



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Don Bland, Chief Animal Services Officer
Animal Services Office (ASO)

Date: October 10, 2019

Subject: Shelter Neuter Release (SNR) Program at Austin Animal Center

Over the last several Council meetings, members of the community have provided testimony regarding the Animal Services Office (ASO) Shelter, Neuter, Release (SNR) program. The information below provides an overview of the program, how it fits into the No Kill implementation plan, and the impact that would be created if the program were changed.

Austin has its share of feral cats and community cats. Community cats are those cats that live in the outdoors and could very well be socialized and will go from house to house being fed and cared for by the community. Community cats are currently living outdoors and thriving, and most do not do well inside, much less a shelter environment.

SNR is a program supported through a partnership with the Austin Human Society. The program provides spay and neuter services to kittens and cats, six (6) months of age or older, after an intake is completed at the Austin Animal Center (AAC); in some cases, kittens as young as three (3) months of age may be deemed eligible. The program is similar to Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), a program where community cats are humanely trapped by volunteer trappers and cats are taken directly to the Austin Human Society where they are spayed/neutered and given vaccinations.

With both programs, the kittens/cats are delivered back into the neighborhood where they were found after the spay/neuter surgery. Our SNR program provides the best lifesaving option for community cats brought to the shelter by our community members while the TNR program compliments our work to effectively manage population growth of free-roaming cats by enlisting volunteers to trap free-roaming cats that otherwise wouldn't make it to the shelter. The cats that go through the TNR program are diverted away from the shelter and taken to Austin Humane Society.

On occasion, someone will trap or pick-up a cat found outdoors and present it to the shelter. This cat may have been a pet that was an outside/inside cat and could have been pickup from its own yard. Through SNR, the cat it will get to go back home to the family that was loving it. Most people will not look for a lost cat. If they did come here looking for it and we had sent it to a rescue partner, there is a higher chance that they would never be reunited.

These programs are a result of input and recommendations made in early 2010 by the Council's Public Health and Human Services Subcommittee, the Animal Advisory Commission, and staff. Recommendation #14 stated the following:

Stray Cat Relocation – Relocate stray cats back into the community from where they came, after spaying and neutering them. The City will work with community stakeholders to develop related procedures and protocols to address this item.

Council approved these recommendation and gave direction to staff to implement these recommendations on March 11, 2010. Furthermore, Chapter 3-1-25 (E) states that, "An animal in custody of the health authority solely for the purposes of sterilization, vaccination and microchipping, is not subject to a mandatory period of impoundment." The current stray hold period is three (3) days, but ASO will process an impounded cat through the program as soon as it is found to be eligible for inclusion.

To be eligible for SNR, the animal must meet the following criteria:

- The cat is minimum of six (6) months old.
 - As a life saving measure, cats under six months may be considered for SNR if they meet the following:
 - They are a minimum of three (3) pounds;
 - They are at least three (3) months old;
 - The cat's body condition (body fat evaluation tool) score is between a 4/9 and 8/9;
 - There is no observed injury or illness that cannot be treated by the Austin Humane Society; and
 - The cat has not been declawed.
- The cat has no identification, such as tags or a microchip.
 - If no identification is found, the presenter is provided information on the SNR program.
 - If a microchip or ID is found but the info does not produce an owner, then the cat may be sent out into the program.
- Cats will not be released to high traffic or other unsafe conditions I f there is no known care taker at the location.

Once it is determined that a cat meet the criteria for the program, the cat is taken to the Austin Humane Society where it is spayed or neutered and given a rabies vaccine. The cat is also microchipped, and the microchip is registered to the Austin Humane Society. Twenty-four hours following this procedure, the cat is transported back to the place where it was found and is released.

Previous practice for many shelters, including Austin, was to catch and kill outdoor cats in order to control their population. This approach did not address the problem and resulted in healthy, outdoor cats being euthanized. These policies created a vacuum which resulted in new cats moving into an area to take advantage of the available resources. The new cats breed to create new colonies which causes the population to grow. In aligning with national best practices, Austin Animal Center, as well as shelters across the nation, embrace trap-neuter-release programs as a more humane way to address the issue and maximize community lifesaving.

Some members of the community do not wish for kittens to be placed back in the area they were found once they have been spayed/neutered. As community cats, these kittens will thrive to become adults. Successful cat programs from across the nation suggest and, often times, urge individuals to leave the healthy kittens outdoors and only trap them once they are old enough to get spayed/neutered. The

programs provide guidance to the community on what to observe to with the kittens before human intervention is absolutely necessary. They will also advise to trap any injured or sick cat, get it to the appropriate shelter and return it to its home once it is healed.

Both TNR and SNR are critical to maintaining No Kill because AAC operates at or near capacity the majority of the year. Without these program, the shelter would run out of kennels, and our resources would be taxed and critical medical, under socialized and/or neonatal kittens would potentially suffer the greatest adverse impact. In this past fiscal year, 802 cats of the more than 6,000 strays that were brought to the shelter were processed into the SNR program. Without SNR, these additional cats would need some an area to be housed, which would be difficult at the Austin Animal Center since we are almost always at capacity with cats that need sheltering services.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 512-978-0521.

Cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Christopher Shorter, Assistant City Manager
Austin Animal Advisory Commission