

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 17, 2014
TO: Alder John Strasser
FROM: Heather Allen
RE: **IMPROVING LICENSING COMPLIANCE FOR DOGS AND CATS IN THE CITY OF MADISON**

OVERVIEW

Approximately 20% of Madison's dogs are licensed. Animal licenses are intended to ensure companion animals are vaccinated against rabies and other communicable diseases. In addition, licensing facilitates reunification of pets and owners,¹ a vital benefit given the nearly 1/3 of companion animals which will be lost at some point during their lifetime.² The licenses also generate revenues for animal services provided by Public Health Madison & Dane County, including funds for the Dane County Humane Society. Without licenses, it is challenging to determine whether the remaining estimated 80% of Madison dogs have current vaccinations. Increased compliance with licensing regulations requires a heightened level of awareness regarding the benefits of licensing, the legal requirements, increased ease and opportunity of compliance and, often times, negative consequences for the failure to license. The following recommendations to improve licensing compliance build on program models from other municipalities, while reflecting the local conditions, state regulations and available opportunities for the City of Madison.

CITY OF MADISON CURRENT LICENSING PROCESS

The City of Madison offers licenses for cats and dogs online, via regular mail and in person at the City-County Building. Applicants are required to provide proof of rabies vaccinations and spay/neuter, if applicable. The following press release details the process to obtain a license.

"Many people are surprised when they hear that dog and cat licenses are required in the City of Madison. Some people don't find out about the requirement until they have to "bail" their wayward pet out of the Humane Society. Pet licenses not only help reunite a lost pet and its owner, but the licensing process helps assure that the pets we share our community with have been vaccinated against rabies.

The City of Madison now offers the convenience of online licensing. To take advantage of this option, you need to be able to get digital or scanned versions of your pet's proof of current rabies vaccination, and if applicable, proof of spaying or neutering. These digital documents must be attached to your online license application.

Any dog or cat that is 5 months of age or older belonging to a Madison resident must be licensed. These licenses are for the calendar year, from January 1st through December 31st.

To register online, you must first create an account at the [City of Madison Licenses & Permits portal](#). Then you can go to the [licensing web page](#) at and fill out the application for either a cat or dog. You will also need digital versions of or be able to scan in your dog or cat's proof of current rabies vaccination so that they can be attached to the license application. The application process can also be done via regular mail and in person at the City Treasurer's Office.

¹ There is some debate about the use of the term pet owners vs. pet guardians. The American Veterinary Medical Association has a policy statement recommending the term ownership, to promote the legal authority and responsibility of the human toward the pet. Other organizations have lobbied to transition to the word guardian to acknowledge animals as sentient beings rather than as property. For the purposes of this paper, we will utilize the term owner, without prejudice to this debate except to acknowledge it.

² www.foundanimals.org/

(City-County Building 210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.) room 107. Be sure to provide or bring proof of vaccination when applying by mail or in person. The treasurer's office also offers dog owners the ability to purchase a Madison dog park permit online as part of the licensing process.

The same licensing requirement applies to dog owners in Dane County outside of the City of Madison. County dog licenses are sold by individual Town, City and Village Clerks. Some municipalities in Dane County may also require cat licenses. Online registration for Dane County residents is available at for some municipalities at www.petpass.net.³

City of Madison 2013 Pet Population Estimates and Licensing Rates

	Number of Pet Owning Households (Est.)	Pet Population (Est.)	Licenses Issued	Percentage Licensed
DOGS	34,162	54,659	11,343	20.75%
CATS	28,453	59,713	1,357	2.27%

Nationwide, approximately 36.5% of households have dogs and 30.4% of households have cats, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). The organization provides a formula⁴ to estimate the pet population based on the number of people living in a community⁵. According to the AVMA formula, the estimated pet population in the City of Madison is over 50,000 dogs and more than 50,000 cats. The table above compares those pet population estimates with the total number of licenses issued in 2013 by the City of Madison. Over eleven thousand dogs and just over one thousand cats had been licensed in 2013. This comparison indicates that approximately 20% of dogs and only 2% of cats in the City of Madison are licensed. Madison licensing compliance rates mirror national trends which estimate average licensing rates for dogs between 10 and 30%.

With an estimated 80% of dogs going unlicensed in the City of Madison, there is room to improve licensing rates to ensure dogs are vaccinated and to collect revenues needed to support the Humane Society and animal services. At a cost of at least \$15 per license, full compliance in dog licensing could yield as much as an additional \$650,000 annually.⁶

LICENSING MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS

The Found Animals Foundation focuses on three key steps to improve licensing compliance and capture additional revenue:

1. Clarify licensing objectives: What is the purpose of the licensing program? What does the agency or municipality hope to achieve?
2. Refine licensing structure and process: Align structure and process with program objectives. Make the process easier for both the city AND pet owners.
3. Outreach to pet owners: Educate pet owners about licensing benefits and requirements. Provide incentives to encourage compliance.

