Executive Policy Committee
July 10, 2013

Submitted by James Webb, Citizens Helping to End the Cat Crisis

We believe that this issue of Cat Licensing is a distraction from what should be our real focus in solving this critical cat over-population crisis in our city.

High volume, low-cost spay and neuter clinics, which are open to the public regardless of income level, are what has worked successfully in the United States to reduce cat and dog over-population levels.
With some minor variations, that is typically all these clinics do.

In areas where these clinics have been established, the veterinary associations support them. Spaying and neutering is a one-time cost in a life of an animal, and owners without veterinarians (generally about 80%) are encouraged by clinic staff to have their animal seen by a "vet" on a regular basis. Many veterinarians offer these pet owners a free post-op examination, thereby establishing the potential for a new client with whom they would otherwise not have contact with.
Also, veterinarians appreciate that with the cat and dog over-population problem and all of its ramifications under control, it leaves them free to practice veterinary medicine.Therefore these clinics are a win-win situation for all parties involved. The non-profit corporation which pioneered these facilities is called Humane Alliance.

Since 2006, Humane Alliance has been running a national training and mentoring program that has led to the establishment of 115 such clinics in 30 states and now in Canada as well. Each vet they train does at least 35 sterilizations a day; a male cat in 5 minutes or less and a female dog in 20 minutes or less. That's a third to a quarter of the time it takes a vet using traditional methods. And because the fee is substantially less; from $15 for a male cat to $65 for a female dog, thousands of pet owners finally take the step. Also, these clinics partner with rescue organizations and do spay and neuter procedures on feral cats for free.

The Ontario SPCA opened its first high volume low-cost spay and neuter clinic in New Market, Ontario in 2009. This facility, which is based on the Humane Alliance model, has been overwhelmed in interest and is booking months in advance for spay and neuter surgeries.

There are now also Humane Alliance-mentored clinics in Barrie and St Catherines, as well as in Toronto. Through our contact with the Humane Alliance organization, we have now learned that one of these clinics will be opening within the next six months in London, Ontario.
There are now also groups in Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Lindsay, Port Colborne, Peterborough and Ottawa working to set up such services in their own areas. Also, the

Humane Alliance organization has reported to us that they are having "good conversations" with a group in Calgary.

These clinics are set up to eventually become self-funding. Therefore, other than initial costs, they do not require the use of taxpayer dollars (or for that matter, Cat Licensing revenue).

High volume, low-cost spay and neuter clinics are a common sense solution which goes right to the heart of the problem. A recent report on the cat overpopulation crisis in Canada published by The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies cites "the rising cost of veterinary services" as a "barrier to owners accessing the surgery".

I, myself, recently had an opportunity to see firsthand what the cost of spaying a female kitten actually is in Winnipeg. A friend of mine recently rescued a homeless stray kitten and when the kitten was six months old, it was time to shop for a veterinarian in order to get a spay procedure done. My friend and I were both surprised to find that the total cost was going to be in the neighbourhood of $500. My friend had contacted six veterinary clinics and the cost of the spay procedure with all of them was around the $200 mark. However, that was not the total cost. They all also required the same two preliminary vaccinations which were about $100 each, to be performed during two separate office visits. Therefore, adding office visit fees and taxes, the whole amount was about $500, which is obviously prohibitive for most members of the general public, regardless of their income level.

My friend also contacted the Winnipeg Humane Society regarding their low-cost spay and neuter program and was told that she didn't qualify because the income level cut-off was $28,000, which is very low and which excludes the majority of pet owners who need the procedure done.

We are certainly not opposed to veterinarians making money, but when the cost of this one important surgical procedure, this once-in-a-pet's-lifetime procedure, rises to a level where pet owners who might otherwise be responsible are unable or unwilling to purchase the service, then we are faced with a pet over-population situation such as the one that exists today in our city of Winnipeg.

A high volume, low cost clinic would provide affordable spay and neuter services which would be open to all members of the public, regardless of income level. Research has shown this to be a successful solution to a pet over-population problem.

The city of Winnipeg spends an enormous amount yearly on animal control and pound services, and the number of homeless and unwanted cats and dogs is increasing, not decreasing. The status quo is ineffective and unacceptable.

Taxpayers would prefer to see their hard-earned dollars used in a pro-active manner, as

well as in a way that will actually be of benefit, rather than simply another so-called "tax grab" with no concrete plan for spay and neutering.

The establishment of a high volume, low-cost spay and neuter clinic in Winnipeg would show the citizens that the city is serious about reducing the cat and dog over-population problem, and would also show the rest of the world that Winnipeg is as progressive as any other modern city.

Therefore, we urge the committee members to not approve the implementation of the proposed Cat Licensing program.

We would like to propose that the city move towards the establishment of a high volume, low-cost clinic which will be based on a business and operational model developed by Humane Alliance.

We would encourage the Counsillors and the Mayor, as well as members of the public, to please visit the Humane Alliance website at
"humane alliance.org" and watch their short video there which explains exactly what they do and how they do it.

They are a non-profit organization. They do what they do to make a difference; they don't do it for the money. They do it for the animals.

We can bring the Humane Alliance here to Winnipeg. They can show us how to set up a clinic that will provide a much needed service here.

This spay and neuter clinic would serve dog owners as well. It could also serve areas surrounding Winnipeg, and, through the use of a transport system, could also serve the rest of the province.

We believe that if a proper solution is not adopted by council, in order to address and solve this critical and growing cat over-population crisis, then this will continue to be an issue into and through the upcoming 2014 civic election.

We would like to point out that the public's attitudes towards animal welfare issues are changing at a rapid pace. The practice of euthanizing healthy animals as a means of over-population control is no longer acceptable; especially among younger people who generally always tend to question the status quo.

Indeed, these high volume, low cost clinics, such as we have discussed, are part of a growing greater movement. The by-laws need to reflect these changing attitudes.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue, and thank you for your consideration."