

City Council
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Item 32
Handout
received from
the public

MORGAN HILL PARTICIPATION IN THE
SANTA CLARA COUNTY LOW-COST SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAM

City Council Meeting, 16 Dec 15

Thank you for this opportunity to address City Council, and publicly discuss and vote on Morgan Hill participating in the Santa Clara County Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Program.

I would like to introduce Dr. Peggy Young, a Morgan Hill resident and veterinarian; Albert Escobar, Program Manager for Santa Clara County Animal Care and Control; and Jeni Lepow, a Morgan Hill resident who is active in both South County dog rescue and trap-neuter-return (TNR). I asked them to accompany me in case you have questions about spay/neuter in general, or the County Program in particular.

My purpose and goal here tonight is to ask the Council to approve immediate participation in the Program, direct the City Manager to allocate funds for the Program, and ensure this line item be included in future City budgets.

Participation in the County Program will provide a much-needed service at the lowest cost to our City residents on a year-round basis through an already-established, efficient, and well-run program. This includes spay/neuter services for dogs, with a special allocation for large breed dogs; domestic/owned cats; and community/unowned cats.

I originally asked for \$5,000, and hope the Council will fund at this level. However, as a fellow Government employee, I understand our City budget is still tight and we're now nearly halfway through the fiscal year, so if the full \$5,000 isn't possible at this point, I ask for participation at least at a nominal level now, with the intent to increase funding to \$5,000 in next year's budget. This is a minute portion of our City's total \$127.2M budget, but the return on this investment, impact on animal overpopulation, and help for our citizens are all significant.

To emphasize the reasons for, and benefits of, participation:

1. This Program contributes to our City's #1 priority, public safety, especially through the large breed dog component. Fewer large breed dogs lead to less potential for incidents involving these breeds. Our City's #2 priority is to protect the environment. The TNR element reduces the number of community cats, which are unfortunately sometimes viewed as a threat to wildlife and the environment. Our City's #3 priority is fiscal responsibility, which is achieved by lowering the number of both dogs and cats brought into area shelters, rescue groups, and even our Police Department, thus reducing the financial requirements for sheltering these animals. It is also fiscally sound to partner with the County which has a model program already in place.
2. Regarding unowned community cats, the Morgan Hill Police Department's website states, "If the free roaming cats are healthy, then they have found a food source and should be altered and returned to the neighborhood." This public endorsement of TNR is one part of addressing cat overpopulation. Morgan Hill can address both the TNR program and animal overpopulation in general through its financial support of the County Program.

3. The City's website states, "The annual budget process commences with the City Council adopting its priorities, goals, and strategies for the organization and the community at the beginning of the calendar year." This coincides with the immediate need to include increasing animal services, including spay/neuter program support, in its annual planning.
4. Program participation will help our City residents save money when spaying or neutering their pets. This is especially significant for low-income residents.
5. There are occasionally some free spay/neuter options available, such as through our County Shelter in San Martin and the Humane Society Silicon Valley, but these programs are impacted and limited by time of year, number of other animals at the facility, and/or limited numbers of special spay/neuter events.

Mayor Tate and Councilmember Siebert both inquired about outside funding, such as grants. Yes, there are some grant sources available, such as through the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Municipal Spay-Neuter Grant Program, the ASPCA, and Petsmart Charities. However, with grants come additional requirements on City staff, such as who will write and prepare the grant package, who will monitor the grant if awarded, who will keep required statistics, and who will write the required after-action report. Another consideration is that some grants come with conditions such as the funding must go to municipal animal shelters or animal control departments, which Morgan Hill doesn't have at this time. The other major factor is that grants are not automatic, and even if awarded, there is no guarantee of future funding. Morgan Hill needs to commit itself to addressing the animal overpopulation problem within the City, for it can't rely upon outside funding. Funding the County Program eliminates the extra work required for grants, bypasses shelter and animal control grant restrictions, and provides a reliable and ongoing source of spay/neuter options for our citizens.

The Morgan Hill Police Department's mission statement cites "partnering with the community" to "improve quality of life," and among its core values is "team work." You see before you City residents and volunteers who are passionate about animals residing within our City limits, and willing to help improve the lives of these animals. They're working behind the scenes every day in many ways to address animal overpopulation, and ensure better care for these animals. I ask you to provide them another tool through participating in this County Program, for what helps these animals also helps our City and its residents.

The best time to spay or neuter is during the fall and winter months before breeding season begins in the spring. Waiting till next fiscal year is too late to impact the number of unwanted animals. The adults will be well into their reproductive cycle, and more litters will needlessly, and preventably, be born by the time next year's budget comes-up for review and decision. Deciding now to participate in the well-managed County Program is fiscally sound, efficient, effective, and responsible for Morgan Hill.

Thank you.