

To: **Mayor and City Council**
Through: **Ryan Schroeder, City Manager**
From: **Manila Shaver, Chief of Police**
Date: **May 28, 2019**

Animal Licenses, Term, Proposed Changes

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Per West St. Paul City Code, Chapter 90.01 Section A, residents of West St. Paul are required to obtain a City license for pets over the age of four months. Section B of the Chapter requires an animal owner to show proof of a current rabies vaccination certificate when animal licenses are submitted. For as long as I have worked for the City (30+ years), the animal license term has been for a one-year period and City administrative staff have processed the animal license applications.

Recently a resident has suggested a longer animal license term, including a “lifetime” dog license. While various cities have different animal licensing requirements, the common factor in licensing an animal is to ensure a current rabies vaccination. Below are the animal licensing requirements of our sister cities:

St. Paul – Must renew an animal license annually or can obtain a lifetime license if a dog is microchipped.

Mendota Heights - Must renew an animal license annually.

Inver Grove Heights – As of last year, they do not license animals, but there is a hefty fine if there is an incident and the animal is not properly vaccinated.

South St. Paul - Must renew an animal license every two years. However, South St. Paul is in the process of adopting a lifetime dog license (May 2019).

Note – Most cities provide an owner the option to mail in the application and payment or apply in person.

The cost of a rabies vaccination is around \$60/shot. The effective period of a rabies vaccination can vary. Normally, the initial rabies vaccination is effective for one year and subsequent booster shots are effective for either one or two additional years. When a rabies vaccination is given, the animal receives a tag from the vet articulating information about the animal, the owner and the vaccination period.

Since the City utilizes the police department’s community service officers to enforce the City’s animal code, I asked for their input and suggestions about animal code and enforcement issues. Below are some of their comments:

- ✓ *Keeping the two-tier license fee for an animal license if the dog is spayed or neutered may be an incentive for people to neuter their pets.*

- ✓ *Creating the convenience of applying/paying for the license online. While not everyone will have the ability to upload a copy of the rabies vaccination certificate or pay online, thus the City would still need to keep the in-person option. People rely on their phones more and more to make their lives easier and daily tasks less of a hassle, so I think if this service was offered online or in a cellphone APP the City would see an increase in animal license compliance.*
- ✓ *Trakit is used to record a number of City interactions with residents, including animal licenses. However, not all police employees have office/mobile access to this software, thus afterhours record checking cannot always be done. Additionally, police employees already use numerous software applications, additional software applications are making accessing information complex for the CSOs and officers.*
- ✓ *The current yearly license renewal period keeps City /animal records up to date. Moreover, rabies vaccinations would also be current. If the annual license period remained, the City should consider developing an online application, as that would help our residents the most.*

Some of the pros and cons of annual animal license periods include:

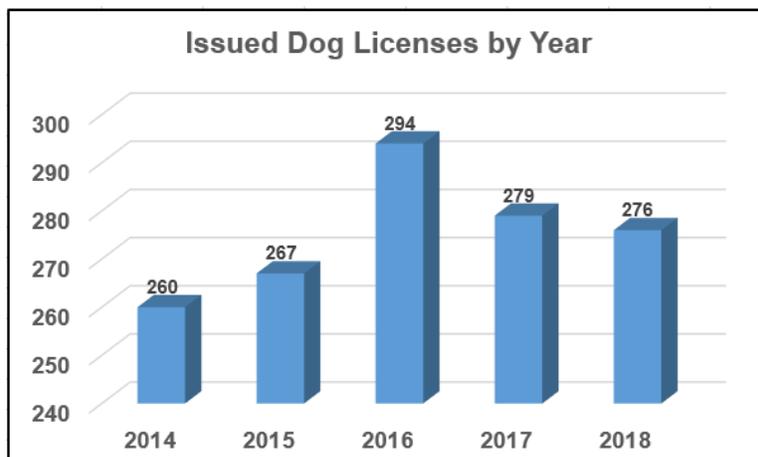
Annual or Shorter Periods...

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Owners information is current ✓ Up to date information on animals within a household 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Yearly renewal costs for owners ✓ Cost of issuing tags every year, however some of the cost is reimbursed though the fee

More lengthy licensing periods...

