

# **Managing Pet Overpopulation: A Strategic Plan for Orange County, North Carolina**

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**Prepared by Animal Services Staff  
and the Animal Services Advisory Board**

***Members of the Pet Overpopulation Committee of the Animal Services Advisory Board and Animal Services cooperated to prepare this report. Special thanks are due to the following individuals for their contributions to the work that resulted in this strategic plan: Amanda Arrington, Spay Neuter Initiatives Manager, The Humane Society of the United States; Beth Livingston, Executive Director, AnimalKind; Peter Marsh, Esq., Director, Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets; and Pat Sanford, retired Executive Director, Animal Protection Society of Orange County.***

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## **Executive Summary**

This is a five-year strategic plan developed by Animal Services staff and the Animal Services Advisory Board (ASAB), on the basis of professional knowledge and best practices, to address pet overpopulation and euthanasia in Orange County. The plan builds upon strong animal services and a progressive tradition of animal welfare and seeks to reduce the number of animals that end up needing to be sheltered at considerable costs to the County and its residents.

As population continues to grow in the County, planning of this kind becomes even more critical, as it is expected that there will be an increasing number of surplus pets—that is, cats, dogs and other animals needing to be sheltered. In the absence of a vigorous effort to be proactive toward this dynamic of population growth, there will be growing costs associated with caring for and sheltering animal companions. Indeed, it is a widely held belief among animal welfare professionals that the actual costs of reactive approaches to pet overpopulation problems exceed the costs of more positive and proactive intervention.

All of this is worth bearing in mind given the recent completion of the County's new state-of-the-art Animal Services Center. While expansion is certainly a possibility, it is an expensive one from the standpoint of capital outlay as well as operating costs. It is believed that by implementing this plan Animal Services can better manage the assessed risk for pet overpopulation in Orange County and the increases this risk poses for sheltering costs. Only in this way will it be possible to assure that the Animal Services Center provides sufficient sheltering capacity in the absence of an increased euthanasia rate.

This plan has been developed to be cost neutral and self-sustaining. More specifically, it is based on an existing fee differential for licensing sterilized and unsterilized cats and dogs, and the creation of cost-effective public/private partnerships. There is no recommendation in this five-year plan to increase the licensing differential fee, but in the long run, adequate funding for the plan does involve achieving greater compliance with the County's licensing requirements.

Staff and the ASAB have developed this strategic plan to help the County manage its commitment to animal welfare in a manner that is both good fiscal policy and good public policy. By taking a proactive approach and promoting "targeted spay/neuter" in the coming years, there is every reason to believe that the number of animals needing to be sheltered will be lessened, and that costs will thereby be managed to a much larger degree than would be possible in the absence of such a plan.

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## **I. Introduction**

The issue of pet overpopulation is a problem that many communities face, Orange County being no exception. Pet overpopulation can simply be defined as having more homeless animals than adoptable homes in any given community, leading to the use of euthanasia as a means of population control for animals that are healthy, stable and otherwise adoptable. It is an issue that merits addressing on various levels, from the efficient use of government funds to social and humane interests of a community.

Animal Services staff and the Animal Services Advisory Board (ASAB) recognize that the problem of pet overpopulation is a community problem and must be addressed on a fundamental level by targeting and preventing the root cause, namely the birth of unwanted litters of puppies and kittens. Thus, we have developed the following strategic plan to address the issue of pet overpopulation in our community.

Several factors make Orange County uniquely situated to launch an assertive program to address pet overpopulation and further reduce the euthanasia rate of unwanted and/or homeless pets. These factors include:

- The new Animal Services Center (ASC) on Eubanks Road opened in June of 2009. This state-of-the-art facility has been designed to be a user-friendly public space, with a retail-like front end. It is expected that both the number of animals arriving at the ASC and the number of animals leaving the ASC through adoptions and partner placement agreements will increase.
- Orange County's Community Spay/Neuter Fund was created with monies generated from the increased licensing differential fee approved by the Board of County Commissioners in FY0708. Funding is thus available to support low-cost spay/neuter in Orange County and public outreach about the individual and community benefits of sterilization.
- Orange County has a tradition of progressive animal welfare, as well as strong community expectations about the care of companion animals and the value and importance of taking reasonable measures to abate the use of euthanasia as a means of population control. These expectations are responsible for the design and construction of the new Animal Services Center and apparent in the transition of sheltering services that ended in the creation of Animal Services as a County Department.

Thus Orange County Animal Services (OCAS) is proposing this plan because it is good fiscal policy in the medium and long-term and because it continues the County's commitment to humane animal welfare. Current budget constraints necessitate aggressive long-term cost management.

## II. Overview

This strategic plan builds upon existing programs and processes and it is expected to make a measurable and sustained impact on Orange County's pet overpopulation problems and their costs. It extends the work currently being done with the County's recently established Community Spay and Neuter Fund on the basis of a survey of practices in other communities and emerging professional perspectives on the problem of pet overpopulation.<sup>1</sup>

The plan emphasizes controlling costs and could also mitigate staffing needs in the long run. The program is self-sustaining in that the primary funding comes from the licensing differential for unsterilized pets in Orange County. This is not only an effective part of budget management now, but in the long run as well.

