

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**COSA - CITY CLERK
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TO: Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk

FROM: Councilmember Marina Alderete Gavito, Council District 7

COPIES: Erik Walsh, City Manager; Andy Segovia, City Attorney; Joe Frank Picazo, Interim Assistant to the City Manager; Emily McGinn, Assistant to the City Council

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Safety Measures for Loose and Dangerous Dogs

DATE: May 02, 2024

Issue for Proposed Consideration

After coordinating this Council Consideration Request (CCR) with the City Manager, I respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following item on the agenda of the earliest available meeting of the Governance Committee:

Requesting consideration of Comprehensive Safety Measures for Loose and Dangerous Dogs.

Brief Background

The issue of dangerous, loose and roaming dogs in San Antonio is severe and ongoing. This problem affects the daily lives of residents, especially in the South, East and West sides of the city. Loose and roaming dogs create life-safety threats and negatively impact the quality of life for residents of San Antonio. Many residents cite an inability to let their children play outside, walk their dog, or spend time outdoors in their neighborhoods due to the threat of loose dogs.

Canines being allowed to roam increases the risk of attacks on humans and other animals, contributes to overpopulation and overcrowding in shelters, perpetuates diseases amongst dogs in the community, and can disrupt vehicular traffic and cause accidents. Furthermore, many neighbors cite fear of retaliation as a reason for not reporting loose and potentially dangerous dogs to Animal Care Services, which prevents the issue from being properly addressed.

A study conducted by San Antonio Animal Care Services in 2019 determined there are nearly 34,000 loose and roaming dogs in the streets of San Antonio at any given time. Of those,



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between 87.2% and 96.5% of those have owners.¹ Additionally, per ACS' 2023 Strategic Plan, only 30% of owned animals in San Antonio are sterilized. These statistics highlight the fact this problem is largely created by people, and that this culture of irresponsible pet ownership has been accepted historically.

There are numerous resources in the community to assist pet owners in caring for their animals and achieving responsible ownership. These include but are not limited to:

1. DaisyCares Pet Food Program, which provides pet food to families in need.²
2. SAACS CASA - Community Animal Support and Assistance, which provides holistic services to animal owners who may be in violation of animal-related codes and provides tangible resources and support to help them address those issues to avoid ticketing.
3. SAACS partners with five area organizations to provide free or low-cost spay and neuter services to residents in 26 low-income zip codes in San Antonio.
4. Various city-sponsored programs are available to help residents with fixing fences or addressing other code violations that may contribute to dogs getting loose.

Even with the various resources available to pet owners, the problem still persists. Properly addressing this issue is multi-faceted and will require the following efforts:

1. A shift in the behaviors and attitudes of pet owners in our community.
2. Holding habitually irresponsible pet owners accountable for the nuisances, public safety concerns and the quality of life issues they are imposing upon their neighbors, and the negative impact their actions have on City resources.
3. Ensuring that neighbors feel safe and supported when reporting their concerns to ACS.

Request

1. Tougher Penalties for Repeat Offenders: It is my request that the Code of Ordinances be changed to reflect an increase in fines for owners of dogs repeatedly found to be running

¹ San Antonio Animal Care Services Strategic Plan, 2023;
<https://www.sa.gov/files/assets/main/v/2/acs/documents/strategic-plan.pdf>

² Programs For Pets - San Antonio Food Bank - <https://safoodbank.org/pets/>



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loose, with the minimum fine being set at \$500 for the second offense and \$750 for the third offense, and each offense thereafter. Payment plans should be made available to ensure people are able to pay fines and collect their pet from impoundment.

2. Loose Dog Sterilization: The District 7 team, in consultation with the City Attorney, has determined that ACS **does have** the ability to sterilize owned animals per the Texas Health and Safety Code, which states, "A veterinarian employed by a releasing agency may not perform nonemergency veterinary services *other than* sterilization on an animal that the releasing agency knows or should know has an owner."³ As such, it is my request that ACS spay or neuter any dog deemed medically appropriate for sterilization that is found loose or roaming before it is released out of ACS' care, at the responsibility of the owner. **This is an update to the current practice of ACS not sterilizing owned animals.** I am directing ACS to identify the needed resources to provide this service prior to the start of the FY25 Budget Work Sessions.
3. Protecting Residents Who Report Dangerous Dogs: Lastly, I am requesting that ACS create and implement a pseudonym program to protect the identity of people who file Dangerous or Aggressive Dog Affidavits. This will provide a safeguard against retaliation, and will help encourage victims and witnesses to come forward and report animal-related issues to ACS.

The intent of these policy changes is to address the long-standing and widespread public safety issue of dangerous, loose and roaming dogs in San Antonio. These changes will move the needle in making the necessary cultural shift regarding dog ownership in our city. Implementing these changes will serve to reduce dog attacks and ultimately create a safer city for residents and animals alike.

³ Texas Health and Safety Code, Title 10, Chapter 828, Section 828.012 (b).



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Submitted for Council consideration by:

Councilmember Marina Alderete Gavito

Supporting Councilmembers' Signatures (exactly 4)

District

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- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

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