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CLARK COUNTY
WASHINGTON

AUDITOR
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Department of Community Development

Performance Audit of Animal Protection and Control

Clark County Auditor's Office

Report #07-04

October 2, 2007



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Community Development's Animal Protection and Control Division is responsible for enforcing the animal control provisions of the county code, including those related to animal cruelty, strays, and noise complaints. The Division's Licensing Program issues about 24,000 pet licenses annually. Since 2002, division staffing has been constant at eleven positions.

This audit found that Clark County has adopted an animal protection and control ordinance with provisions that implement many "best practices" recommended for local jurisdictions. Among these are provisions that address animal cruelty, encourage spaying and neutering, require rabies vaccinations, and require that dangerous dogs be monitored and controlled.

AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Act to Increase the Number of Dog and Cat Licenses Issued

Despite county population increases, the number of dog and cat licenses issued has declined by five percent since 2001. Factors likely to have contributed to this decline include a reduction in number of licensing agents (veterinarian offices, etc.) and a substantial increase in the cat licensing fee in 2003.¹

To address this issue, the Department of Community Development plans to implement on-line licensing, and is attempting to increase the number of licensing agents. To supplement and gauge the success of these efforts, **we recommend** that the Department track the number of licenses issued and measure the result against a goal, such as increasing licensing numbers by a defined percentage each year.

The number of cat licenses issued declined by 25 percent from 2003 through 2006. The decline was concurrent with the substantial fee increase that was adopted in 2003. The Department is considering a proposal that would increase the licensing fee from \$10 to \$15 for spayed or neutered cats, and from \$20 to \$38 for unaltered animals. **We recommend** that the Department analyze the impact an additional increase could have on licensing numbers before a decision is made to change the fee.

Comply with the City of Vancouver Contract Payment Provision

By contract, the county provides animal code enforcement, licensing, and related services to the City of Vancouver. The contract specifies that the amount the city is to reimburse the county for these services is to be estimated annually and

¹ The fee for a spayed or neutered animal was increased from \$6 to \$10, and the fee for an intact animal was increased from \$12 to \$20.

subsequently adjusted for actual costs incurred. However, the same amount, \$289,000 annually, was charged from 2001 through 2006.

- Reconciliation on an actual cost and activity basis, as required by the contract, found that an additional \$63,122 should have been collected from the city for work done in 2006. For the entire 2001 through 2006 period, the amount that should have been collected totaled \$245,437. **We recommend** that the Department assure that actual costs incurred are recovered from the city in accordance with contract provisions.

In response to this recommendation, the Department stated that the 2007 contract payments will be reconciled on an actual cost basis and that the city would be contacted regarding how to make an adjustment for the actual costs incurred in 2006.

Other Recommendations

We also recommend that the Department:

- conduct a survey to obtain input from citizens who have been contacted by the Animal Protection and Control Division to identify possible improvements to procedures.
- evaluate procedures related to the handling of noise (barking dog) complaints to determine whether efficiencies can be gained.
- designate an official to work with the Southwest Washington Humane Society and the City of Vancouver to assist in analyzing the need for and funding of a new shelter.

See the Department of Community Development's letter in Appendix C for additional details on plans to implement the recommendations in this report.

PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF ANIMAL PROTECTION AND CONTROL

BACKGROUND AND MISSION

The Department of Community Development's Animal Protection and Control Division is responsible for enforcing the animal control provisions of the county code, including those related to animal cruelty, strays, and noise complaints.

The division's Licensing Program issues about 24,000 pet licenses annually and assures that rabies vaccinations are current. The Licensing Program helps maintain humane standards for animal care through inspecting and licensing animal businesses and private domestic animal facilities. Facility inspections, neighborhood canvassing, delinquent licensing follow-up, wild/exotic animals and dangerous dog licensing are services provided through this program.

Enforcement Program officers enforce county and state animal control regulations, often on an emergency response basis. Officers also provide education in the local schools and summer camps through the division's bite prevention program.

Appeals of enforcement actions are handled through an administrative hearings process. The Animal Control Division schedules, organizes and presents enforcement cases in appeal hearings. Division officers conduct investigations to assure compliance with any penalties and corrective actions resulting from Hearing Officer decisions.

Animal shelter services are provided through a contract with the Southwest Washington Humane Society, and an Animal Protection and Control Advisory Board provides for communication, coordination, and public input into policy development. Through the advisory board process, community projects have developed in cooperation with private organizations to address continuing community concerns. Projects are in place that promote animal placement, responsible pet ownership, humane care of pets and livestock, and dealing with aggressive animals. Special community event projects have been developed to ensure public awareness, and to provide incentives to spay and neuter pets.