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Less paperwork for office staff ✓ Save \$ on issuing tags 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Owners information may not be current ✓ No assurance on up to date rabies vaccinations

Actual West St. Paul Animal licenses issued:



Exotic Animals and Special Permits – City Code requires these types of animals to be licensed as well. In some circumstances, special conditions to include enclosures and signage are required. A Special Permit is required if an owner wants to exceed the permissible number of animals. Currently the City has not issued any 2019 licenses for either of these animal licensure categories.

Cats - It should be noted over a decade ago the police department started taking “no action” on cats, considering them as feral. Several reasons prompted this approach, (1) cats normally stay away from people, (2) cats usually do not attack or bite people, (3) cats can be difficult to catch sometime causing employee injuries, (4) cats either are house cats or are let out by their owners to roam freely, and (5) the cost associated with cat management.

Concerning the cost of cat management, if an animal is impounded by the police department, there are several fees to include an impoundment fee (\$25), a per day boarding fee (\$21 for cats and \$25 dogs), a medical stabilization fee (\$50 maximum), and sometime a euthanize fee (\$70 under 50 pounds and \$90 for over 50 pounds). It should be noted the South St. Paul Animal Hospital is considered a non-euthanize organization and if possible, they use an adopt-a-shelter for an animal’s “disposal.”

Our current contract states the animal hospital will hold an impounded animal for six (6) days. Almost 100% of impounded dogs are claimed by an owner during this period and the associated fees are paid by the owner upon claim of the animal. However, almost 100% of impounded cats are never claimed and are likely to be euthanized at the end of the six days as shelters often have an abundance of cats.

Considering all the fees, if a cat is impounded:

Impounding Fee	\$ 25
6 Days of Boarding	\$126
Stabilization Fee	\$ 0
Euthanize Fee	\$ 70
Total: \$221/cat to the City	

The average annual animal control budget is \$5,000. The decision not to impound cats occurred when over \$5,000 in cat impoundment and euthanize fees started occurring monthly. Since then there has not been a single cat complaint or concern in the past 15 years. Officers will still respond to a cat complaint should the cat be causing a danger to the public. While the police department does not enforce cat licensure, cats may still be licensed and if lost and found, returned to an owner.

Animal License Changes – Some cities are moving towards a lifetime animal license or a complete eliminating of animal licenses. Part of the rationale is the lack of any type of significant rabies incident with a pet. This is largely due to pet owners getting their pets vaccinated on a regular basis. I cannot say if the license requirement encourages pet owners to get their pets vaccinated and health inspected or if rabies vaccinations would decline should the license requirement be removed.

Responsible pet owners will have their pets examined by a veterinarian at least once a year. Doing so will identify animal health issues before they become a health concern to others. Licensing is one way to ensure veterinary visits. In addition, licensing is an excellent tool in establishing a database to return lost

and found animals to their owners. Lastly, without some type of animal regulation, there might not be adequate accountability or safeguards to protect the public.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Current animal license fees, which are very similar to our sister cities:

Animals:	
Cats	20.00
Spayed or Neutered	15.00
Duplicate License	2.00
Dogs	20.00
Spayed or Neutered	15.00
Duplicate License	2.00
Potentially Dangerous Animal	210.00
Dangerous Animal (including warning symbol and tag)	420.00
Exotic Animal Permit	200.00
Special Permit - Exceeding Number of Animals Allowed	200.00
Renewal of Special Permit-Exceeding Number of Animals Allowed	100.00
Animal Impoundment - plus boarding fees (by contract)	25.00

Depending on the Council’s direction, there will likely be costs associated with on-line application systems, databases, and technology maintenance.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The Council may choose to discuss this matter and provide staff direction. Some of the courses of Council action may include any or all of the following:

- ✓ Make no changes
- ✓ Modify the animal license term
- ✓ Eliminate the license
- ✓ Instruct staff to add an online application process
- ✓ Have veterinary clinics collect City license fees and issue a license on behalf of the City when the animal receives a vaccination

If Council wanted to make some type of change, staff could eliminate the regular annual dog/cat license requirement, but require a current rabies vaccination if there is an incident, enforced by a fine, but vaccinations would not monitored or checked by the City, and keep all of the current “for the good of public safety” regulations to include:

- ✓ Keeping exotic animal requirements
- ✓ Keeping special permits for the number of animals
- ✓ Keeping leash laws
- ✓ Keeping our potentially Dangerous and Dangerous Dog language

The City would not maintain a list of animal owners, thus if a dog or cat was lost and if the owner did not take it upon himself or herself to place a tag on the animal, the animal would be impounded. Once impounded, proof of a current vaccination certificate would be required before release.