



ORDINANCE NO. 28923

1 BY REQUEST OF COUNCIL MEMBERS DIAZ, HINES, AND RUMBAUGH

2 AN ORDINANCE amending Title 17 of the Municipal Code, relating to Animal
3 Control, by adding a new section 17.02.155, entitled “Cat Declawing”, to
4 establish a ban on performing a procedure that results in the partial or
5 complete declawing of a cat except when conducted by a licensed
6 veterinarian for a therapeutic purpose, effective March 31, 2024.

7 WHEREAS feline onychectomy, more commonly referred to as cat
8 declawing, is a serious medical procedure and major surgery where a cat’s third
9 phalanges (toe bones) and claws are surgically removed; a cat’s claws grow from
10 the bone, making the surgery to remove the claw similar to amputating a human
11 finger at the last knuckle, and

12 WHEREAS declawing cats is occasionally medically necessary, such as in
13 cases where the cat has a cancerous tumor or has injured its paw so severely that
14 amputation is needed, however, cat owners in the City can currently elect to declaw
15 a cat without a therapeutic reason to prevent the animal from scratching people,
16 other animals, or household items, such as furniture, for the owner’s convenience,
17 and

18 WHEREAS declawing for a non-therapeutic purpose is widely considered by
19 prominent animal protection organizations and veterinary associations to be painful
20 and traumatic for the cat, and the practice is seen as a form of animal cruelty and
21 unnecessary mutilation, and

22 WHEREAS declawing can result in a range of medical problems including
23 paw pain, back pain, infection, tissue necrosis (tissue death), and lameness, and
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WHEREAS additionally, improperly removed claws can regrow, causing nerve damage and bone spurs, and removing a cat’s claws also changes the way a cat’s foot meets the ground and can cause additional pain when the animal walks, and

WHEREAS the American Association of Feline Practitioners strongly opposes declawing as an elective procedure, noting there are “inherent risks and complications with declawing that increase with age such as acute pain, infection, nerve trauma, as well as long term complications like lameness, behavioral problems, and chronic neuropathic pain,”¹ and the American Animal Hospital Association, the Humane Society for the United States, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the Humane Society for Tacoma & Pierce County (“Humane Society”) all oppose non-therapeutic declawing,²³ and

WHEREAS declawing cats can negatively impact a cat’s personality and emotional well-being, leading many declawed cats to be abandoned by their owners, seen as unadoptable, or euthanized, and

WHEREAS scratching is a part of a cat’s behavior and helps to remove dead husks from their nails, add their scent to their surroundings, and stretch, and when cats can no longer engage in this natural behavior, many become depressed and grow more aggressive, including increased biting, and if left outside, a declawed cat is largely defenseless against predators, and

¹ <https://catvets.com/guidelines/position-statements/declawing>
² <https://www.aaha.org/about-aaha/aaha-position-statements/declawing/>
³ <https://www.aspcas.org/about-us/aspcas-policy-and-position-statements/position-statement-declawing-cats>



1 WHEREAS the Humane Society has noted that they often experience
2 owners surrendering their declawed cats to the shelter because of the behavioral
3 changes that take place after declawing, and
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5 WHEREAS innovative products are available that can be used as effective,
6 safe, affordable, and humane alternatives, including for ill and immune-
7 compromised cat owners, such as nail trimmers, scratching posts, cat nail covers,
8 and specialized furniture covers/protectors; trainers and behaviorists can also help
9 cat owners with behavior modification, if needed, and
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11 WHEREAS the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) does
12 not support declawing and notes that ill and immune-compromised individuals can
13 live safely with their companion cats by avoiding rough play and trimming cats’
14 nails frequently to prevent scratches. Guidelines about living with HIV, jointly
15 produced by the CDC, the National Institutes of Health, and the HIV Medicine
16 Association of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, state “declawing is not
17 advised,”⁴
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19 WHEREAS declawing bans first emerged in the United States twenty years
20 ago and since then more than a dozen cities across the nation and two states have
21 adopted bans, with more currently considering legislation, and more than 40
22 countries worldwide have banned declawing, along with 10 provinces in Canada; in
23 Washington, Tacoma as an opportunity to be the first in the state and lead on this
24 issue; Now, Therefore,
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⁴ <https://pawproject.org/about-declawing/position-statement-on-declawing/>



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BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF TACOMA:

Section 1. That the City Council hereby adopts the Recitals of this Ordinance as its formal legislative findings.

Section 2. That Title 17 of the Tacoma Municipal Code is hereby amended by adding a new Chapter 17.02.155, entitled “Cat Declawing,” as set forth in the attached Exhibit “A,” and establishing a ban on performing a procedure that results in the partial or complete declawing of a cat except when conducted by a licensed veterinarian for a therapeutic purpose, to be effective March 31, 2024.

Section 3. That the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, is authorized to make necessary corrections to this ordinance, including, but not limited to, the correction of scrivener’s/clerical errors, references, ordinance numbering, section/subsection numbers, and any references thereto.

Passed _____

Mayor

Attest:

City Clerk

Approved as to form:

Deputy City Attorney



EXHIBIT "A"

Chapter 17.02
ANIMAL CONTROL

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Sections:

- 17.02.010 Animals at large on public grounds.
- 17.02.020 Animals at large on private property.
- 17.02.030 Stray dog, cat, or animal.
- 17.02.040 Confinement of female dogs and cats in heat.
- 17.02.041 Roosters prohibited.
- 17.02.050 Dogs off premises to be on leash.
- 17.02.060 Dogs chasing vehicles on public roads.
- 17.02.070 Confinement of an animal in a motor vehicle.
- 17.02.071 Removal of animals for feeding – Examination – Notice – Euthanasia – Adoption by reference.
- 17.02.080 Dogs jumping and/or threatening pedestrians.
- 17.02.090 Animals injuring humans, domestic animals, or livestock – gross misdemeanor.
- 17.02.091 Rabies notification.
- 17.02.100 Directing dog to harass or attack – gross misdemeanor.
- 17.02.110 Directing dog to harass or attack public officer – gross misdemeanor – minimum mandatory.
- 17.02.120 Use of dog in illegal activity prohibited – gross misdemeanor.
- 17.02.130 Animals injuring private or public property – infraction or misdemeanor.
- 17.02.132 Removal of animal waste.
- 17.02.140 Public disturbance noise and public nuisance noise made by an animal.
- 17.02.150 Sale or transfer of animals in public places prohibited.
- [17.02.155 Cat Declawing.](#)
- 17.02.160 Violations – Civil infraction.

* * *

[17.02.155 Cat Declawing.](#)

[A. Except as provided in subsection B. of this section, it shall be unlawful for any person to perform a procedure that results in the partial or complete declawing \(partial digital amputation\) of a cat in the City of Tacoma.](#)

[B. Notwithstanding the restrictions set forth in subsection A. of this section, a person may perform a procedure to declaw a cat only if:](#)

- [1. The person performing the procedure is a licensed veterinarian; and](#)
- [2. The procedure has a therapeutic purpose.](#)

[C. As used in this section:](#)

- [1. "Declaw" means to surgically remove or alter the claw or claws of a cat by a surgical procedure such as onychectomy or tendonectomy, in order to prevent the normal functioning of a cat's paws or toes. Tendonectomy is a surgical procedure where tendons to the cat's toes are severed in order to prevent their normal function. Declawing does not include the trimming of a nonviable claw husk or placing nonpermanent nail caps.](#)
- [2. "Therapeutic purpose" means a medically necessary procedure to address an existing or recurring infection, disease, injury, or abnormal condition in the claws, nail bed, or toe bone, that jeopardizes the cat's health. "Therapeutic purpose" does not include a procedure performed for a cosmetic or aesthetic purpose or to make the cat more convenient to keep or handle.](#)



~~A person found to be in violation of this section shall be subject to a civil fine of up to \$250, not including any statutory assessments.~~

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