The primary goals of this program will be to:

- Lower annual animal intake measured as a per capita rate at Orange County's Animal Services Center.
- Control the costs of managing the County's pet population by lowering annual animal intake measured on a per capita basis.
- Generate funding for strong, proactive community spay/neuter via an effective licensing program based upon differential licensing fees.
- Increase the annual rate of targeted sterilization of dogs and cats to 5 per thousand county residents (or approximately 600 per year based on the County's current population) over a period of 5 years.
- Lower the euthanasia rate at the County's Animal Services Center to 35 percent or less in five years.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A number of the elements of this proactive and progressive perspective are found in Chapter IV (Programs for Spaying and Neutering) of Handy, Geoff. 2002. Animal Control Management: A Guide for Local Governments. Washington, D.C.: International City/County Management Association. The significant development of this perspective on pet overpopulation along programmatic, policy, technical, and other dimensions is apparent in the presentations and papers delivered at two recent national conferences of note: the **Fix It Forum: National Spay and Neuter Networking and Training Conference**, held in Chicago in October, 2007, and sponsored by PetSmart Charities; and the **Southern Regional Spay/Neuter Leadership Conference**, held in Memphis in September, 2007, organized by Spay USA (a program of North Shore Animal League America) with a variety of national organizations as sponsors.

In addition, there is now considerable information available from a variety of national professional organizations. In different forms, for instance, practical materials as well as general information are provided by The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty and The Humane Society for the United States. Our strategic plan has benefited as well from careful consideration of other community or area plans. These included the **Richmond (Virginia) SPCA: Spay/Neuter Campaign** (August 2007); **Companion Animal Initiative of Tennessee Strategic Plan 2006-2011** (nd); and City of San Antonio, Animal Care Services Advisory Board, **Animal Care Strategic Plan (Preliminary Report)** (June 2006).

<sup>2</sup> This number is based on the number of animals that are euthanized because they are not considered adoptable. Animals that were euthanized for behavioral or medical reasons, feral cats, and owner

- Raise community awareness about spaying and neutering as a critical element of responsible pet ownership

These goals have been developed given our ongoing evaluation of intake and disposition numbers. Achievement of these goals is expected to have several positive corollaries. Among these are providing financial assistance to more low-income residents; improving relations between owners and (sterilized) pets; and reducing the number of roaming animals that may be a nuisance and public health threat.

In 2009, a total of 4089 animals were “disposed” by the County’s Animal Services Department.<sup>3</sup> As the following table shows, 47 percent of the animals were euthanized, and another 50% were returned to their owners (or custodians) or transferred to approved rescue organizations for their final placements in a new home.

**Table 1  
Total Disposition of Animals for 2009**

	Dogs	Cats	Others	Total	% of Total Dispositions
Reclaimed	420	46	4	470	11.49%
Adopted	608	696	44	1348	32.97%
Transfers	183	72	72	390	9.54%
Euthanized	732	1040	16	1788	43.73%
Died	22	62	5	89	2.18%
Other	1	3	0	4	0.10%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1966</b>	<b>1982</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>4089</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Finally, we would underscore that support for this program is justified by fiscal good judgment as well as humane considerations. Our own and other communities bear the costs of pet overpopulation and these costs will only grow with the expected growth of human population in a place like Orange County. Controlling these costs requires a smart investment of public funds to reduce the number of so-called surplus animals that end up needing to be sheltered. Doing so means paying less now rather than more later.

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requests were approximately 40 percent of the animals dispositioned in 2009 and 35 percent of the animals dispositioned in 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Dispositioned animals consist of animals who have left the custody and care of Orange County Animal Services. They are different from admitted and sheltered animals. In 2009, Animal Services admitted 4036 animals and sheltered 4262 animals.

### III. Targeted Spay and Neuter

Fundamental to this plan is the concept of targeted spay and neuter.<sup>4</sup> Targeted spay and neuter refers to the sterilization of pets, such as cats and dogs, that would not be sterilized in the absence of a program aimed at those animals. A good illustration are low-cost spay and neuter programs, e.g., The \$20 Fix program offered by Orange County and AnimalKind. Without this program, it is very reasonable to believe that the overwhelming majority of animals spayed and neutered through this program would not be sterilized due to the prohibitive costs of the procedure for lower income households in our community.

Animal welfare experts concerned with pet overpopulation suggest that targeted spay and neuter can and does reduce the number of surplus or unwanted pets in a community or area. The important corollary of this point is that animal shelters in a community will begin to see a decrease in the number of companion animals they take in and care for. As with other animal demographics, this is measured as a per capita rate per thousand residents to control for increases (or decreases) in the number of people and households in a particular place.

The same experts have indicated that the number of animals that need to be sheltered will begin to significantly decline with a targeted spay and neuter rate of between 4 and 6 pet sterilizations per thousand residents. In the case of Orange County, this would mean that these sterilizations would need to number 570 (the midpoint between 480 and 720). This target number of spays and neuter may well need to change as a result of growth in human population in Orange County, but it provides a measurable objective toward which to work on the basis of the strategic plan set out in subsequent sections of this document. Based on the current cost per surgery, it is estimated that 600 sterilizations will cost \$45,000 annually.

