

County OKs animal control regs, details undetermined

By Cody Hooks

The Taos News, 8/20/2015

Following months of drafts, debates and revisions, Taos County has a new animal control ordinance. But the new set of laws is only one step in a protracted process of getting the county's animal population in check.

The Taos County Board of Commissioners voted to adopt the new set of laws Tuesday (Aug. 18).

The most substantial change to a previous animal control ordinance is that the new law requires all pets, or "companion animals," be microchipped and licensed with the county.

Licenses will cost \$10 per animal unless the owner is low-income, a senior or veteran, or requires a service animal. If an animal is to remain "intact" — neither spayed nor neutered — the owner has to purchase an additional permit.

A copy of the new ordinance can be found with this article at taosnews.com.

The new ordinance is designed to reduce the stray animal population over the long run by cultivating more responsible pet ownership, getting more animals fixed, and curtailing "frequent flyers," or animals that end up at the shelter again and again.

According to Taos County Manager Stephen Archuleta, commissioners have allocated \$15,000 for spaying and neutering and have pledged to find a way to offer spaying, neutering, licensing and microchipping for free for the first year of the new ordinance.

Even still, actually getting the law off the ground will take several more months, he said.

In an Aug. 19 email to *The Taos News*, Harvey Yocum, executive director of Stray Hearts, asked, "Who will be selling licenses? Who will be providing microchipping? How will you confirm compliance and enforce? How will fees be collected? What reporting will be required?" "We couldn't really sort those [details] out because we didn't know if the ordinance was going to pass," Archuleta said.

In terms of enforcement, Taos County Sheriff Jerry Hogrefe wrote in an Aug. 19 email to *The Taos News*, "I need to get another [animal control officer] hired and will begin a media campaign soon. There is time," he said, noting the ordinance doesn't go into effect until late September.

The county currently has only one animal control officer.

Essential details will likely get sorted out as the county revisits its contract with Stray Hearts in the coming months.

The county must go through the process of a public bid. Last go-round, Stray Hearts was the only group to submit a proposal. The current contract with Stray Hearts expires Dec. 31 of this year.

The county must now determine a new “scope of work,” making decisions about who will handle the new arms of the ordinance.

Archuleta said a new scope of work will be determined by Sept. 15, while final approval of a new contract will come mid-December.

Yocum’s email also questioned how to fund a new fire-suppression system and 24-hour-a-day veterinary services. He criticized what he described as a lack of coordination with municipalities and pueblos.

Archuleta said those issues will be dealt with in the bidding process.

In an Aug. 18 phone interview with *The Taos News*, Commissioner Jim Fambro said, “We do want to continue to try to work with [Stray Hearts].”