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More on the pending county animal ordinance

by Trish Hernandez

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This week I would like to address the pending Taos County Animal Ordinance that is spreading like wildfire and getting people upset and angry.

Everyone deserves to express their opinion, but make sure you actually know the information yourself. Facts tend to be embellished or exaggerated when told from another's perception. Read the ordinance and attend the meetings — the date and time to be published in *The Taos News* legals and here in my column.

The 2011 current Taos County Animal Ordinance has many of these same laws already being enforced. An updated ordinance was essential due to the complaints from the public.

Complaints mainly included: dogs running at large, dogs off leash, neglected and abused animals, barking dogs all night, dogs being left chained without food or water or appropriate shelter. These calls come in every day 365, 24/7.

I understand that it is very difficult for those who take care of their pets to comprehend the immense animal challenges we have in our community. Most would find it too horrendous to actually experience what these groups face and what they have to see because of lack of care for the animals.

Every stray you see is because some human being made a decision for that animal's quality of life. We find puppies and kittens thrown in garbage bins, abandoned in boxes. People bring their litters of kittens and puppies to the shelter on a regular basis and they refuse to have the female spayed. They do not believe in it — so here take all of them and oh yeah, I will be back in a few months with more.

The objective of the pending animal ordinance is to keep the animal population down to prevent the suffering and neglect that too many of our animals experience, and to keep the numbers down at our animal shelter. Yes, perhaps the penalty and citation fees are too high and they can be adjusted.

Those of you who are opposed to this can speak up at the scheduled work-study sessions that will be in the near future.

Those who deal with these animal calls every day, animal control officers and the Sheriff's Department, avidly support the proposed fee structure.

Along with the fee structure, here are the sections in the pending ordinance that appear to be the most contentious:

Section 3-7 Multiple companion animal site permit (MCASP)

(A) Any Person intending to exceed the maximum limit of six companion animals in a household shall obtain a Multiple Companion Animal Site Permit.

(B) All companion animals at a Multiple Companion Animal Site shall be licensed and microchipped. Fostering a pregnant companion animal and her eventual offspring is a temporary exception to this rule.

(C) Any adjoining property owner may petition the county for revocation, modification or suspension of a MCASP if the adjoining property owner is reasonably aggrieved by any effects of the multiple animal site.

(D) No person shall keep or maintain more than 15 companion animals at any MCASP site, no more than four of which can be Intact.

(This is an attempt to keep the numbers manageable, prevent neglect and hoarding.) **Off leash:** An animal is off-leash if it is beyond an enclosure or the premises or vehicle of the custodian and is unconstrained by a leash or tether, but is still under supervision and voice control of the owner. All companion animals shall be restrained or confined as necessary to prevent damage or harm to people and property and to prevent any violation of this Ordinance or State law.

(Exemptions: Ranchers and farmers, Taos Ski Patrol, Taos Search and Rescue.)

Part 2 Care and maintenance (C) Required alteration of companion animals: No companion animal owned by a person who lives in Taos County shall leave any animal shelter including an ASF without having been altered except as provided herein. The foregoing does not apply to a licensed intact animal which is not required to be altered until impounded three times at an ASF, or to an animal whose alteration would be dangerous due to age or health issues. This provision does not apply to boarding kennels and guard dog sites. Intact animals at guard dog sites must have Intact Animal Licenses. (Only enacted when your dog is brought to the shelter the third time and when an animal is at the shelter and not reclaimed.) This is a companion animal ordinance and does not include livestock of any kind or type.

Please attend the workshops, open to the public and voice your concerns to the commissioners, animal control and law enforcement.

The national organization the Animal Defense League lists New Mexico as one of the top five states to be an animal abuser, due to our lack of animals laws.

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