³ Online Pet Licensing Now Available in Madison: Licensing Offers other Benefits and It's the Law. Press Release July 9, 2013. Retrieved from www.cityofmadison.com/news/online-pet-licensing-now-available-in-madison

⁴ American Veterinary Medical Association. U.S. Pet Ownership Statistics and Formula. Retrieved from www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Statistics/Pages/Market-research-statistics-US-pet-ownership.aspx

⁵ The 2013 population estimate for the City of Madison is 243,344 residents according to the U.S. Census.

⁶ Additional revenue is based on a cost of \$15 per dog license and an estimated 43,316 unlicensed dogs in the City of Madison (based on 2013 licensing and population data).

In a comparison of the pet licensing programs of Los Angeles and Calgary, Canada, the Found Animals Foundation highlights the differences between the enforcement (LA) and impact (Calgary) model. Notably, license compliance and license revenues are significantly higher for Calgary, while rates of euthanasia are 75% lower than euthanasia for dogs in LA. Some features of both these program models may prove useful for the City of Madison.

Program Model Comparison – Structure Los Angeles vs. Calgary⁷

	Enforcement	Impact
City and Population	City of Los Angeles (Pop. 4 M)	Calgary, Canada (Pop. 1 M)
Goals of Licensing	1. Enforcement of mandatory spay/neuter requirement 2. Enforcement of rabies requirement	1. Licensing as a source of revenue 2. Public education about importance of pet identification 3. Increased return to owner rates 4. Decreased euthanasia rates
Fee Structure	Dogs: \$100 intact/\$15 altered Cats: Optional \$5 tag	Dogs: \$52 intact/\$31 altered Cats: \$30/\$10
Compliance Rate	~30%	~90%
Licensing Revenue	~\$2 million	~\$4 million
Requirements	1. Written proof of spay/neuter 2. Written proof of rabies vaccination	1. Self certification of spay/neuter (\$500 penalty for false info) 2. No rabies certification, handled separately
RESULTS		
# Dog licenses sold	106,320	97,500
% Dogs returned to owner	14%	86%
% Dogs euthanized	24%	6%
# Cat licenses sold	25 (optional tag)	46,000
% Cats returned to owner	1%	48%
% Cats euthanized	55%	22%

⁷ Pet Licensing Programs that Work. Program Model Comparison – Table replicated from Pet Licensing Programs Found Animals Foundation. Retrieved from www.foundanimals.org/docs/pdfs/pet-licensing-programs.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE LICENSING COMPLIANCE

Make It Easier to Get a License; Help More Veterinarians Issue Licenses

Wisconsin statutes allow for veterinarians and humane societies to become collecting officials for pet licenses on behalf of a municipality.⁸ Madison General Ordinances also permit veterinarians and veterinary clinics to issue licenses.⁹ Deputizing collection officials would enable veterinarians and humane societies to offer more services to customers and facilitate compliance with licensing and vaccination regulations, and improve data collection.¹⁰ Veterinarians—with first-hand proof of rabies and spay/neuter status—would be in the best position to file paperwork and ease the burden of additional steps and paperwork for the pet owner.

In 1996, Madison began allowing veterinarians to collect and submit application materials for licenses. Those materials are then sent to the City Treasurer, who then issues the licenses to the pet owner via mail. The program began with 14 participating veterinarians. In 2013, only six local veterinarians actively participated in the program for a total licensing rate of just 154 dogs and 26 cats. To realize the spirit of this ordinance, the City of Madison could help promote this licensing option and work with local veterinarians to revive the program.

Lee County, Florida requires that a pet license is due the day the pet receives the rabies vaccine. Veterinarians are authorized to issue the license which serves both as proof of rabies vaccine and as the municipal license.¹¹ Lee County promotes compliance with low license fees (\$8 annually for sterilized and microchipped pets) but significant late fees for failure to register or renew a license within 30 days (\$25 late fee). In fact, some communities, such as Los Angeles and Seattle allow retail pet services to vend licenses, in addition to veterinary clinics and hospitals and neighborhood service centers and agencies.¹²

Promote Licensing Through Increased Outreach and Education

Many municipalities employ outreach and education to promote pet licensing. The City of Madison can similarly use outreach and education to convey the social and community benefits of licensing such as protecting the community as a whole from rabies, funding animal shelters and helping to return lost

⁸ Wis. Stat. 174.065

Collection. (1) COLLECTING OFFICIAL. The collecting official is any city, village, or town treasurer or other tax collecting officer or any person deputized by the treasurer or tax collecting official, unless the common council or village or town board provides by ordinance or resolution for the appointment of a different person. Veterinarians and humane societies may voluntarily become collecting officials for a city, village, or town if the governing body of the city, village, or town by resolution or ordinance provides that veterinarians and humane societies may be collecting officials for the city, village, or town. In a county in which an agreement under s. [174.10 \(2\)](#) is in effect, the intergovernmental commission is also a collecting official for a city, village, or town if the governing body of the city, village, or town by resolution or ordinance provides that the intergovernmental commission is a collecting official. (c) *Reimbursement*. The collecting official may retain 25 cents, or a greater amount established by the county board by ordinance or resolution, for each license issued as compensation for the service, if the collecting official is not a full-time, salaried municipal employee.