The concept of targeted spay and neuter can be put into perspective by reviewing the impact of pet reproduction on animal intake at Orange County's Animal Services Center. This data is organized into two tables presented as Appendix I (Litter Animals Relative to Total Intakes 2007, 2008 and 2009) and Appendix II (Animal Litter Intakes 2007, 2008 & 2009).

In 2009, 372 litters of kittens and puppies were admitted and they accounted for 1334 individual animals. In turn, these animals accounted for 33 percent (1334 of 4036) of the total number of companion animals admitted (or received) by Animal Services. This is a characteristic annual pattern. For the calendar years 2007, 2008 and 2009, for instance, an average of 391 litters of kittens and puppies accounted for an average of

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Marsh is among the most respected proponents of this concept. A good example of his overall approach and specific conceptualization of targeted spay and neuter is available in Marsh, P. 2009. [Using Evidence-Based Programs to Eradicate Shelter Overpopulation: A Program-By-Program Handbook](#). Concord, New Hampshire: Town and Country Reprographics.

1428 animals, which in turn amounted to an average 33 percent (1428 of 4271) of total intake.

In Orange County, definite and distinctive seasonal variations in animal intake are associated with this kind of uncontrolled reproduction. As Appendix III and IV show, the number of animals admitted to the County's shelter are highest from May through October, the months in which litters are born and become juvenile animals in need of a home. Operating resources are most taxed in the summer months by a steady influx of animals that on any given day may number as many as 17.<sup>5</sup>

These very sizable numbers are also the reason why it is believed that proactive programs organized around the goal of targeted spay and neuter are good fiscal policy for local governments. Controlling the costs of animal care and control depends upon the effective management of the companion animal population, and specifically, in the reduction of the number of surplus or unwanted animal companions. These costs can only be expected to increase given the growth of Orange County and the Triangle in the absence of an aggressive and proactive approach to pet overpopulation.

It deserves to be said, finally, that this takes seriously the view that communities are themselves responsible for preventing pet overpopulation. Closely aligned to this view is the belief that adoptions and other forms of animal placement can not themselves resolve the problem of pet overpopulation that ultimately manifests itself in the euthanasia of adoptable animals at our own shelter and others. Instead, minimizing and ultimately eliminating the use of euthanasia as a means of population control requires that we reduce the rate of pet reproduction via various programs of targeted spaying and neutering before such unwanted litters exist.

**IV. The Plan**

The strategic plan is based upon several components that are described in greater detail in this section. First is the continuation of and increase in current placements through adoptions, partnerships with placement partners and recoveries by owners or custodians. In addition, the plan aims to perform targeted spay and neuter, designed to assist pet owners who would not have their pets altered in the absence of program assistance. The third component of the plan consists of legislative changes that will need to be in place in order for some spay/neuter partnerships and initiatives to form.

The staging of specific components of this strategic plan is captured by the following timetable. As we discuss further in a later section, the effective management of pet

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<sup>5</sup> The timing of efforts to intervene via targeted spaying and neutering becomes important in the light of this pronounced pattern. It may well be that concentrated as well as aggressive outreach and early intervention should be organized prior to the prime period of reproduction to the greatest extent possible. An illustrative program is "Beat the Heat," which promotes the sterilization of cats prior to the initial estrus of female cats in the late winter and early spring.



overpopulation in Orange County depends upon carefully conceptualized and reasonable staging of components over time.

**Table 2  
Strategic Staging Timetable**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Legislation			Review	Reclaim legislation	
				Feral cat legislation	
Spay/Neuter		Litter Patrol		Feral cat nonprofit review	Partner with Feral cat nonprofits
	\$20 Fix				
Placements	Placement Partner Agreement	Continue working with Placement Partners			
Licensing	Program Review	Program Changes	Increased Compliance		

A. Increasing Animal Placements- Orange County Animal Services currently places animals through direct adoptions to members of the general public; transfers to placement partners (or rescues) for final placement; and animal recovery by owners or custodians. This plan aims to increase these placement numbers over the next 5 years in a manner that ensures to the greatest extent possible that animals are spayed or neutered before they enter our community.

a. Adoption and Pre-Adoption Sterilization

Maintain and enhance a high rate of adoption and continue to sterilize animals prior to adoption to ensure they don't contribute to pet overpopulation. The County's new state-of-the-art Animal Services Center should enhance the adoption process (especially when economic recovery begins) and performing in-house spays and neuters of adoptable animals is expected to be stable and cost-effective.

b. Placement Partnerships

Continue placing pets with approved rescue organizations on the basis of a more formal program that facilitates and governs these transfers. In addition to finalizing the guidelines and agreement that are under development, it is critical to organize effective outreach directed at placement partners that helps build strong partnerships. This may eventually include the release of adoptable, screened animals to organizations in geographic areas where there is an unmet demand for certain adoptable animals.

c. Recovery

Increase the number of dogs and cats reclaimed from the ASC. In 2009 the reclamation rate for the shelter for total intake was 20 percent overall with a

significant difference in reclaim rates for dogs and cats.<sup>6</sup> Through ongoing public outreach by electronic, as well as more traditional means, there will be an effort to increase the number and percentage of lost animals that are recovered by an owner or custodian.

