



City of Austin

Animal Services Office, Austin Animal Center

7201 Levander Loop, Austin, TX 78702

To: Mayor and Council

From: Abigail Smith, Chief Animal Services Officer, *A. Smith*

Art Acevedo, Chief of Police *A. Acevedo*

Sara Hensley, Director, Parks and Recreation Department *S. Hensley*

Date: November 3, 2014

Subject: City of Austin Coyote Policy

The proposed Coyote Policy (Agenda Item # 56) on the November 6, 2014 City Council Agenda, if passed, will pose a significant public safety risk to the citizens of Austin. We bring to your attention the following points:

- This policy only permits response to aggressive coyote behavior *after* a person is attacked and bitten or injured and after a pet is injured or killed. The City's existing program allows for an investigation by Texas Wildlife Services' (TWS) wildlife biologists to determine the level of the threat and appropriate course of action *before* a person or a pet gets hurt.
- The proposed policy only permits one method of capture in the event of an attack on a person or pet. Wildlife biologists must have discretion to use the appropriate and most effective method of capture given the specific environment in which they are working. The "live release box traps" proposed in this policy are not among TWS approved methods of capture as they have proven to be ineffective, thus not efficiently addressing the public safety risk, especially once an attack has already occurred. TWS uses the same humane methods of capture as research biologists do.
- Coyotes are listed in Texas as one of five high-risk rabies species in the Rabies Control and Eradication Rules. Skunks are the main terrestrial rabies reservoir in Central Texas, and infect other high-risk species (foxes, raccoons, coyotes). Blanco, Burnet and Williamson counties have endemic skunk rabies and Travis County has had skunk rabies in years past. Conflicts between coyotes and humans (and pets) should be prevented to safeguard against the spread of rabies.
- TWS has advised that it cannot effectively respond to citizens' requests for assistance within the City limits if this policy is adopted. This will leave the City without any practical remedy for dangerous wildlife issues, further endangering community members experiencing aggressive coyote behavior in their neighborhoods. Park Rangers, Animal Control Officers and Police Officers are not trained biologists or certified wildlife handlers, and we do not possess the expertise or resources to provide the services that TWS does today.

The City of Austin's current Dangerous Wildlife Mitigation Policy was implemented in cooperation with Travis County in 2005 in response to an increase in aggressive behavior of urban coyotes and escalated concerns from our citizens. The existing program has proven to be effective in limiting serious conflicts between coyotes and the public for the last ten years and should remain in place as a matter of public safety. The need for dangerous wildlife mitigation remains critical as Austin continues to grow and infringe on the coyote's habitat. The passage of the proposed Coyote Policy

will endanger our citizens and their pets and leave the City of Austin with no reasonable response to aggressive coyote behavior, even after a person or pet is attacked.

If you have any questions, please contact Abigail Smith, Chief Animal Services Officer, at 512-978-5036.

Cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Michael McDonald, Deputy City Manager
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager