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# Board of Supervisors Memorandum

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August 5, 2014

## Community Cats Program

### Introduction

To further Pima County's continued goal to increase life-saving efforts at the Pima Animal Care Center (PACC), the County applied for and was awarded a three-year Community Cats Project grant from the national Best Friends Animal Society (Best Friends). The proposed agreement is designed to trap, neuter and return at least 15,000 target area, eligible, free roaming cats over a three-year period. In addition, a proposed amendment to the Pima County Code has been submitted in order to permit PACC to release animals to Best Friends and other rescue partners that are duly incorporated humane societies or other nonprofit corporate organizations that are devoted to the welfare, protection and humane treatment of animals.

### Community Cat Grant

The Community Cats program essentially replaces euthanasia of feral cats, which have never been socialized to people, with trap/neuter/return services, commonly referred to as "TNR" in the animal welfare community. Under this technique, feral cats are trapped, surgically sterilized and then returned to their territory with a tipped ear, signaling that the cat has already been sterilized and will not need to be trapped again.

The program includes sterilizing healthy free-roaming cats brought into the shelter and then returning them to their habitat, while also proactively identifying "hot spot" areas and providing targeted colony management. Currently, it is estimated that PACC euthanizes approximately 1,600 feral cats annually. A goal of the Community Cats program is to reduce cat euthanasia in these target areas by no less than 35 percent annually.

This management method also has a longer-term advantage of immediately eliminating new litters of feral cats, thereby permanently reducing the feral cat population and eventually reducing the number of kittens and cats coming to the shelter in the first place.

Sterilization itself reduces nuisance behaviors, and since cats are territorial and protect their areas, they will prevent un-sterilized cats from moving in and growing a colony. In the rare cases of neighborhood conflict, the County can explore the feasibility of relocating cats, given open space holdings that include ranch properties that could benefit from natural rodent control.

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Beginning September 1, 2014 through August 31, 2017 Best Friends in coordination with PACC will hire employees, provide transportation and supplies. The total cost of the employees and related equipment for the three year program will be \$1,500,000 of which \$900,000 will be provided by Best Friends. The Fiscal Year 2014/2015 PACC budget dedicates \$600,000 to spay/neuter programs of which \$200,000 will be allocated to this critical project. It is anticipated that a like amount will be dedicated from Pima County's spay/neuter programs in the subsequent two years.

#### Code Text Amendment

The current Pima County Code states once an animal is being cared for by PACC the only way an animal can be released is if PACC finds "a suitable home" or the animal is "humanely destroyed." These current restrictions do not allow PACC to release an animal to Best Friends or any other acknowledged rescue group as part of a TNR program.

The proposed code text amendment, which was unanimously passed by the Pima County Animal Care Advisory Committee, allows PACC to partner with other community groups such as Best Friends to insure that animals are humanely cared for, trapped, sterilized, vaccinated and returned to the area in which they were found.

#### Conclusion

A similar program has been successful in many other areas, including Albuquerque, where cat euthanasia rates have dropped dramatically at its Animal Welfare Department. The Best Friends community cats program staff reports a save rate for cats approaching 90 percent in Albuquerque, with a sister program in San Antonio likewise reporting strong results.

Approval of the code text amendment and acceptance of the Community Cat Grant will significantly decrease euthanasia rates and continue to increase the live release rate, which is a key goal of PACC and Pima County.

The attached memorandum from Dr. Francisco Garcia provides additional information on the grant and note that as of July 24, 2014 a total of 277 emails of support have been received by staff.

#### Recommendation

I recommend approval of the contract with Best Friends Animal Society, allowing Pima County to receive good and services estimated to be at least \$900,000 and approve the proposed amendment to Section 6.04.180 of the Pima County Code so that we may appropriately partner with Best Friends on this critical program.

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C.H. Huckelberry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator

CHH/dr - July 24, 2014

Attachment

c: Jan Leshar, Deputy County Administrator for Medical and Health Services  
Dr. Francisco Garcia, Director, Health Department



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## MEMORANDUM

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Date: July 24, 2014

To: Jan Leshner  
Deputy County Administrator  
Medical and Health Services

From: Francisco Garcia  
Health Department Director  
Kim Janes  
Pima Animal Care Center  
Chief of External Affairs

**Board of Supervisors Meeting, August 5, 2014  
Agenda Item Pima County Ordinance 6.04.180 Amendment and  
Consent Calendar Addendum, CT14\*0501  
Justification for Agreement with Best Friends Animal Society**

The Pima Animal Care Center (PACC) is committed to reducing pet overpopulation and its burden on our community. The proposed agreement between the County/PACC and the Best Friends Animal Society (Best Friends), a Utah based non-profit, animal advocacy organization, aims to trap, neuter and return at least 15,000 target area, eligible, free-roaming cats over a three year period from July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2017. Best Friends agrees to hire a minimum of one full-time project coordinator and two part-time employees and to provide two transport vans and some necessary supplies. Project costs incurred by Best Friends are estimated to be at least \$1,500,000 over the three year period, including \$600,000 that will be paid by the County/PACC to Best Friends to assist with the cost of spay/neuter surgeries. Best Friends will facilitate the trapping, transport to spay/neuter providers, and return of eligible cats.

