



January 12, 2022
City of La Crosse Common Council
400 La Crosse St
La Crosse WI 54601

RE: 21-1718, An Ordinance to amend Section 6 of the Code of Ordinance of the City of La Crosse regarding cats

Dear President Janssen and Members of the Common Council,

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation's largest animal protection organization, understands that managing community cats is a complex issue that concerns many local leaders and agencies mandated to serve and protect the public. Cat management should be designed to protect public safety, protect cats, and provide animal control agencies with effective, proactive, humane tools to manage cat populations. We support and promote strategic, non-lethal management of community cats who already exist outdoors through sterilization and vaccination efforts, such as trap-neuter-return (TNR). We applaud Coulee Region Humane Society for vocalizing their support of this local legislation and appreciate the invaluable services they provide to the La Crosse area .

Community cat programs are now the standard for animal shelters across the country, combining community-based trap-neuter return with shelter policies allowing healthy stray cats to be sterilized and vaccinated then returned to their outdoor home and efforts to rehome young kittens. Many agencies partner with other organizations in the community to ensure services to community cats and the people who care for them. In fact, numerous municipalities across Wisconsin have adopted TNR.

After a century of removing cats from the outdoors without having an impact on their numbers, shelter professionals have found trap-neuter-return based programs are far more effective in both saving lives within the shelter and decreasing the overall population of free-roaming cats in our communities. A number of studies have been published to support this:

- A community cat program at the University of Central Florida in the 1990s reduced cat population by 85% over the course of 10 years.
- A population of over 300 cats in Newburyport, MA was eliminated through a concerted TNR effort paired with rehoming of adoptable kittens. The final cat died at the age of 16.
- A 67% decrease in cat population was found in a Chicago neighborhood targeted for TNR, over the course of 8 years.
- A study of TNR in rural North Carolina compared the impact of TNR with control groups. There was a 36% mean decrease where TNR was employed (range 30-89%) versus a 47% mean *increase* of control groups – where the actual increases across the three sites were 31%, 127%, 283%.

Sadly, kittens born to the cats currently living outdoors, if not sterilized, will continue to fill the shelter at taxpayer expense or they will perish – only 25% of kittens born outdoors survive past 6 months of age. These deaths are preventable with TNR.



A study of data from before and after community cat programs were implemented six shelters across the country found a 40% decline in kitten intake with a 32% decline in overall cat intake and a corresponding 87% decline in kittens euthanized and a 83% decline in overall feline euthanasia.

TNR is less expensive than trapping and impounding cats, caring for them during their stray hold, and providing an outcome – be that adoption, transfer, or euthanasia. Fewer cats needing government assistance means a decrease in municipal costs. Moreover, agencies employing community cat programs have documented decreases in complaints about cats – some by 90%. Sterilized cats are less likely to roam or fight over territory, don't engage in noisy mating rituals, and obviously don't reproduce – all common sources of nuisance complaints about cats.

Humanely reducing and managing community cat populations ultimately reduces the threat of predation on wildlife. And as these cats are vaccinated against rabies before being returned, and generally healthier after being sterilized, threats to public health are also diminished.

We recommend the City of La Crosse adopt the proposed ordinance updates to fully embrace TNR-based community cat programs for managing outdoor cat populations and reducing both the number of free-roaming cats in the community as well as stemming the number of these cats that need to be handled by the shelter.

Thank you for considering our comments to make your community a healthier and safer place for people, cats, and wildlife.

Sincerely,

Megan Nicholson
Wisconsin State Director