

City of San Antonio



Minutes Public Safety Committee

2021 – 2023 Council Members

Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6, Chair
Mario Bravo, Dist. 1 | Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2
Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3 | Manny Pelaez, District 8

Tuesday, May 16, 2023

9:30 AM

City Hall Complex

The Public Safety Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Council Briefing Room beginning at 9:31 AM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

Members Present: Melissa Cabello Havrda, *Chair*
Mario Bravo, *Member*
Jalen McKee- Rodriguez, *Member*
Manny Pelaez, *Member*

Members Absent: Phyllis Viagran, *Member*

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of minutes from the April 18, 2023 Public Safety Committee Meeting.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez moved to Approve the minutes of the April 18, 2023 Public Safety Committee meeting. Councilmember Bravo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Cabello Havrda, Bravo, McKee-Rodriguez, Pelaez
Absent: Viagran

Briefing and Possible Action on

2. Briefing on Animal Care Service Dangerous Dog and Bite Investigations. [David W. McCary, Assistant City Manager; Shannon Sims, Director, Animal Care Services]

Brad Davenport, Assistant Director of Animal Care Services (ACS), thanked members of the ACS Advisory Committee for attending the meeting. Davenport provided a definition of dangerous animals which was governed by State Law and aggressive animals which was regulated by City Ordinance.

Davenport stated that there were 113 dangerous dogs in San Antonio as of May 14, 2023 and the owners were required to show their compliance with statutory guidelines. He noted that 50 of the 113 were out of compliance. Davenport stated that there had been 38 noncompliance hearings since February 2023 with 14 dogs seized, 13 reached compliance, two owner surrendered, two noncompliance and seven given additional time.

Davenport reported that ACS had a special facility to quarantine animals after a bite incident noting that there were 3,500 bite incidents reported annually; 65% were investigated based on prioritization criteria according to Davenport. He reported that the department had developed a proactive effort to address multiple-bite dogs with a focus on getting owners into compliance. Davenport announced the development of the Animal Care Officer Apprenticeship Program which allowed for over hiring of 15 cadets with 15 weeks of on the job training.

Shannon Oster-Gabrielson, Assistant to the Director of ACS, provided an update on spay/neuter services which included in-house surgeries, low cost leased clinics, and free community spay/neuter to targeted areas including feral cats. Oster-Gabrielson mentioned that mobile units were rarely used due to low volume and lack of reliability and recommended creation of a new position to coordinate transportation.

Chair Cabello Havrda requested clarification on the definition of dangerous versus aggressive dogs. Davenport stated that dangerous animals had incidents of biting a human and aggressive animals had incidents of biting another animal. Chair Cabello Havrda expressed concern with packs of dogs and stray dogs as well and recommended that pet owners get their animals microchipped.

Chair Cabello Havrda noted that some members of the public had alleged that ACS was designating animals as dangerous or aggressive to justify euthanizing the animal and not counting it against the live release rate. Davenport replied that they fully investigated complaint affidavits and noted that many were unfounded and not designated as either dangerous or aggressive.

Assistant City Manager David McCary noted that the live release calculation did not change if the animal was designated dangerous or aggressive, they were still counted as euthanized. Chair Cabello Havrda expressed concern with staff turnover, mental health and the shortage of Veterinarians. Oster-Gabrielson stated that they had two in-house Veterinarians, but ACS was not allowed to spay/neuter owned animals so if they had more Veterinarians, it would not impact the spay/neuter rate for privately owned pets. Chair Cabello Havrda asked how the transport program would work since ACS could not treat an owned animal. Oster-Gabrielson explained that the transport was to a partner agency. Chair Cabello Havrda recommended more spay/neuter clinics, increased awareness and more transportation opportunities.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested data on the location of calls regarding bites and how many were investigated. Davenport stated that 60% of the calls for bites were in Council Districts 2, 3, 4 and 5; about 65% of the bite calls were investigated within a week. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez supported more staff to improve the investigation process. Assistant City Manager McCary stated that the additional four officers requested were recommended as a result of analysis of the calls and, if approved, service levels would be reevaluated.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked if there was a different process for roaming dogs versus strays. Davenport stated that owners were cited for roaming dogs and strays were picked up because they did not have owners, noting that roaming dogs were less of a priority than strays unless the dogs were dangerous or aggressive. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez noted that it was difficult to meet community expectations as the dogs were moving around and it was difficult to catch them and he recommended development of a program to help owners repair their fences.

Councilmember Bravo acknowledged that ACS could not treat owned pets and asked if a pet owner could surrender their pet and get the pet spayed/neutered and then adopt the same pet. Oster-Gabrielson commented that ACS would not have the capacity to treat owned pets, but rather recommended expansion of spay/neuter partnerships and additional funding for partner agencies which was a part of the ACS Strategic Plan and was recommended to begin with mid-year FY 2023 funding.