These components of the strategic plan should positively affect the number of animals that are placed after they are sheltered at the County's Animal Services Center. By contrast, the following components are focused on reducing the number of animals that must be sheltered and the number of surplus animals in our community.

B. Reducing Animal Intakes- An effective, targeted spay/neuter program is crucial in reducing the number of surplus pets in a community over time. As previously indicated, these are animals that would not be spayed or neutered without specific interventions aimed at that objective. This plan will include the following programs to reduce the number of surplus animals in the county and thereby the number of animals that Animal Services must be shelter each year.

a. The \$20 Fix and I-Care

The \$20 Fix and I-Care are programs that target low-income households and offer qualifying applicants assistance in spaying and neutering their pets for a reduced fee- or even no fee. Programs such as this have reduced the numbers of animals coming into shelters in jurisdictions across the country. The I-Care program is a program of the state of North Carolina that offers some reimbursement to local governments for the costs of spays and neuters of pets from qualifying households. Orange County's \$20 Fix agreement also involves the Department of Social Services (DSS), which offers a no-cost spay or neuter for pets of qualifying clients in certain Orange County DSS programs. More than 200 cats and dogs were spayed or neutered in calendar year 2009 through the County's \$20 Fix program.

b. Litter Patrol

Litter patrol is a program intended to address owners who repeatedly breed and/or surrender litters to the County. By providing these individuals with a voucher for a low-cost or discounted spay and/or neuter, this program can help curb the numbers of incoming litters and animals in Orange County as well as elsewhere. As previously noted, each year OCAS receives hundreds of puppies and kittens, which contributes to the costs of animal care and control in our County.<sup>7</sup> Critical to the successful operation of such a program will be the development of appropriate income guidelines for households that do not qualify for the \$20 Fix or I-Care. The program's management would involve select

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<sup>6</sup> The recovery rate for dogs and cats is very dissimilar, reflecting their still very different status in our culture and communities. In 2009, only 4 percent of cats were recovered by contrast with 36 percent of dogs. Our calculation of these rates of recovery excludes owner surrendered animals.

<sup>7</sup> Orange County Animal Services spent an estimated \$241,401 to shelter litters of puppies and kittens in 2007. This figure does not include any administrative costs or animal control costs associated with transporting litters.

Animal Services staff who would be responsible for offering vouchers to such owners in accordance with the approved guidelines.

c. Feral Cats

In 2009, 30 percent of all cats (n=273) euthanized were feral— that is, cats without the kind of socialization that makes them associate and bond with humans. The number of feral cats in our community and their euthanasia has increasingly become a concern in the field of animal welfare and in regard to targeted spay and neuter. Yet feral cats present especially challenging issues for public policy and an informed and rational approach will require considerable effort and attention. Nevertheless, it is agreed that the following are reasonable components of this strategic plan:

- i. Consider public/private partnerships with nonprofit feral cat rescue groups that have programs such as Trap Neuter Release (TNR) in place.<sup>8</sup> This may include establishing pilot programs or providing some kind of general support and consideration.
- ii. Make appropriate ordinance amendments for the keeping of feral cats and/or the management of colonies of feral cats and as would be needed for the creation of public/private partnerships.

C. Legislation- Legislative changes will be required in order to begin or implement certain activities known to promote the targeted spaying and neutering of animal companions. As staff and citizen advisors keenly recognize, long-term planning, preparation, and implementation are needed to amend the County's animal ordinances.

a. Reclaimed Animals impounded multiple times

Currently there is no requirement for ensuring that intact animals that are reclaimed from OCAS by an owner or custodian will be sterilized. Yet it is generally recognized that roaming intact animals contribute to pet overpopulation (as well as nuisance) problems, and communities increasingly find that the recovery of intact animals is an opportunity to address pet overpopulation and its costs. Thus it is appropriate to consider various options in regard to the recovery of an intact animal that was previously impounded. One recommended possibility would be to waive reclaim fees for a second recovery of the animal if spayed or neutered, but make sterilization mandatory for an animal impounded a third time. Alternately, the reclaim fee could be waived for the first recovery if the animal is spayed or neutered with sterilization becoming mandatory if the animal is impounded a second time.

b. Feral Cats

The keeping of feral cats and feral cat colonies, on the basis of their sterilization, is expected to require amendments to the County's Animal Ordinance. Examples include whether feral cats need to be licensed and whether keepers of feral cats are required to comply with the County's kennel permit requirements. With respect to rabies, there needs to be an agreed upon solution for identifying

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<sup>8</sup> Feral cats can be sterilized free of charge at the School of Veterinary Medicine at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. However, they need to be trapped and transported, and there are important issues about how they are kept if they are returned to colonies in a community.

vaccinated feral cats and ensuring they receive subsequent rabies vaccinations throughout their life.

Many of the facets of this plan, as described above, will require quality outreach and public relations approaches. In addition, any legislative changes or considerations will require outreach on a wide scale to ensure that the community is informed and invited to be a part of the process well in advance. This outreach may include disseminating information in a variety of ways, including the internet, inserts in tax bills; attachments to licensing postcards sent out by OCAS, posters to be distributed in key locations, radio announcements, door hangers for distribution in targeted neighborhoods, and media releases.

