



## City of Tacoma

## City Council Action Memorandum

**TO:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager  
**FROM:** Council Member John Hines and Christina Caan, Policy Analyst  
**COPY:** City Council and City Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** Ordinance to amend Title 17 and Title 5 of the Municipal Code to better address animal overpopulation and add clarifications  
**DATE:** May 28, 2025

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### SUMMARY AND PURPOSE

An ordinance amending Title 17 and Title 5 of the Municipal Code to better address animal overpopulation and add clarifications.

### COUNCIL SPONSORS

Council Member John Hines, Council Member Olgy Diaz, Council Member Sarah Rumbaugh, and Council Member Sandesh Sadalge

**Ordinance Request:** Tacoma is grappling with an increase in its animal population, leading to overburdened animal shelters, strained animal control and police resources, and amplified risks to the environment, public safety, and public health. Animal overpopulation is also detrimental for animal welfare, as it can lead to increased euthanasia rates for healthy and adoptable animals due to the high costs of sheltering and an insufficient number of adopters or foster homes.<sup>1</sup>

- In 2022-2023, Tacoma's 311 system received 758 complaints related to animal issues, such as breeding, animal waste, and animals that have been hit by vehicles. In 2023-2024, the number of complaints doubled. Data for 2024-2025 shows that 311 complaints for animal issues remained on par with the record highs at 1,467 complaints.
- The Humane Society for Tacoma & Pierce County (HSTPC) has resorted to doubling and tripling kennel occupancy, as well as waiving or reducing adoption fees, on multiple occasions due to high intake rates and overcrowding.<sup>2</sup>

Tacoma's Municipal Code (TMC) is currently ill-suited to help curb animal overpopulation, as it lacks robust constraints on issues such as breeding companion animals for profit and owning unaltered animals. The TMC also lacks sufficient fees to help generate even modest amounts of revenue that could be used to support low-cost spay and neuter programs, as well as Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) efforts for community cats. Low-cost spay and neuter programs, along with TNR efforts, are a proven method for managing animal populations, limiting the burden on animal control, police officers, and animal shelters, minimizing the negative impacts of large numbers of unhoused animals on neighborhoods, and curbing the need to euthanize healthy and adoptable companion animals.<sup>3</sup>

To better equip Tacoma to manage its animal population, this ordinance updates the TMC in several ways, such as:

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<sup>1</sup> [Shelter Intake and Surrender | Animal Homelessness | ASPCA](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Making Happy Happen: Over 220 Animals Find Loving Homes During Shelter Capacity Crisis - The Humane Society for Tacoma & Pierce County](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Dog Population & Dog Sheltering Trends in the United States of America - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)



- Adding a definition for “community cats” to enable unowned, free-roaming, and generally feral cats that may be receiving care from a community member or may be stable without intervention in their resident area to remain outdoors and be altered through TNR programs.
- Banning the breeding, advertising, and sale of companion animals for profit without a current business license issued under TMC 6B.20.
- Creating mandatory spay and neuter requirements for animals impounded by Animal Control, absent proof of alteration or risk to the health of the animal.
- Increasing the general animal licensing fees, including unaltered fees, to help fund low-cost spay and neuter programs and TNR efforts, while also establishing a new reduced license fee rate for those who qualify for the Tacoma Public Utility Bill Credit program.

Along with updates aimed at curbing animal overpopulation, we are proposing changes to clarify vague and outdated code language. This includes refining the requirements for keeping pigs, clarifying the penalties for animals inuring humans, and providing more explicit language regarding the adoption of potentially dangerous dogs.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community members in Tacoma have frequently expressed alarm to City Council Members and City staff regarding the number of unhoused animals in their neighborhoods and difficulties finding space or long wait times for assistance at animal shelters. In addition, community members express frustration that overpopulation is a drain on animal control and police resources and have shared concerns about sanitation issues from unhoused animals. City Council Members have also received community input regarding problems arising from a lack of clarity in the code regarding hogs. The HSTPC and other local animal welfare community groups have also shared feedback regarding the challenges they face with animal overpopulation.

## 2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

**Equity and Accessibility:** These proposed updates aim to better enable the City to provide animal welfare services to all our residents by decreasing animal overpopulation. This proposal also aims to allow those who qualify for the Tacoma Public Utilities Bill Credit Assistance Plan to pay a reduced rate for animal license fees, along with seniors and individuals with a permanent disability.<sup>4</sup> This aims to help make pet ownership more affordable for all our low-income residents.

**Civic Engagement:** *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity

Increase the percentage of residents who believe they are able to have a positive impact on the community and express trust in the public institutions in Tacoma.

**Livability:** *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity

Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

## ALTERNATIVES

Alternative	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Take no action.	N/A	Tacoma is likely to face rising costs and community impacts from animal overpopulation and the

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<sup>4</sup> [Tacoma Public Utilities -- Bill Credit Assistance Plan](#)



		overextension of animal shelters, Animal Control, and Police Department resources.
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#### EVALUATIONS AND FOLLOW UP

If approved, the code updates would be published on relevant City websites and shared with relevant departments and animal shelters. Tax and License also intends to reach out to additional local veterinarians to promote partnerships for animal licensing to expand the number of pets that are licensed in Tacoma. The new license fees will have a delayed effectiveness until September 1, 2025, giving the community time get their pet licensed for the first year at the current lower rate. The City Manager should also provide an annual update to the City Council in the City Manager's Weekly Report about the number of all animal licenses issued by the City, with a particular focus on trends in new licenses and unaltered animal licenses. The City Manager should also include the annual number of animals that are spayed or neutered when impounded for the first time.

#### SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION

Sponsors recommend approving this ordinance.

#### FISCAL IMPACT

Several of the suggested updates to the code outlined in Exhibit A include increases to our license fees and civil penalties, potentially generating modest increased revenue amounts for the General Fund, especially if paired with efforts to increase animal licensing outreach with local veterinarians. Increasing unaltered animal licensing fees may result in some decrease in unaltered licensing, although Tax and License estimates that overall revenue from increased fees would still increase by more than \$130,000.

#### REVENUES:

FUND NUMBER & FUND NAME	COST OBJECT (CC/WBS/ORDER)	COST ELEMENT	TOTAL AMOUNT
0010 General Fund	106540	4322400	(\$130,000)
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>(\$130,000)</b>

**What Funding is being used to support the expense?**

N/A

**Are the expenditures and revenues planned and budgeted in this biennium's current budget?**

N/A

**Are there financial costs or other impacts of not implementing the legislation?**

NO

**Will the legislation have an ongoing/recurring fiscal impact?**

NO

**Will the legislation change the City's FTE/personnel counts?**

NO



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**Attachment:** Exhibit A – Proposed Code Updates