⁹ M.G.O. Sec. 9.50(3) Effective January 1, 1996, the City Treasurer may authorize the initial issuance of dog licenses by local veterinarians. Veterinarians shall not issue renewals of previously issued licenses. (Am. by Ord. 11,736, 12-13-96)

¹⁰ Note: Public Health Madison & Dane County already utilizes other professional groups to record relevant data into a master database. Septic system inspections are one such example.

¹¹ Lee County Southwest Florida. It's the Law. Retrieved from www.leelostpets.com/pages/petlicensing.aspx Additionally, Lee County promotes compliance with low license fees (\$8 annually for sterilized and microchipped pets) but significant late fees for failure to register or renew a license within 30 days (\$25 late fee).

¹² Purchase or Renew a License. License Sales Partners. Retrieved from www.seattle.gov/animal-shelter/license/purchase-or-renew-a-license

pets to owners. Currently, the City of Madison promotes licensing only through traditional press releases, and information available on official websites. Other cities utilize a variety of other approaches to promote licensing.

For example, the City of Seattle, Washington employs a Pet License Partnership Coordinator at the Seattle Animal Shelter to:

- Increase pet license sales locations
- Reconcile/promote license sales
- Attend community fairs and conduct other related pet license outreach activities
- Coordinate pet license compliance activities with Animal Shelter Enforcement Unit such as door-to-door canvassing and outreach at off-leash areas
- Develop marketing and advertising related to pet license sales
- Follow up on delinquent licenses

The City of Seattle also offers monthly *license and free rabies clinics*, which encourage pet owners to purchase or renew a pet's license at the Seattle Animal Shelter and receive a free rabies vaccine. Events such as these may provide the incentive and convenience necessary to encourage licensing. Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission also provides "one-stop" rabies vaccination, licensing and microchip events.

Increase the Forfeiture Associated with Unlicensed Pets

The City of Madison forfeiture, or fine, for a dog without a license is \$50. The same fee applies to failure to vaccinate a dog or cat (M.G.O.) 23.39. Madison could raise the penalty for these transgressions. Alternatively, Madison could implement door-to-door compliance checks.

Los Angeles and all counties in Pennsylvania have recently implemented field enforcement campaigns to verify dog license and rabies compliance. In Pennsylvania, "A warning will be issued to owners whose dogs are found without the proper licensing or rabies boosters. Dog owners will have 48 hours to acquire the necessary license and/or vaccination, or they'll face a citation and a fine of up to \$300 for each violation."¹³

Promote the Value of Licensing by Highlighting the "Free Ride Home"

Many cities are providing a "Free Ride Home" for licensed pets who become lost. This service is valuable to pet owners and adds to the usefulness of a license. The ride home ideally allows pet and owner to be reunited without a trip to the animal shelter. It also reduces administrative resources and space constraints in the shelter.

Animal services officers from Public Health already provide a "Free Ride Home." In the City of Madison (and the County) if officers capture a stray with a license and tag, they will take it to the owner rather than taking it to the Dane County Humane Society. This service adds value to the license. Nevertheless many pet owners may not be aware of this license benefit. Madison could promote awareness of this benefit more widely.

¹³ Dog Wardens Combing Towns, Issuing Fines. Comcast Sports Net CSNPhilly.com. June 3, 2014. Retrieved from www.csnphilly.com/article/dog-wardens-combing-towns-issuing-fines

A vacation pet alert (a database allowing for animal control to quickly return a pet to the designated person if found while the owners are away) is a related incentive that is offered by the City of Seattle. The vacation pet alert database provides animal enforcement officers contact information for the person responsible for the pet while the owner is away. Animal control officers can utilize the database to contact the person taking care of a pet, without having to wait for an out of town owner to respond.

Prepare for Intergovernmental Commission and County Wide Licensing Model

Today, all municipalities in Dane County including the City of Madison manage their own licensing programs and models, though Public Health Madison & Dane County provides animal services for all of Dane County. Counties in Wisconsin with populations over 500,000 are permitted to establish an intergovernmental commission to govern pet licensing.¹⁴ After the 2020 census, Dane County will have more than 500,000 residents and will be able to establish a intergovernmental commission to manage licensing and other animal services. Madison should begin to work with partners to explore the potential cost savings and added value of a county-wide intergovernmental commission to offer streamlined licensing and other animal services.