It is for this reason that marketing and outreach are significant aspects of this strategic plan for addressing the problem of pet overpopulation in Orange County. Public relations initiatives and endeavors are considered integral to the plan and they are budgeted as a separate line item in the annual budget for the County's Community Spay/Neuter Fund.

## **V. Working with the Community**

Addressing the problem of pet overpopulation requires the active support of the community and the effective collaboration of Animal Services with community groups and members. Partnerships and volunteering are two of the most critical ways of working with the community to reduce the number of animals admitted to the ASC and to work toward a reduction in the number of animals that are euthanized.

### Partnerships

Partnerships with other organizations are very important in furthering the objectives of this strategic plan. Our current agreement with AnimalKind for the operation of a \$20 Fix Program in Orange County is an excellent example of how such partnerships can enable Animal Services to do more than is possible for it to do on its own.

Several significant examples of such partnerships deserve to be mentioned in this context. These are:

- Expanded placement partnerships, managed and expanded to sustain current levels and oriented toward the movement of adoptable animals to other regions of the U.S. Whereas this is conceived as an extension of existing placement partnerships, it will require one or more partners to provide transportation and one or more partners to receive and adopt animals.
- Feral cat programs that will need to be organized and sponsored by partners. In these situations, Animal Services would work on the basis of existing legal parameters and certain shared guidelines.

- Counseling and resources for pet owners who are considering whether to surrender their pet to Orange County's Animal Services Center. Whether there is a need to modify an undesirable behavior or obtain discounted food in lean economic times, given its resources and other responsibilities, Animal Services may support and facilitate such activities but it is not capable of providing them.
- Education programs oriented toward spaying and neutering as an integral element of safe and responsible pet ownership in our own and other communities. However, these programs will only be available if another organization takes the initiative to provide them, ideally in partnership with the County's Animal Services Department.

Beginning in 2009, the Animal Services Advisory Board set itself the objective of meeting with current and potential partners. This is an important ongoing endeavor not only in regard to the specific kinds of partnerships mentioned above but any partnerships that relates to a program element of this strategic plan.

### Veterinarians

In order for the strategic spay/neuter plan to have the greatest overall impact, it must include forming partnerships and bridging communication with local veterinarians. This does not mean that veterinarians will necessarily perform surgeries to further the plan's objectives. Rather it may mean that they will understand the plan and hopefully work with their existing and new clients to promote awareness and stress the importance of spay/neuter at an early age. A few examples of how veterinarians can help increase such awareness and thus increase the effectiveness of a spay/neuter plan include:

- Promoting earlier spay/neuter for clients. Many veterinarians recommend pets be spayed and neutered at or after 6 months of age, and recommending a younger age of 4 months can make a difference in preventing unwanted early litters from juvenile mothers.
- Recommending pediatric spay/neuter when appropriate.<sup>9</sup>
- Being knowledgeable of low-cost spay/neuter options and recommending them when appropriate.

### Volunteer Program

Our volunteer program is an excellent way for members of community to involve themselves in the County's Animal Services endeavor. With respect to efforts to promote spay and neuter within Orange County, volunteers have already played a

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<sup>9</sup> The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has a positive policy on the pediatric spay/neuter of dogs and cats ([http://www.avma.org/issues/policy/animal\\_welfare/spay\\_neuter.asp](http://www.avma.org/issues/policy/animal_welfare/spay_neuter.asp)). Specifically, it "supports the concept of pediatric spay/neuter in dogs and cats in an effort to reduce the number of unwanted animals of these species. Just as for other veterinary medical and surgical procedures, veterinarians should use their best medical judgment in deciding at what age spay/neuter should be performed on individual animals."

significant role, and one that is changing as part of the development of this strategic plan.

New formalized opportunities are being created for volunteers with an interest in working in the area of community spay and neuter. Their work may involve counseling interested members of the community to matching residents with low-cost sterilization services to assisting with transportation on the day of surgery and the like. As with other parts of the volunteer program, these require appropriate training, some of which is general in nature, and some of which is specific to spay and neuter related responsibilities.

These opportunities are in addition to more established forms of outreach which have promoted spay and neuter as component parts of responsible pet ownership. An outstanding example has been the outreach work that staff and volunteers routinely do at the County's low-cost rabies vaccination clinics. Further outreach with a spay/neuter focus is a distinct possibility as this strategic plan is implemented.

As with other resources, volunteer time and commitment is fixed, and their activities must be managed in a commensurate manner. This point deserves special emphasis given that we are already seeking to redefine volunteer opportunities to provide more adoption counseling (and the like) given the opening of the County's new Animal Services Center.

As with program planning, it is critical that the activities pursued under this strategic plan not exceed available human and material resources. By establishing formalized and effective partnerships, it may be possible to pursue otherwise prohibitive activities that are critical to reducing animal intake and euthanasia. Precedents for such partnerships exist in the form of our current agreement with AnimalKind and the emergent standard agreement with various placement partners.

**VI. Funding the Plan**

A. Background

Funds to support programs initiated and managed through this strategic plan will primarily come from Orange County's Community Spay/Neuter Fund. This fund receives \$20 for each registration of a dog or cat that is intact and capable of reproducing (and thus contributing to the problem of pet overpopulation). The fund was created as part of the FY0708 budget process which increased the licensing fee (or tax rate) for intact dogs and cats from \$10 to \$30.

Each fiscal year since the County's Community Spay/Neuter Fund was created, more than \$25,000 has been gathered as a result of the \$20 increase in the licensing fee for animals with reproductive capacity. As can be seen from Appendix V, these are the funds that have been used to address pet overpopulation in our community by

organizing special events in conjunction with an annual Spay (and Neuter) Day, as well as the creation of a partnership with AnimalKind to offer The \$20 Fix program in Orange County.

An important component of staff work in the first few years of this plan will be to develop a more refined budget for the strategic plan as it unfolds over the next five years (and beyond). Preliminary discussion with Budget staff has identified long term budgeting as an important part of not only this plan but the County's Community Spay/Neuter Program. Accordingly, staff will be involved in developing a longer term as well as annual budget as the program commences and evolves.

## B. Pet Registration Compliance

There is good reason to believe that annual income to the Community Spay/Neuter Funds can be grown by increasing the rate of cat and dog registration. What is needed is an effective program for more effective follow-up on licensing notices and renewals based upon available human and technological resources.<sup>10</sup>

In any of the last several years, between 21,000 and 22,000 pet dogs and cats have been registered with the County. This number is only about half of the pets that should be registered given the number of registration notices issued by Animal Services. In 2009, for instance, Animal Service issued 42,594 registration notices based upon available information about dogs and cats in the County.<sup>11</sup>

Also, it should be stressed that the number of registration notices is itself less than the number of cats and dogs estimated to be in Orange County. Using an established formula developed by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), and human population data, we can estimate that the total number of dogs and cats for Orange County in 2010—72,630 (34,128 dogs and 38,502 cats).<sup>12</sup> The difference between the estimate and the number of registration notices issued suggests that there

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<sup>10</sup> Staff is already considering a more systematic follow-up to non-renewals of expiring cat and dog registrations or the failure to register given a recent rabies vaccinations for a new animal. Our orientation is toward an economical as well as efficient follow-up process, one done by mail rather than in person. Nevertheless, the specific process and procedures for increasing the rate of compliance still need to be formalized and implemented.

<sup>11</sup> The number of registration forms sent out by Animal Services is as high as it is because North Carolina state law requires veterinarians to provide rabies vaccination information to the local animal control authority.

<sup>12</sup> Using these formulas, the AVMA now makes a U.S. Pet Ownership Calculator available on line ([http://www.avma.org/reference/marketstats/ownership\\_calculator.asp](http://www.avma.org/reference/marketstats/ownership_calculator.asp)). The 2010 human population figure for Orange County used in our calculation is 134,770, which is taken from the **Linear Population Projections based on 1980-2000 Census**, prepared by and available from Orange County's Planning Department. The estimate may overstate the number of cats and dogs in the County because the underlying formula does not adjust for college students and the figure we have used for human population includes college students if they are living at school.

continue to be a significant segment of dogs and cats that are not registered with the County or vaccinated against rabies.

An increase in licensing compliance can be expected to generate significant fund amounts of income for the County's Community Spay/Neuter Fund as well as the County's General Fund. Each unregistered pet owner will generate \$5 or \$10 to the General Fund, regardless of spay/neuter status. Licenses for those animals that are intact will also generate an additional \$20 to the Community Spay/Neuter Fund. If we assume that the proportion of intact to sterilized pets is the same among unregistered animals (and this would appear to be a quite conservative assumption), there would still be upwards of an additional \$25,000 to \$30,000 to collect from the licensing differential for intact animals.

This means that annual income to the Community Spay/Neuter Fund could be increased between 50 and 100 percent on the basis of more deliberate and effective forms of follow-up on licensing notices. The additional funds could cover the projected costs of achieving targeted sterilization to the range of 6 per 1000 residents on the basis of organized programs. In other words, under the current financial arrangement with the \$20 Fix (\$75), the targeted number of 600 sterilizations could be covered by fees associated with increased compliance with the licensing requirement.

Increasing funds available for the Community Spay/Neuter Fund is only one reason to increase licensing compliance. Another is fairness. It is only equitable that all pet owners in Orange County license their cats and dogs. For some to do so while others do not is unfair, and ultimately it is for this reason that effective follow-up on pet licensing is a legitimate endeavor.

Differential pet licensing is good public policy. It assigns a greater share of the financial burden for animal care and control programs to owners whose pets most contribute to pet overpopulation and other problems commonly associated with intact animals. It also provides these very same pet owners with a financial incentive "to do the right thing" by spaying or neutering their cat or dog. Thus, differential pet licensing is a cornerstone of progressive animal care and control programs, and in some jurisdictions the fee differential for reproductive pets is much greater.

### C. Targeted Donations

Donations to the County's Spay/Neuter Fund could prove to be an important source of support for this plan now and in the future. Historically, residents have given significantly to Animal Services, and they have done so in the absence of even passive giving targets. Accordingly, there is good reason to believe that they would be willing to donate to a progressive program for "targeted spaying and neutering."