Staffing and Funding: Little Change Over Time

Since 2002, division staffing has been constant at eleven positions, including six animal control officers; one licensing officer; three office assistants; and a program manager. Although the staffing level has remained constant, one animal control officer position was added and one licensing officer position was eliminated.

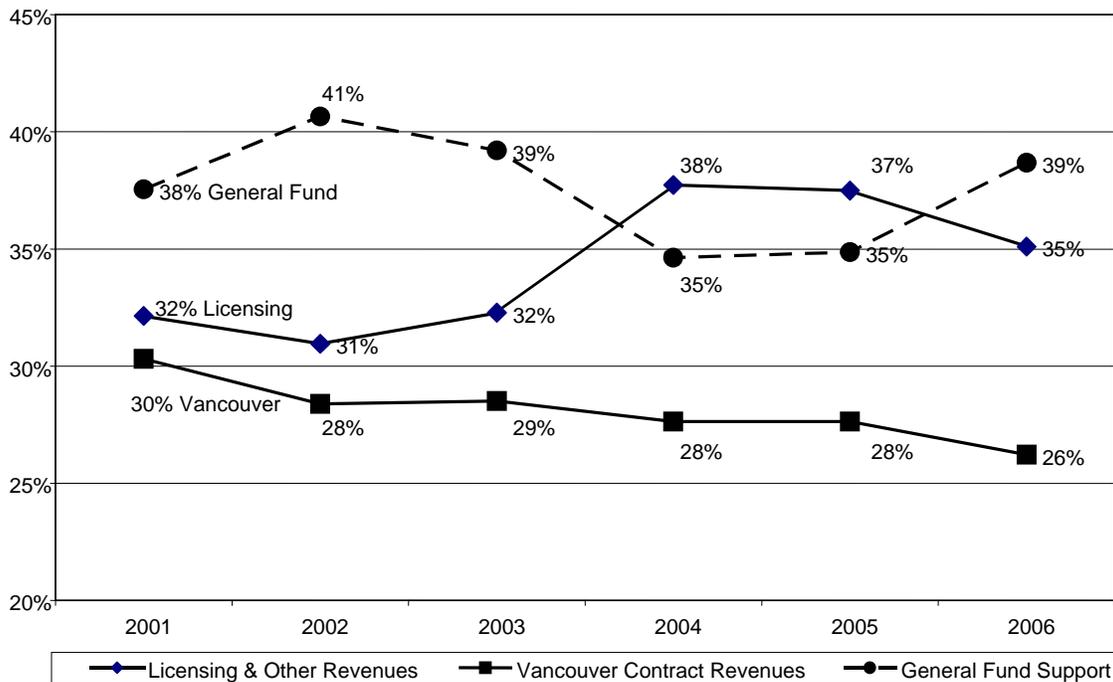
The division's total funding rose from \$953,000 in 2001 to \$1,102,000 in 2006, as shown in the table below.

ANIMAL PROTECTION & CONTROL DIVISION FUNDING SOURCES

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Dog/Cat License Revenue	\$269,532	\$278,662	\$288,078	\$352,738	\$358,408	\$345,484
Vancouver Contract Revenue	289,000	289,000	289,000	289,000	289,000	289,000
Other Revenue	36,920	36,397	39,166	41,854	33,631	41,421
General Fund Support	357,955	413,881	397,374	362,088	364,596	426,389
Total Annual Funding	\$953,407	\$1,017,940	\$1,013,618	\$1,045,680	\$1,045,635	\$1,102,294

The amount of funding provided by license revenue (predominantly dog and cat licenses) fell from 38 percent in 2004 to 35 percent in 2006. Over the same time period, the amount provided by the contract with the City of Vancouver fell from 28 percent to 26 percent. Consequently, the percentage of General Fund support increased from 35 percent in 2004 to 39 percent in 2006.

PERCENTAGE OF FUNDING PROVIDED ANNUALLY: BY SOURCE



CLARK COUNTY HAS ADOPTED MANY ANIMAL PROTECTION AND CONTROL BEST PRACTICES

Clark County has adopted an animal protection and control ordinance with provisions that implements many “best practices” recommended for local jurisdictions, including:

- A restraint (leash) law; dogs are generally required to be on leash unless on the premises of the owner.
- A limitation on the number of dogs (nine maximum in the county) that citizens may keep.
- A requirement that all animal bites be reported.
- Provisions for monitoring and controlling dogs determined to be dangerous.
- Minimum impoundment times (3 days if unlicensed, 5 days if licensed) before adoption or euthanasia.
- Animal cruelty ordinances. Animal control officers respond to many animal cruelty complaints, including those involving livestock (primarily horses).
- A nuisance (noise) law.
- A licensing fee that is substantially lower if an animal is spayed or neutered. Jurisdictions have found this “differential licensing” to be an effective animal population control measure, leading to reduced enforcement and sheltering costs. Clark County’s dog licensing fee is \$16 if spayed or neutered, compared to \$40 otherwise. Cat licenses are \$10 and \$20, respectively.
- A requirement that cats, as well as dogs, be licensed and vaccinated for rabies. The cat-licensing requirement is important because (1) many animal control service calls involve cats; (2) cats are usually the most numerous inhabitants of animal shelters, and licensing helps reduce these numbers, and (3) the cat population is the leading carrier of rabies in the United States.
- A requirement that kennels and pet grooming facilities be inspected annually.

LICENSING PROGRAM

An effective licensing program is considered essential to the long-term success of the animal protection and control effort. Statistics from local jurisdictions have shown a strong correlation between licensing and return-to-owner rates.² Jurisdictions have found that increasing licensing numbers subsequently reduces animal pick-up and sheltering costs. More animals are returned to owners without calling animal control officers, and fewer animals end up in the shelter.

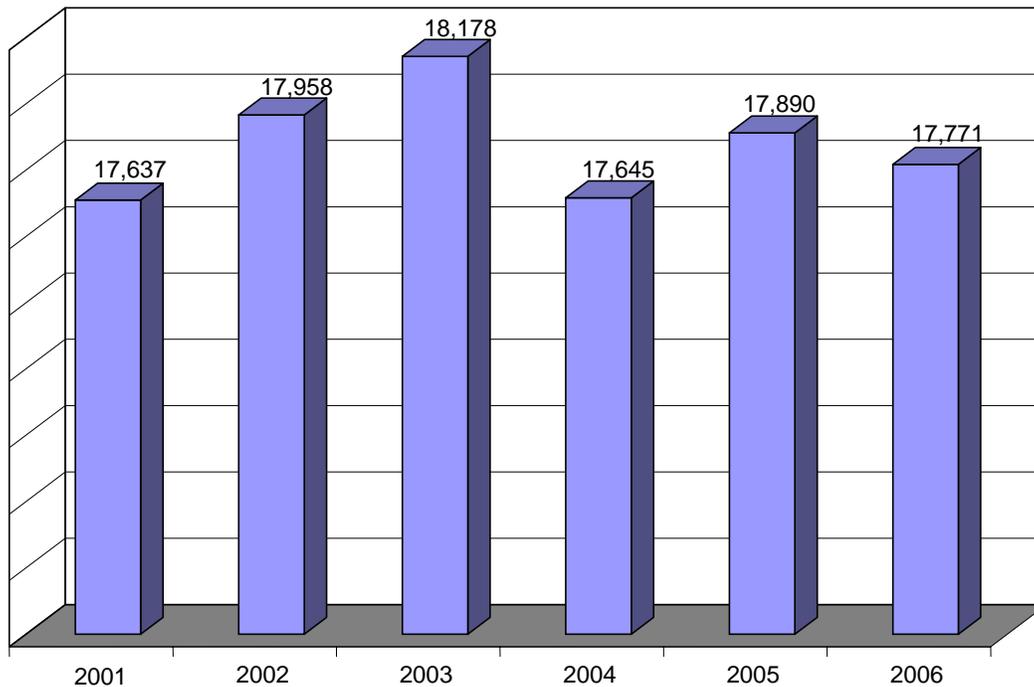
In Clark County, the number of animal licenses issued has declined and licensing numbers have not kept pace with the county's population increase. Animal Protection and Control Division officials attribute this decline to fewer veterinarians and other facilities (licensing agents) providing licensing services to the public. In addition, Animal Protection and Control Division officials advised that fewer resources are now devoted to licensing--one of the two Licensing Agent positions was eliminated in order to provide for an additional Animal Control Officer position. The change was considered necessary because of increases in the enforcement workload.

Dog Licensing

From 2001 through 2006, Clark County's population increased by an estimated 14 percent. Despite the population increase, the number of dog licenses issued in the county did not vary substantially during that period—and in fact decreased from a high of 18,178 in 2003 to 17,771 in 2006.

² "Animal Control Management: A Guide for Local Jurisdictions," International City/County Management Association, 2001. Page 21

DOG LICENSES ISSUED ANNUALLY



The International City/County Management Association publication entitled “Animal Control Management: A Guide for Local Governments” presents a methodology for estimating the total number of dogs and cats in a local jurisdiction. The estimate is based upon the number of households in the jurisdiction, and national averages relating to the number of pets owned. (See Appendix A for the detailed calculation.)

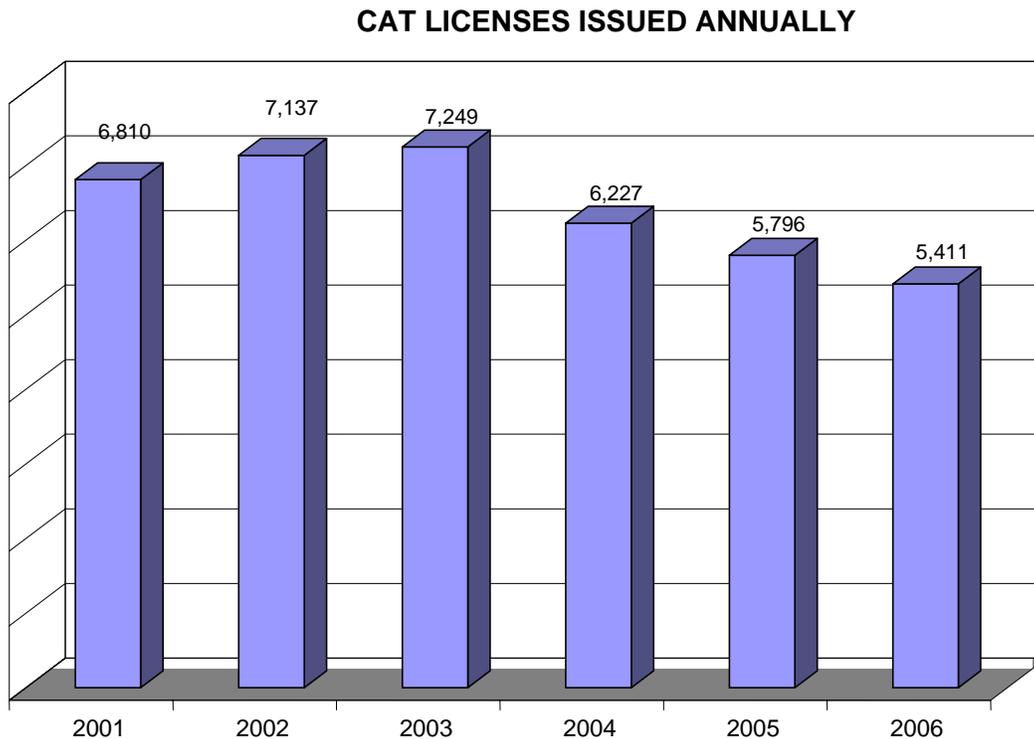
Based upon this calculation, there were an estimated 99,000 dogs in Clark County in 2006. The county licensed 17,771 dogs in 2006 (18 percent of the total estimated dog population).

The Animal Protection and Control Division currently tracks the number of dog licenses issued. **We recommend** that the division establish a dog licensing performance measure and goal. For example, one option would be for the division to set a goal to have a selected percentage of the county’s total estimated dog population licensed. Another option would be to set a goal at a level which would keep dog licensing numbers on pace with county population increases.

Performance would then be measured and reported against the selected goal or goals.

Cat Licensing

Licensing statistics for Clark County show that the number of cats licensed annually has been decreasing. The chart below shows that cat licenses issued decreased from 7,249 in 2003 to 5,411 in 2006, a 25 percent decline. Possible factors which may have contributed to the decline include (1) the cat licensing fee was increased substantially in 2003, from \$12 to the current \$20 for an intact animal, and from \$6 to the current \$10 for a spayed or neutered animal, and (2) as discussed subsequently in this report, the number of Licensing Agents declined from 20 to 9 during the 2003-2006 period.



Based upon the calculation described above for dog licensing, there were an estimated 107,000 cats in Clark County in 2006. The county licensed 5,411 cats in that year—a number which represents 5 percent of the total estimated cat population.