Councilmember Bravo requested information on the process for noncompliant dangerous dog owners and bad actors that simply met compliance on the surface and continued to fall back out of compliance. Davenport responded that owners were given seven days to comply, if they did not comply, they would be taken to court with a follow up investigation.

Councilmember Pelaez thanked staff for their work and asked Jeff Coyle, Assistant City Manager, about bills at the State Legislature related to animals. Assistant City Manager Coyle stated that there were two bills in the Texas Legislature, one related to dangerous animals and another that would provide spay/neuter assistance to low income individuals. Assistant City Manager Coyle noted that the impact of the super-preemption bill was unknown.

Councilmember Pelaez recommended that the Office of Innovation review the operations of ACS and its social media and/or advertising campaigns. Davenport stated that the Office of Innovation had been involved and made some excellent operational recommendations.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez noted that the data indicated areas of town with high levels of inequities experienced more roaming, stray, and dangerous dogs and recommended more proactivity in those areas. Davenport stated that the canvassing team was envisioned to be more proactive similar to San Antonio Police Department's San Antonio Fear Free Environment (SAFFE) Officers.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested partners needed more funding for both technical and business operations. Assistant City Manager McCary commented that dangerous dog

owners needed to be held accountable and he appreciated the role of Municipal Court.

Councilmember Bravo requested bar charts with historical comparison to assist with context.

Chair Cabello Havrda closed the presentation by thanking staff for their work. The Item was for briefing only, so no action was taken.

3. Briefing on the San Antonio Fire Department's Statistics for the 2nd Quarter of FY 2023.
[Maria Villagomez, Deputy City Manager; Charles Hood, Fire Chief]

San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD) Chief Charles Hood reported that in FY 2022, there were 240,796 total incidents with 444,169 total unit responses which indicated that multiple units were responding in many instances. Hood listed the types of incidents and showed a chart which indicated an increase in medical incidents and a slight decrease in non-medical incidents over the past three years. Hood stated that this was a result of the strategy of using the GoodSAM application to redirect incidents to other resources, when appropriate. He added that this strategy focused the efforts of SAFD on fires and medical emergencies through an equity lens.

Hood stressed the prevention component of his department to ensure community members were educated on how they could make their homes safer. Hood mentioned that SAFD was getting more calls to assist the Police Department as a result of the George Floyd Laws.

Chair Cabello Havrda noted that seniors did not get the same safety training that children received in schools and recommended that SAFD provide safety training at the Senior Centers. Hood stated that pre-pandemic, SAFD used to go to the Senior Centers and they were happy to attend community events and provide information and smoke detectors. Chair Cabello Havrda asked if the smoke detectors were dual detectors of carbon monoxide. Hood stated that their free smoke detectors were mostly donated and only for smoke, not carbon monoxide, but added that these were kept in their emergency vehicles and provided when they went out on a call.

Councilmember Bravo recommended investment in permanent supportive housing for the homeless as these expenses resulted in cost savings since many homeless individuals went into vacant buildings and built fires to stay warm. Councilmember Bravo requested data on fires in vacant buildings.

Hood stated that his priority was to keep his Firefighters safe and vacant structure fires were some of the most dangerous because of the condition of the building and debris spread throughout noting that he was working with the Development Services Department (DSD) to put a big red mark on the front of unsafe buildings so SAFD knew it was structurally unsafe and not to go in.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez supported the GoodSAM application as a leveraging of technology to help improve efficiencies and create innovative approaches and added that this was a model for other departments. Hood invited the Committee to come to their facility and witness the program first-hand. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked if the digital divide was a barrier in certain low-income neighborhoods. Hood commented that a smartphone was needed to access the

GoodSAM application.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez stated that some members in the community were concerned that developers were intentionally starting fires to save money on demolition. Hood stated that this assertion had been investigated but could not be verified.

Councilmember Pelaez stated that there was a fire at a Japanese Restaurant near IH-10 in Council District 8 some time ago, and now the building was vacant and many people were breaking in and doing drugs, running extension cords from next door and committing crimes within the building noting that the building caught on fire again today.

Hood stated that sometimes unhoused persons will get into a vacant building that DSD was already in the process of evaluating and the best practice was to board up and fence the property. Councilmember Pelaez suggested that it might not just be homeless individuals getting into the former restaurant as some of the people were going in there to do other nefarious things. Hood referred the specific situation to DSD.

Chair Cabello Havrda closed the meeting noting that the Item was for briefing only so no action was taken.

Executive Session

There was no Executive Session held.

Consideration of items for future meetings

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, Chair Cabello Havrda adjourned the meeting at 10:55 a.m.

Melissa Cabello Havrda, Chair

Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk