative of the Humane Society of the United States and Ms. Camilla Fox, founder of Project Coyote (appearing at page 5 of a 6/26/16 Memorandum previously submitted to the Committee):

“Suitably trained Department personnel shall be authorized to use rubber bullets or paintball guns on a highly selective basis to deal with coyotes that display increasing brazenness, despite efforts to alter their behavior through the use of other non-lethal methods.”

In closing, I underscore that I strongly oppose the indiscriminate killing of coyotes and, as well, the use of any tool or technique that may permanently injure animals whose behavior does not rise to the level of a serious public safety threat. At the same time, I believe the Department, in failing to formally adopt humane, widely endorsed steps to deal with the problem of dangerous, habituated coyotes, is failing in its duty to protect the public.

Respectfully,



Mark Steinberg

Los Feliz Resident