



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Council Member John Hines and Christina Caan, Policy Analyst
COPY: Government Performance and Finance Committee Members; Andy Cherullo, Committee Executive Liaison; D’Angelo Baker, Committee Staff
PRESENTER: Council Member John Hines
SUBJECT: Proposed Animal Code Updates
DATE: January 21, 2025

PRESENTATION TYPE: Request for Ordinance

SUMMARY: Animal shelter and Animal Control resources are frequently overburdened managing the high volume of unhoused animals in our city, and animal overpopulation carries risks for our environment, public safety, and public health. In addition, animal suffering increases when overpopulation occurs, particularly as euthanasia rates of healthy and adoptable potential pets can grow and animal welfare resources to help sick, vulnerable, or injured animals are spread thin.

This memo proposes a variety of updates to Title 17 of the Municipal Code to help address animal overpopulation and minimize unnecessary burdens on the City’s Animal Control officers. The updates are highlighted in Exhibit A and include items such as:

- Adding a definition for “community cats” to enable unowned, free-roaming 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 engaged through Trap-Neuter-Return programs.
- Banning breeding, advertising, and sale of companion animals for profit.
- Creating mandatory spay/neuter requirements for animals impounded by Animal Control, absent proof of alteration or risk to the health of the animal.
- Increasing the unaltered animal licensing fee to help fund spay and neuter programs.
- Clarifying legal status of indoor and outdoor pigs.
- Other miscellaneous changes updating boarding charges, fees, and penalties.

BACKGROUND: Animal overpopulation impacts communities nationwide and often results in many healthy and adoptable animals being euthanized due to the high costs of sheltering animals and insufficient numbers of adopters or foster homes.¹ In addition, animal overpopulation and the lack of wellness care for unhoused animals can have negative impacts on our environment, landscape, and public health. Sanitation issues that arise with unhoused animals can be particularly difficult and problematic for the community. Unhoused cats and dogs can also pose a risk to public safety while scavenging for food or due to untreated illness and disease.

- 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.² While the HSTPC has launched a capital campaign to raise money for a larger facility that can house more animals, it will likely take several years before this new facility is open and accepting animals.

¹ [Shelter Intake and Surrender | Animal Homelessness | ASPCA](#)

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



Community members in Tacoma have expressed alarm regarding the number of unhoused animals in their neighborhoods and difficulties finding space at shelters for such animals. In addition, community members express frustration that overpopulation is a drain on Animal Control resources and concerns about sanitation issues. In 2022-2023, Tacoma's 311 system received 758 cases related to animal issues, including complaints of breeding, animal waste, and animals that have been hit by vehicles. In 2023-2024, the number of complaints doubled. Current data suggests that 311 complaints for animal issues in 2024-2025 is likely to remain on par with last year's record highs.

ISSUE: Spay and neuter programs are a proven method for managing animal populations, limiting the burden on Animal Control 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 potential pets.³ However, Tacoma's Municipal Code is currently ill-suited to help address animal overpopulation, as it lacks robust constraints on issues such as breeding companion animals for profit and owning unaltered animals. The Municipal Code also lacks sufficient fees to help generate even modest amounts of revenue that could be used to support affordable spay and neuter programs, as well as Trap-Neuter-Return efforts.

To better equip Tacoma to manage its animal population, this memo proposes a variety of updates to Title 17 of the Municipal Code, such as:

- Adding a definition for “community cats” to enable unowned, free-roaming 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 engaged through Trap-Neuter-Return programs.
- Banning breeding, advertising, and sale of companion animals for profit.
- Creating mandatory spay/neuter requirements for animals impounded by Animal Control, absent proof of alteration or risk to the health of the animal.
- Increasing the unaltered animal licensing fee to help fund spay and neuter programs.

Along with updates aimed at preventing additional animal overpopulation, Tacoma's Municipal Code needs updates that help Animal Control and Police Officers act when dealing with currently unregulated animals, particularly pigs. These situations can become a burden on law enforcement because they lack clear legal guidance, creating frustration and confusion for our community members. This memo therefore includes recommended code changes to clarify our laws regarding indoor and outdoor pigs. In addition, this memo includes other miscellaneous changes updating boarding charges, fees, and penalties.

ALTERNATIVES: Tacoma could make no changes to the current the animal control code. Choosing not to adopt any changes to the code would likely result in a further overextension of animal shelters and Animal Control resources. The longer that animal overpopulation is left unabated, the more costly this problem will become to address. For example, just one intact unhoused female cat can have dozens—if not hundreds—of kittens during its lifetime, leading to a staggering increase in the cat population and the care needed to manage these animals. In addition, the need for expansive euthanasia is likely to grow with additional cat and dog population surges.

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



FISCAL IMPACT: Several of the suggested updates to the code outlined in Exhibit A would increase boarding charges, license fees, and civil penalties, potentially generating modest increased revenue amounts for the General Fund.

RECOMMENDATION:

I recommend that the Government Performance and Finance Committee move these updates to the Municipal Code forward to the full Council for consideration. I also recommend that additional review in partnership with the Pierce County Council be undertaken regarding Chapter 17.04 on Dangerous Dogs and Potentially Dangerous Dogs.

Attachement:

- **Exhibit A: Proposed Code Updates**



EXHIBIT A: Proposed Code Updates

Chapter 17.01

Animal Control – General Provisions

17.01.010 Definitions.

As used in this title, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

XX. “Community cat” refers to an unowned, free-roaming cat that may be receiving care from a community member or may be stable without intervention in its resident area. These cats are generally feral and may or may not be reproductively sterilized. Community cats are not defined as stray cats, and they do not have a legal owner and are not routinely microchipped.

17.01.080 Redemption of dogs.

Unless otherwise specifically provided in this title, the owner of any dog impounded under this title may redeem said dog within 48 hours from time of impounding by paying the appropriate redemption fee to the animal shelter, if the animal is in the animal shelter; otherwise, to the City. For the first impound within a one-year period, the redemption fee is ~~\$5025~~ and the dog will be required to be microchipped; for the second impound within a one-year period, the redemption fee is ~~\$7550~~; for the third and subsequent impounds within a one-year period, the redemption fee is ~~\$10075~~. In addition to the redemption fee, the redeemer shall pay as a boarding charge for the caring and keeping of such dog as determined by the animal shelter ~~the sum of \$6 per day for each day~~, including the first and last days that the dog is retained by the animal shelter and any licensing fees and penalties related to licensing. All fees and charges must be paid prior to redeeming the dog at the discretion of the animal shelter. A dog may not be redeemed unless it is properly licensed. If an impounded dog is not redeemed by the owner within ~~7248~~ hours, then any person may purchase it within the next ~~7248~~ hours by complying with the animal shelter’s purchase provisions. ~~In case such dog is not redeemed within 96 hours of impoundment, it may be humanely euthanized or otherwise disposed of within the discretion of the animal shelter.~~

(Ord. 28271 Ex. A; passed Dec. 16, 2014; Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007; Ord. 27558 § 3; passed Dec. 5, 2006; Ord. 27447 § 5; passed Dec. 13, 2005; Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

17.01.090 Redemption of livestock.

The owner of livestock impounded under this title may redeem said livestock within 48 hours from time of impounding by paying a redemption fee of ~~\$7535~~ per animal for small livestock (i.e., goats, sheep, swine, ostriches, rhea, emu, etc.) and a redemption fee of ~~\$15075~~ per animal for large livestock (i.e., cattle, horses, mules, llamas, etc.) to the animal shelter, if the animal is in the animal shelter; otherwise, to the City. In addition, the cost of a private livestock hauler, if one is used, is to be paid at the time of redemption. In addition to the redemption fee, the redeemer shall pay as a boarding charge for the caring and keeping of such animal the sum of \$6 as determined by the animal shelter for each day, including the first and last days that the animal is cared for at the animal shelter. The livestock may be cared for by a private boarding facility, in which case that facility’s boarding fees shall be paid to the City at the time of redemption.



(Ord. 28271 Ex. A; passed Dec. 16, 2014: Ord. 27447 § 6; passed Dec. 13, 2005: Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

17.01.100 Redemption of animals other than dogs and livestock.

The owner of any animal other than a dog or livestock impounded under the provisions of this title may redeem it within 48 hours from the time of impounding by paying a redemption fee of ~~\$2515~~ to the animal shelter, if the animal is in the animal shelter; otherwise, to the City. In addition to the redemption fee, the redeemer shall pay as a boarding charge for the caring and keeping of such animal ~~the sum of \$4 per day for each day, including the first and last days that the animal is retained by the animal shelter as designated by the animal shelter. Microchips are mandatory upon impounding cats (not to include community cats by definition) at an animal shelter and the cost of the microchip shall be included in the fees designated by the animal shelter.~~ All fees and charges must be paid prior to redeeming a cat ~~at the discretion of the animal shelter.~~ A cat may not be redeemed unless it is properly licensed ~~and community cats should not be returned until spayed or neutered. If such animal is not redeemed by the owner within 48 hours, it may be humanely euthanized or otherwise disposed of at the discretion of the animal shelter; provided, however, at the discretion of the animal shelter, any animal so impounded less than two months of age may be humanely euthanized or otherwise disposed of at any time after impounding.~~

(Ord. 28271 Ex. A; passed Dec. 16, 2014: Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007: Ord. 27447 § 7; passed Dec. 13, 2005: Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

17.01.110 Mandatory spay/neuter for impounded dogs and cats – exception.

A. No unaltered dog or cat that is impounded ~~more than once in any 12-month period~~ may be redeemed by any person until the animal is spayed or neutered. The alteration shall be accomplished by the animal shelter or by any duly licensed veterinarian in Pierce County authorized by the animal shelter. In all cases, the veterinarian fees shall be paid at the time of redemption by the animal's owner.

B. Exceptions. The alteration shall not be required upon a showing of proof of alteration from a licensed veterinarian. The alteration shall not be required if the owner or other person redeeming the animal provides a written statement from a licensed veterinarian stating that the spay or neuter procedure would be harmful to the animal.

(Ord. 28271 Ex. A; passed Dec. 16, 2014: Ord. 27854 Ex. A; passed Dec. 1, 2009: Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007: Ord. 27447 § 8; passed Dec. 13, 2005: Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

17.01.130 Conditions of release.

The animal control authority may refuse to release to its owner any animal that has been impounded more than once in a 12-month period unless the owner demonstrates that he or she has taken steps to reasonably ensure that the violation will not occur again ~~and the animal has been spayed or neutered.~~ The animal shelter or the animal control authority may impose reasonable conditions that must be satisfied by the owner before release of the animal, including conditions assuring that the animal will be confined. Failure to comply with the conditions of release is a violation.

Exceptions. The alteration shall not be required upon a showing of proof of alteration from a licensed veterinarian. The alteration shall not be required if the owner or other person redeeming the animal provides



a written statement from a licensed veterinarian stating that the spay or neuter procedure would be harmful to the animal.

(Ord. 28271 Ex. A; passed Dec. 16, 2014; Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007; Ord. 27447 § 9; passed Dec. 13, 2005; Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

17.01.150 Duties upon injury or death to an animal – misdemeanor.

The operator of a vehicle involved in an accident resulting in injury or death to a cat, dog, or livestock shall immediately stop the vehicle at or as near to the scene of the accident as possible and return thereto, and shall give to the owner or other competent person having custody of the animal the name and address of the operator of the vehicle and the registration number of the vehicle involved in the accident. If the owner or other competent person is not the person at the scene of the accident, the operator shall take reasonable steps to locate the owner or custodian of the animal and shall supply the information hereinabove required. If the animal is injured to the extent that it requires immediate medical attention and there is no owner or custodian present to look after it, the operator of said vehicle shall immediately report the situation to the Tacoma Police Department. A person who violates this shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and face a \$250 fine.

(Ord. 27447 § 11; passed Dec. 13, 2005; Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

Chapter 17.02

ANIMAL CONTROL

17.02.030 Stray dog, cat, or animal.

Any stray dog, cat, or animal running at large within the City may be seized and impounded. For the purposes of this section, “stray dog,” “stray cat,” and “stray animal” shall mean and include any dog, cat, or animal loitering in a neighborhood or any public place without an apparent owner or home. Community cats located outside who have a caretaker are not considered “stray.”

(Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007; Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

XXXX Indoor Pigs

- No more than two (2) pigs may be kept indoors per property and each pig must be less than 200 pounds.
- Pigs must be licensed, spayed/neutered, and microchipped by owner.
- Pigs may not be used for breeding or consumption.
- Pigs must be on leash when off property.

[See TMC 5.23.020 for conditions for keeping pigs outdoors. The category of “Pigs” will also be added to TMC 5.23.010]



17.02.090 Animals injuring humans, ~~domestic animals, or livestock~~ – gross misdemeanor.

The owner or other person having control or custody of any animal is guilty of a gross misdemeanor if he or she has possession, custody, or control of an animal that, because of the owner's negligence, causes ~~serious or grave~~ injury to a human, ~~domestic animal, or livestock~~ which is acting in a lawful manner. Any such animal may be seized and impounded.

Any penalties imposed under this section are in addition to any penalties or civil remedies imposed in relation to a declaration that a dog is dangerous or potentially dangerous.

(Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007; Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

17.02.090 Animals injuring domestic animals or livestock – misdemeanor.

The owner or other person having control or custody of any animal is guilty of a misdemeanor if he or she has possession, custody, or control of an animal that, because of the owner's negligence, causes serious or grave injury to a domestic animal or livestock which is acting in a lawful manner. Any such animal may be seized and impounded.

Any penalties imposed under this section are in addition to any penalties or civil remedies imposed in relation to a declaration that a dog is dangerous or potentially dangerous.

17.02.110 Directing dog to harass or attack public officer – gross misdemeanor – minimum mandatory.

It shall be unlawful for any person having control or custody of any dog to allow, direct, encourage, cause, or otherwise aid or assist any dog to threaten, charge, intimidate, bite, harass, menace, or attack any animal control or other public officer engaged in the conduct of his or her duties. Any such animal may be seized and impounded. Any violation of this section is a gross misdemeanor, and shall carry a minimum mandatory sentence of five days in jail and a fine of no less than \$1000.

“Public officer” means any general authority, limited authority, or specially commissioned Washington peace officer or federal peace officer, as those terms are defined in RCW 10.93.020, and other public officers who are responsible for enforcement of fire, building, zoning, and life and safety codes.

(Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007; Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

Chapter 17.04

DANGEROUS DOGS AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS DOGS

17.04.040 Permits and fees.

A. Within ten days following a declaration of potentially dangerous dog, and the exhaustion of any appeal therefrom, the owner of a potentially dangerous dog shall obtain a permit for such dog from the Finance Department of the City and shall be required to pay a fee for such permit in the amount of ~~\$250~~\$300, have the dog implanted with a microchip, and provide the microchip number to the Finance Department of the City.



B. Any potentially dangerous dog is also subject to any additional conditions of confinement set forth in RCW 16.08, as now exists or as may be amended hereafter, including, but not limited to, posting of warning signs and maintenance of liability insurance coverage.

C. The owner of a potentially dangerous dog shall pay an annual renewal fee for such permit in the amount of ~~\$1050~~ for two years. After two years, the permit requirement ends.

17.04.070 Confiscation and destruction of potentially dangerous dog.

Any potentially dangerous dog confiscated pursuant to this chapter shall be returned to the owner upon the owner's compliance with this chapter. ~~However, if the owner does not comply with the provisions of this chapter within 72 hours following confiscation of said dog, said dog shall be euthanized in an expeditious and humane manner, except as otherwise specifically provided in this chapter.~~ The owner is subject to boarding charges as set forth in Section 17.01.080, in addition to all penalties set forth in this chapter. If the owner does not comply or seek to regain the potentially dangerous dog from confiscation, the animal shelter is required to alert potential adopters to the dog's status as potentially dangerous.

This section also applies to any dog declared dangerous under any prior ordinance and prior to the effective date of this ordinance.

(Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007; Ord. 27447 § 15; passed Dec. 13, 2005; Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)

Chapter 17.05

DOG AND CAT LICENSES

17.05.010 License required

D. ~~After August 1, 2002, absent proof of prior ownership, the~~ The following are the maximum number of dogs and cats which may be licensed by a resident of the City or kept at a street address or physical location in the City:

1. ~~4~~ Six dogs or six cats or any combination of dogs and cats totaling six animals.
2. After April 1, 2025, absent proof of prior ownership, only one of the total maximum number of dogs and cats may be licensed as unaltered.
3. It is unlawful for any person found to house more than the maximum number of dogs and cats.

Violation of this section is a misdemeanor.

E. The maximum limits on dogs and cats at a street address or physical location does not apply to the facilities of the Humane Society or other animal shelter, veterinary hospitals, or kennel in compliance with this title.

(Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007; Ord. 27558 § 14; passed Dec. 5, 2006; Ord. 26949 § 6; passed Jul. 16, 2002)



~~17.05.012 – Puppies and kittens.~~

~~A. It is a violation to sell or give away puppies unless the puppies were born to a dog licensed as an unaltered animal.~~

~~B. It is a violation to sell or give away kittens unless the kittens were born to a cat licensed as an unaltered animal.~~

~~C. If the owner provides proof to the court that the dog or cat that bore the puppies or kittens was subsequently spayed and is currently licensed, the court shall consider this a mitigating factor in determining the whether to impose a penalty or the amount of any penalty that is imposed.~~

~~D. Any advertisement, sign, placard, or notice that puppies or kittens are available for sale or may be obtained free of charge must include the license tag number of the mother of the puppies or kittens. Failure to include the license tag information is a violation.~~

~~E. This section does not apply to the Humane Society or an animal shelter as defined in this title.~~

~~(Ord. 27672 Ex. A; passed Dec. 11, 2007)~~

XXXXX. Banning breeding, advertising, and sale of companion animals for profit

The Deliberate Breeding of Companion Animals for Profit is Prohibited. It shall be unlawful for any person to deliberately breed any companion animal, namely any dog, cat, or rabbit, for the purposes of profit. Violation of this subsection by any person or corporation shall be a civil violation punishable by a fine of not more than one thousand dollars (\$1000) per litter deliberately bred. Anyone found guilty of this provision may cure this fine by providing proof that all of the animals bred and their offspring have been spayed or neutered to the animal control officer, via inspection of the animals in question and veterinary records, and that all breeding activity on the property has ceased.

Advertisement and Sale of Companion Animals Prohibited. It shall be unlawful for any person to sell or offer for sale any companion animal, namely any dog, cat, or rabbit. A retail pet store may provide space and appropriate care for animals owned by a publicly operated animal control agency or nonprofit animal welfare organization for the purpose of adopting spayed or neutered dogs, cats or rabbits to the public. Violation of this subsection by any person or corporation shall be a civil violation, punishable by a fine of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250) per animal per day.

Exception for Accidental Litters. The prohibition on the deliberate breeding of companion animals for profit in 5.05.134(a) shall not apply to litters of companion animals which were bred due to accident, provided that the person responsible for the animals provides proof to the animal control officer that the animals bred have been spayed or neutered.

Exception for Rehoming Fees: The prohibition on the advertisement and sale of companion animals in 5.05.134(b) shall not apply to rehoming fees required when adopting any companion animal for the purposes of ensuring that the animal is adopted into a safe environment.



17.05.040 Annual license fees.

The annual license fees for the ownership, keeping, or having control of dogs or cats in the City shall be as follows:

A. Adult Dogs and Cats:

Cat Altered	\$3020
Cat Unaltered	\$17565
Dog Altered	\$4030
Dog Unaltered	\$17565

B. Reduced rates for senior citizens, 65 years of age or older, ~~and~~ individuals with a permanent disability, and individuals who qualify for the Tacoma Public Utility bill assistance program:

Cat Altered	\$5
Cat Unaltered	\$10035
Dog Altered	\$10
Dog Unaltered	\$10035

C. License for Indoor Pig: \$40.00

G. In addition to the infraction penalty set forth in Section 17.05.070, any person who fails to obtain a license 30 days after the license expiration date but before 60 days of the expiration date shall pay a penalty of ~~\$1540~~ per license. Any person who fails to obtain a license after 60 days of the license expiration shall pay a penalty of ~~\$2520~~ per license.

I. One replacement tag per license term will be given per animal at no fee, and each additional replacement tag shall be ~~\$105.00~~ each.