The Animal Protection and Control Division currently tracks the number of cat licenses issued. **We recommend** that the division establish a cat licensing performance measure and goal. For example, one option would be for the division to set a goal at a level which would keep cat licensing numbers on pace with county population increases.

Monitor Effect of Licensing Fee Changes on Licensing Numbers

The Department of Community Development has proposed changing the existing licensing fees. In order to simplify the fee structure, the same fees would be charged for licensing a dog as charged for licensing a cat. The proposed changes would result in a substantial increase in the cat licensing fee—from \$20 to \$38 if not neutered or spayed, and from \$10 to \$15 otherwise. The proposed change would result in a small decrease in the dog licensing fee—from \$40 to \$38 if not neutered or spayed, and from \$16 to \$15 otherwise.

Animal control programs in many jurisdictions have benefited from actions taken to increase the number of animals that are licensed. Since 2003, the number of dog and cat licenses issued has decreased by 9 percent in Clark County. The substantial increase in the cat licensing fee could further reduce the number of licenses issued. As discussed previously in this report, the number of cat licenses issued has declined each year since the cat license fee was increased in 2003. **We recommend** that the department research the possible effect of an increased fee on the number of cat licenses issued. If the proposed fee increase is adopted, we recommend that the effect on the number of cat licenses issued be tracked and evaluated by the department.

Increase the Number of Licensing Agents

The Department of Community Development sells licenses at county office sites and through licensing agents. The county also processes license applications by mail, and sends out license renewal letters. Licensing forms can be downloaded on the county website and mailed in. The application process cannot be completed on-line.

According to Clark County's Lead Animal Control Officer and Licensing Officer, the decrease in licensing numbers is partially attributable to a decrease in the number of licensing agents. There were approximately 20 agents in 2003, compared to 9 currently. The officials stated that several agents, including veterinarians, quit providing the service because they concluded that the administrative procedures that had to be followed were not worth the time and money involved.

The Director of the Animal Control Division and the Director of the Southwest Washington Humane Society both stated that they would contact veterinarians and other organizations to determine what could be done to increase licensing agent numbers.

OTHER ISSUES

Comply with the City of Vancouver Contract Payment Provision

By contract, the county provides animal code enforcement, licensing, and related services to the City of Vancouver. The contract specifies that the amount the city is to reimburse the county for these services is to be estimated annually and subsequently adjusted for actual costs incurred.

However, the same amount, \$289,000 annually, has been charged from 2001 through 2006. The amount was based on the relative number of animal control service requests, licensing transactions, and hearing proceedings attributable to the city during the September 2000 through August 2001 period.

Reconciliation on an actual cost and activity basis, as required by the contract, found that an additional \$63,122 should have been collected from the city for work done in 2006. And for the entire 2001 through 2006 period, the amount that should have been collected totaled \$245,437. Appendix B shows the calculation details.

- **We recommend** that the Department of Community Development assure that actual costs incurred are recovered from the city in accordance with contract provisions.

Conduct a Customer Survey

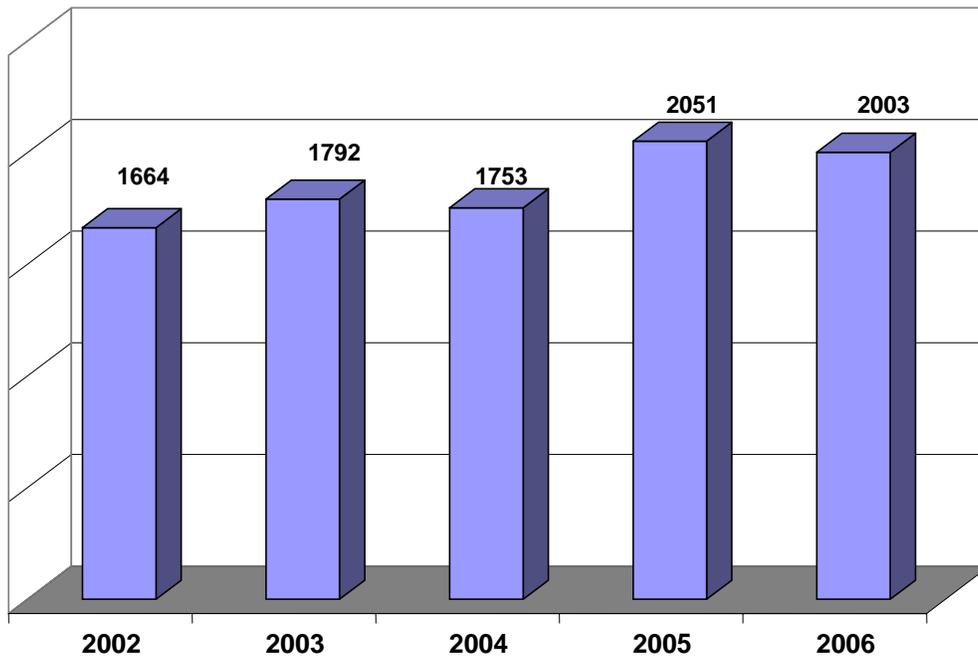
Animal Protection and Control Division personnel often interact with county citizens on a face-to-face basis, and often in stressful situations.