In this regard, it should be mentioned that the County's pet registration program affords an excellent opportunity for concerned pet owners to contribute financially to the County's effort to prevent pet overpopulation. A so-called Chickadee check-off in



amounts ranging from 5 to 100 dollars (or more) could be easily incorporated into a revamped pet registration form. Thus resident dogs and cat owners would easily be able to make a voluntary contribution to the County's Community Spay/Neuter Fund as a charitable gift.

We believe it would be a mistake to understate the potential of such a charitable giving opportunity, especially given the strong community sentiments and expectations that exist about animal companions in Orange County. Many residents want to be part of the solution to the problem of pet overpopulation. They already take seriously the message that spay/neuter is integral to reducing the needless euthanasia of dogs, cats and other pets.

## **VII. Implementing and Managing the Plan**

The effective implementation of this plan will depend upon good program management in the areas covered. Program management will include oversight, but also evaluation and monitoring of each program area.

This plan will incorporate best practices as they exist in strategic plans for other areas and organizations. As with any practice, these are fluid and dynamic, and may adapt and change over time. These practices are apparent in the management of the FY0910 budget for the Community Spay/Neuter Fund.

Programs must be staged in order to be effective. Thus, staff has outlined a five-year timeline (Table 1) in which these programs are set up in a logical and realistic manner given additional tasks performed on a regular basis, as well as other initiatives already underway within the department, e.g., transition to in-house sterilization of adoptable pets and tethering amendment implementation.

There needs to be a realistic appreciation of what is possible to do given present commitments and time constraints. Staff responsibilities to core services, such as field work, animal care and animal placement/recovery, cannot be compromised by new duties and responsibilities for which there are no additional resources. It is for this reason that it is imperative that this plan be implemented on the basis of careful planning and strategic staging. However, support for this program is justified by good fiscal judgment as well as humane considerations.

## **VIII. Planning Objectives and Performance Measures**

Effective program management requires performance measurement. Thus we must establish and monitor specific measures of performance and use these to manage individual programs and their interrelationships.

More generally, there are a number of critical performance measures for the evaluation of the plan and its programs. These include:

- Targeted Spays/Neuters
- Intake Numbers
- Placement Numbers
- Euthanasia rate
- Licensing Compliance

It is important to note that these measures can only be accurately evaluated by taking into account different variables that will affect them over time. One of these variables is population. Pet demographics are a function of human demographics and changes in human population will directly affect the pet population in our community.

Another variable to consider in evaluating these measures is the way in which they relate to one another. Measures of adoptions, transfers, etc. only have meaning in relationship to the total population of animals sheltered and the number of animals euthanized and otherwise dispositioned.

A final but crucial element to remember in this evaluation process is the long-term effects the program may have on the different types and numbers of animals coming into the ASC. For example, as spay/neuter programs begin to decrease the number of litters entering our facility, adoption and transfer numbers may decrease, as kittens and puppies are considered to be highly adoptable.

## **IX. Conclusion:**

There is a need for a progressive and proactive approach to the problem of pet overpopulation in Orange County. Staff and citizen advisers are working to address these issues through this strategic plan. There is a strong sense, by staff, advisers and experts, that such a plan is good fiscal policy. Euthanasia is a problem that cannot be solved by placement efforts alone. It must be addressed at its roots by working to reduce the amount of accidental and unnecessary reproduction of pets in our community.

This plan not only creates a strategy for addressing the problem of pet overpopulation through differential licensing, it also creates opportunity for assistance to citizens who are affected by the differential, but are unable to spay and neuter their pets without financial aid. This plan is good fiscal and public policy in that it addresses the issue, and does so in a self-sustaining way that takes into account the best interest of the animal, the owner and the community as a whole.

**Appendix I:  
Litter Animals Relative to Total Intakes  
Calendar Years 2007, 2008 & 2009**

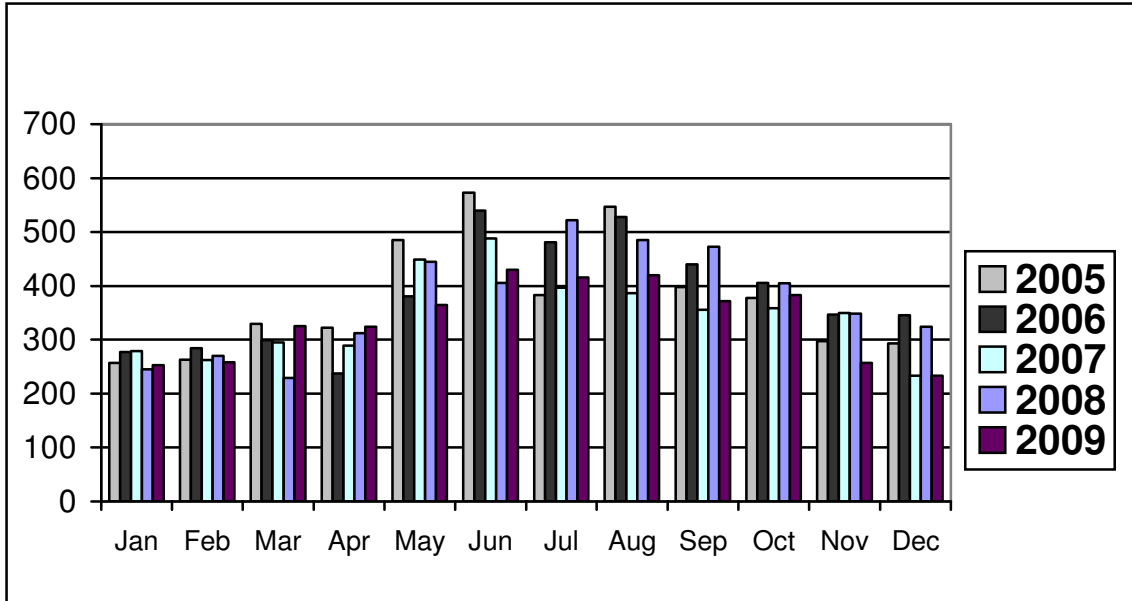
	<b>2009</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>3 yr average (2007, 2008, 2009)</b>
Total number of animals in litters	1334	1749	1201	1428
Total intakes	4036	4474	4304	4271
Litters as a percentage of intakes	33%	39%	28%	33%