This agreement calls for the County to provide up to \$200,000 in funding for up to 4,000 spay/neuter surgeries to be performed during each year of the three year term. Every year the County provides funding for spay/neuter efforts. The County FY14/15 budget has \$600,000 dedicated to spay/neuter. If this Agreement is approved, \$200,000 of this \$600,000 will be allocated to Best Friends for this project. Other requirements of the Agreement include PACC coordination with Best Friends, vaccinations for project cats and housing for up to 30 cats at a time, pre/post-surgery.

This program will allow for the local free-roaming cat problem to be addressed without placing a significant additional burden on PACC. In calendar year 2013 PACC euthanized 1,269 "feral" cats; it is estimated that PACC will be handling 1,400 of these cats this year. Project goals include reducing cat euthanasia in the target areas by no less than 35 percent.

In order to acknowledge and efficiently facilitate modern, animal friendly, life-saving partnerships to include the one being formalized with Best Friends Animal Society through the Community Cat Program grant, PCAO requested staff submit the attached draft ordinance to the Pima County Board of Supervisors to specify that PACC can release animals to Best Friends and other rescue partners which are duly incorporated humane societies or other nonprofit corporate organizations that are devoted to the welfare, protection and humane treatment of animals.

As you may know, 6.04.180, adopted in 1998 states: *"Any animal forfeited, abandoned, ownerless or*

*unclaimed, and any other animals to be disposed of by the county enforcement agent, shall be placed by adoption in a suitable home or humanely destroyed.*” These are the only options in the code, “a suitable home” or “humanely destroyed.” These restrictions don’t acknowledge rescue groups or community cat, trap, neuter, release (TNR) programs as viable options for the aforementioned animals.

Over the past few weeks considerable input has been solicited, received and included to finalize both the Grant and the proposed ordinance.

This effort resulted in the ordinance undergoing a number of modifications to address concerns of providing PACC sufficient oversight of and responsibility to inspect rescue partners to insure PACC pets are humanely cared for by the rescue organizations, not allowing organizations to breed PACC pets while in rescue care and requiring the organizations to sterilize each pet before being released to suitable homes; or free roaming community cats are humanely cared for and trapped, sterilized, vaccinated and returned to the area they were found.

At its July 17, 2014 meeting, the Pima County Animal Care Advisory Committee discussed the ordinance change and unanimously (10-0) passed a motion to support a version as they modified it. Since then, through discussion with PCAO and Advisory Committee Member Ms. Jane Schwerin, the proposed ordinance was modified slightly from the version approved by the Committee. The modifications are:

- To make all three conditions within (A)(3) consistent, the second sentence in paragraph (A)(3) was changed from “Transferred animals shall be placed by adoption in a suitable home after first being sterilized; or shall be humanely destroyed; or may be released as part of a community cat program.” to read “Transferred animals shall be placed by adoption in a suitable home after first being sterilized; humanely destroyed; or released as part of a community cat program.”
- The addition of parentheses around “A” and “3” in the first and next to last sentence in paragraph B, making “A.3.” “(A)(3)”
- The addition of “humanely trapped or otherwise humanely captured,” to paragraph C.

The latest version to include these last three modifications has been shared via posting on PACC websites and with animal welfare partners and the advisory committee members for their information and feedback. In addition to Ms. Schwerin’s support of the current version, the Committee Chair has responded with his support of the changes and the ordinance as written.

To date staff has received 277 emails from individuals supporting the Community Cat Project contract.

Finally, on July 23, 2014, Best Friends hosted a community meeting to discuss the merits of the project, the successes achieved in other communities, the benefits to the communities that participate in the project and answered questions from several of the over 50 attendees. The large majority of the questions and comments were favorable to the program. The panel members were also able to articulate how TNR reduces risk to wildlife and birds as well as provides for healthier and fewer free roaming cats over time.

If the ordinance and companion agreement are not approved, Pima County will not be able to take advantage of these resources being offered to the County by Best Friends through a grant they received from PetSmart Charities in order to mitigate our community’s contentious free-roaming cat issue or improve rescue opportunities for shelter pets.

KJ/ms