The Milwaukee area has already established such a commission called the Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission. Established in 1999, the MADACC offers animal services for all 19 Milwaukee County municipalities, including a unified pet licensing process for all the municipalities. Other services include rabies and vaccination clinics, the Free Ride Home Program, limited veterinary care for injured animals, a low-cost spay/neuter program, and a central place for reunification of all lost pets and owners. Milwaukee began planning for MADACC in 1996.¹⁵

Promote Spay and Neuter and Through Differential Licensing

State law requires that the cost of a license be higher for unneutered or unspayed dogs.¹⁶ The City of Madison charges \$15 for neutered/spayed dogs and \$20 for unaltered dogs. This differential may not provide a sufficient financial incentive for spaying and neutering dogs. Madison could increase the differential to provide a more compelling financial incentive for spaying and neutering.¹⁷

¹⁴ NOTE: Some requirements related to intergovernmental commissions are likely to change in the near future. It is anticipated that the State of Wisconsin will raise the population number required to establish an intergovernmental commission, up to 750,000 per county.

¹⁵ Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Coalition. About Us. Retrieved from www.madacc.org/about_us.htm

¹⁶ Wis. Stat. 174.05 Dog license tax. **(3) ADDITIONAL TAX.** The governing body of any county may by a majority vote of the members present at any regular meeting raise the minimum dog license tax on dogs within its jurisdiction and the governing body of any town, village or city may by resolution raise the minimum dog license tax on dogs within its jurisdiction. If the governing body of any county, town, village or city increases the minimum tax, it shall provide that the tax for unneutered male dogs and unspayed female dogs is greater than the tax for neutered male dogs and spayed female dogs. The additional tax may not exceed the total cost of all dog licensing, regulating and impounding activities for the previous year, less any refunds which may be received under s. [174.09 \(2\)](#), and shall be levied and collected in the same manner as other dog license taxes.

¹⁷ If the City of Madison were to raise the license fees to incentivize spay and neutering of animals, care will be needed to ensure that total revenues do not exceed the total expenditures for Animal Services by Public Health Madison & Dane County. Total expenditures for Animal Services in recent budgets are just over \$1 million annually. Approximately \$300,000 of the Animal Services revenue comes from City of Madison Tax Levy. Accordingly, increases in City of Madison license revenue should not exceed the amount of City of Madison levy support for animal services, as the license funds can only be used for Animal Services. Animal service budget information provided by Doug Voegeli, Public Health Madison & Dane County via personal communication. September 4, 2014.

Researchers have found that “substantial fee differentials promote spay/neutering by forcing owners buying license tags to choose consciously whether to sterilize their animals and pay the lower fee or pay a much-higher price to maintain an intact dog or cat. This should encourage those not intending to breed to opt for spay/neutering, thus reducing the vast number of unplanned puppies and kittens, and becoming a primary means of combating the overpopulation problem.”¹⁸ For example, Broward County which charges “\$15 per year for each altered pet and \$31 per year for each intact animal”¹⁹ may not offer enough of a differential to compel an owner to spay or neuter their pet. Meanwhile, St. Lucie County, Florida charges \$75 per unaltered dog or cat, compared with \$10 for the first altered dog or cat and charges that reduce with each additional sterilized pet.²⁰

CONCLUSION

The City of Madison has several policy options to work to improve pet licensing compliance.

1. Make It Easier to Get a License: Help Veterinarians Issue More Licenses
2. Promote Licensing Through Outreach and Education
3. Increase Fines Associated with Unlicensed Pets
4. Promote the Value of Licensing by Highlighting the “Free Ride Home”
5. Plan for an Intergovernmental Commission and County Wide Licensing Program
6. Promote Spay and Neuter and Through Differential Licensing

These options reflect elements of both the enforcement and impact model and can be woven together to increase pet licensing and, thereby, protect both human and animal health while supporting animal services provided by Public Health.

¹⁸ Coleman, Veleanu, and Wolkov. “It’s Raining Cats and Dogs ... Government Lawyers Take Note: Differential Licensing Laws Generate Revenue, Reduce Costs, Protect Citizens, and Save Lives.” *Stetson Law Review*. Volume 40. Winter 2011. No. 2. See also the ASPCA Position Statement on Licensing.

“The ASPCA supports and encourages license programs for all companion dogs and cats, including those used for breeding, show, sport, work and service. The ASPCA strongly supports fee differentials for intact vs. spayed or neutered pets. The differential should be sufficient to encourage the surgery, as it is a primary means to reduce the overpopulation of dogs and cats.” Retrieved from www.aspc.org/about-us/aspc-policy-and-position-statements/position-statement-on-licensing

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.