We recommend that the Department of Community Development obtain input from citizens who have been contacted by the Animal Protection and Control Division to identify possible improvements to procedures. For reference purposes, the document “Animal Control Management: A Guide for Local Governments” published by the International City/County Management Association discusses the use of such surveys, and provides an example of a survey used in another jurisdiction.

Review Noise Complaint Procedures

As is true in many jurisdictions, many animal control “service calls” involve noise (“barking dog”) complaints. As shown in the chart below, the number of noise complaints steadily increased over the 2002 through 2006 period. There were 2,003 noise complaints in 2006—a total that constitutes 19 percent of the 10,389 service calls handled by the Animal Protection and Control Division that year.

NUMBER OF NOISE COMPLAINTS



Animal Protection and Control Division procedures generally require that two letters be sent to the potential violator. The letters explain the availability of neighbor mediation procedures. If the letters do not solve the problem, an Animal Control Officer is required to visit the property.

Animal control officers stated that trips taken to follow-up on these complaints were frequently ineffective. The dog usually was not barking at the time of the follow-up; as such, the validity and severity of the problem rarely could be determined. **We recommend** that the Animal Protection and Control Division evaluate its procedures to determine whether efficiencies can be gained.

Researching what has worked in other jurisdictions may be useful. Some jurisdictions have found that reconciliation of the complaint is more likely to occur if more responsibility is placed on the neighbors involved to solve the problem.

For example, Multnomah County Animal Services makes resolution procedures and documents available on its website. (The site states that barking dog/noise nuisance complaints are not taken by telephone.) The website provides:

- Advice on how the complainant can talk to the neighbor and explain the problem. For example, the neighbor may not be aware of special circumstances (e.g., night work, requiring sleeping during the day).

- A “barking dog letter” for the complainant to print out and send to the neighbor.
- The names and telephone numbers of neighborhood mediation services.

If there is still no resolution, the website provides a petition form to be printed out. The form must be signed by at least two other neighbors. Upon receipt of the petition, the county’s Animal Services personnel decide whether to issue a Notice of Infraction. Additional Notices of Infraction can result in further action, including impoundment.

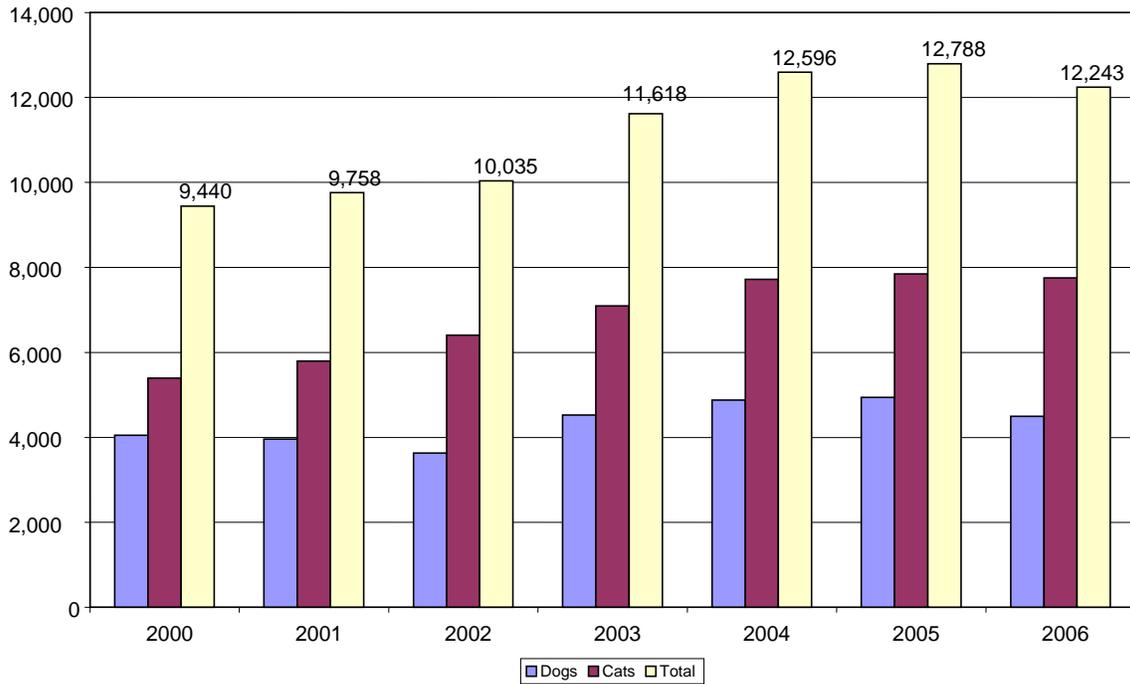
ANIMAL SHELTER CAPACITY

Clark County contracts with the Southwest Washington Humane Society for the provision of shelter-related services. The director of the Southwest Washington Humane Society was interviewed as part of this audit. The director described the overcrowding challenge faced by the shelter. The overcrowding makes it difficult to provide adequate sanitation and control disease.

Clark County’s Animal Protection and Control Officers, who bring animals to the shelter on a daily basis, confirmed the overcrowding problem. The chart below shows that total shelter intake numbers have increased from 9,440 in 2000 to 12,243 in 2006; a gain of 30 percent.

It should be noted that the increase in shelter intake numbers between 2002 and 2006 coincides with the decrease in the number of licenses issued in the county during that period—as shown in the charts on pages 8 and 9.

ANIMAL SHELTER INTAKES



Funds are being sought and plans are being developed to build a new shelter. The layout and location of the new construction are yet to be determined.

We recommend that the Department of Community Development designate an official to work with the Southwest Washington Humane Society and the City of Vancouver to assist in analyzing the need for and funding of a new shelter.

APPENDIX A

ESTIMATE OF CLARK COUNTY'S TOTAL DOG AND CAT POPULATION

Dog Population Estimate

Estimated Number of Households	149,444
Multiply by National Percentage of Dog-owning Households	<u>x .39</u>
Estimated Number of Dog-owning Households	58,283
Multiply by National Percentage of Dogs per Household	<u>x 1.7</u>
Estimate of Total Number of Dogs in Clark County	99,081

Cat Population Estimate

Estimated Number of Households	149,444
Multiply by National Percentage of Cat-owning Households	<u>x .34</u>
Estimated Number of Cat-owning Households	50,811
Multiply by National Percentage of Cats per Household	<u>x 2.1</u>
Estimate of Total Number of Cats in Clark County	106,703

Source: "Animal Control Management: A Guide for Local Governments," International City/County Management Association, 2001, p.16. Based upon percentages from the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association 2000/2001 APPMA National Pet Owners Survey.

APPENDIX B

CITY OF VANCOUVER'S SHARE OF ACTUAL EXPENSES

	Animal Protection and Control Division						
	Vancouver's Share of Actual Expenses: 2001-2006						
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
EXPENSES:							
Administration	99,098	112,958	116,780	91,228	92,663	132,665	645,392
Licensing (1)	60,339	55,100	50,786	48,475	49,556	43,923	308,180
Enforcement	259,735	291,989	283,558	289,664	318,803	319,226	1,762,976
Hearings/Courts	9,799	10,335	6,169	6,277	11,577	3,524	47,681
Total Expense	428,971	470,383	457,293	435,644	472,599	499,339	2,764,228
DEDUCT REVENUES:							
Fee Revenue	(116,988)	(119,639)	(120,630)	(143,400)	(152,466)	(147,466)	(800,590)
Fine Revenue	(6,725)	(7,725)	(7,140)	(7,367)	(5,493)	(9,751)	(44,202)
Spay/Neuter Donation Offset	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	60,000
Vancouver Share	315,257	353,018	339,523	294,877	324,639	352,121	1,979,437
Vancouver Paid	289,000	289,000	289,000	289,000	289,000	289,000	1,734,000
Underpayments	26,257	64,018	50,524	5,877	35,639	63,122	245,437
	(1) Net of Spay/Neuter Program Expenses						

APPENDIX C



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
ANIMAL PROTECTION AND CONTROL DIVISION

MEMORANDUM

TO: Larry Feltz

FROM: Linda Moorhead

DATE: September 13, 2007

SUBJECT: **Animal Control Audit Recommendations**

Thank you for your time in assembling the performance audit of the Animal Control Division. Your evaluation resulted in several recommendations outlined in the audit that have been implemented, or there is a plan to implement in the future.

1. Licensing – The pet licensing officer performs neighborhood canvassing, but also has duties cashiering that conflict with field time. A policy change has transferred those cashiering responsibilities to the office assistant allowing the pet license officer more time to conduct license canvassing. A schedule change was also made to adjust the work schedule of the pet license officer to include Saturdays when there is an opportunity to find more citizens at home.

Many citizens have expressed a desire to have the ability to purchase pet licenses on-line. The Animal Advisory Board has also discussed the benefits of on-line pet licensing.

Offering the public the ability to purchase licenses on line is anticipated in the future. In order to get this accomplished we may need an external contract with IS to implement in a timely manner.

2. Goals – The recommendation to establish goals to keep licensing on pace with the County population increase can be implemented. A yearly population update can be obtained from the State Office of Financial Management. By determining the number of households increasing in the County each year an increase in licenses can be calculated at the same anticipated rate. We suggest setting the goal by households, instead of population, because our database is set up by address, which more closely corresponds to households than population. It will be timely to implement on January 1, 2008.
3. Fee Changes – Cat licensing is now about 5% of the households in Clark County/City of Vancouver. Animal Control will monitor to see if it changes at the same pace with the increase in households. If not, surveying pet owners will determine if the increase in the license fee is the reason people are not licensing their cats. Results can be reviewed at the end of 2008.

Licensing Agents – Licensing agents has decreased from 20 to 9 in the past couple of years, due mainly to the administrative costs associated with the bookkeeping. The ability to license on line will increase licensing. Again, getting pet licensing on-line in a timely manner may take a contract agreement with IS to expedite the project. With a contract for IS services on-line licensing may be available the first quarter of 2008. We believe that on-line licensing will be very effective in increasing license revenue.

In addition, I will visit veterinarian clinics and pet stores beginning immediately to encourage them to promote licensing in their businesses and promote the sale of pet licenses, either as agents or by distributing license applications.

4. City of Vancouver Contract – By November 1st, the Department Finance Manager will have figured the rate to be charged the city for the provision of animal services in 2008. As required by the contract, the 2008 rate will include an adjustment based upon the actual costs of providing services to the city in 2007. In addition, we will discuss with the city on how to adjust for the actual costs incurred by the county in 2006 for provision of services.
5. Customer Survey – This recommendation can be easily implemented. A self addressed survey card will be prepared and mailed with license renewal notices. Additionally, quarterly we can send a survey to citizens that have been complainants or violators at random. The results will be tabulated and policies reviewed. We will put this on the work program the second quarter of 2008.
6. Review Noise Complaint Procedures – I will evaluate the process currently exercised for responding to barking dogs and compare with neighboring communities. Depending on the results, by the end of the second quarter of 2008, I will identify and implement a new procedure which may put more responsibilities on neighbors.
7. Shelter Capacity – there are several things that need to be considered in analyzing the need for a new shelter.
 - a. An updated projection of shelter needs for the next 10 (ten) years from the Humane Society needs to be made available.
 - b. Look at other sheltering options that could be implemented in addition to a new shelter.
 - c. Since Clark County is the lead Animal Control Agency, the County Administrator will be asked to designate a County representative to enter into discussions with the Humane Society to determine resolution of funding and shelter needs. All other cities should be invited to join in the discussions.

APPENDIX D

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The overall objective of this performance audit was to review Animal Protection and Control Division practices and make recommendations intended to increase program effectiveness. A related objective was to identify and recommend the adoption of specific performance measures.

To gain an understanding of Animal Protection and Control Division practices and responsibilities, we interviewed division staff and the Southwest Washington Humane Society Director, accompanied Animal Control Officers on complaint investigations, and reviewed applicable policies and procedures.

Our review included analysis of Animal Protection and Control Division enforcement and licensing activities completed from 2001 through 2006. We analyzed workload data for that period to identify trends in licensing numbers and service calls. We reviewed the contract the county has with the City of Vancouver to provide animal protection and control services, and analyzed the actual costs associated with providing these services. To identify “best practices” and recommended performance measures, we conducted a literature search that included identification of practices other jurisdictions have found to be effective.

Our audit was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards, with the exception of peer review.