**Appendix II  
Cat and Dog Litter Intakes:  
Calendar Years 2007, 2008 & 2009**

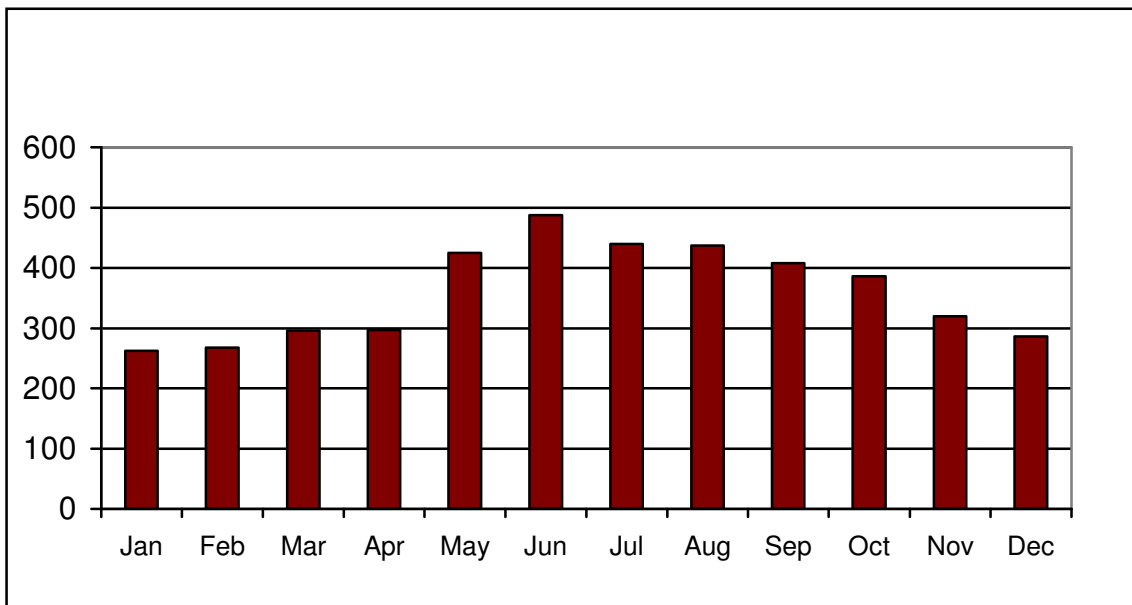
	<b>2009</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>3 yr average (2007, 2008, 2009)</b>
Total Cat Litters	255	261	229	248
Total Cats In Litters	897	1043	755	898
Total Dog Litters	117	188	122	142
Total Dogs In Litters	437	706	446	530
Total Litters	372	449	351	391
Total of Animals from litters	1334	1749	1201	1428

*Litters were counted to include puppies and kittens that were admitted to the shelter as part of a group of animals that are of the same species, age and parentage. Litters counted exclude single animals of any age admitted to the shelter and animals older than one year that were not admitted with siblings. Feral cats with litters are included in this count.*

**Appendix III:  
Monthly Number of Animals Admitted to the Shelter**



**Appendix IV:  
Monthly Number of Animals Admitted to the Shelter  
Average for years 2005 through 2009**



**APPENDIX V:  
Community Spay/Neuter Fund**

	thru FY 2008- 09	FY 2009-10 Budget	Total Budget
<b>Revenue:</b>			
Licensing		27,000	27,000
I-Care		2,000	2,000
Sale of Fixed Asset (Vehicle)		4,000	4,000
Donations		0	0
Transfer from General Fund	48,798		48,798
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,798</b>	<b>33,000</b>	<b>81,798</b>
 <b>Expenditures:</b>			
Animal Kind Contract	15,000	15,000	30,000
Department Supplies	2,298	1,500	3,798
I-Care (\$20 Fix)	5,500	4,500	10,000
Advertising	5,000	4,000	9,000
Spay/Neuter Day	5,000	4,000	9,000
Transfer to County Capital Fund	16,000	4,000	20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,798</b>	<b>33,000</b>	<b>81,798</b>

**Prepared by Budget  
August 18, 2009, Budget Amendment**