



King County

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Shelter dogs and cats to get new space and less crowding

***Executive and Council partner on short- and long-term plans
to improve shelter conditions and define the future of Animal Care and Control***

New cat cages, dog runs, more staff and continued operational reforms are among immediate upgrades to conditions at King County's aging animal shelters that are part of a joint proposal from the County Executive and County Council that would also create a policy framework for a model animal welfare program.

Nearly \$1 million worth of immediate, short-term shelter and operating improvements were proposed today as the result of negotiations between the Council and Executive Ron Sims. The funding will reduce crowding and the spread of disease at shelters in Kent and Bellevue that house approximately 13,000 stray, abandoned and neglected animals each year.

In addition, Councilmembers Julia Patterson and Dow Constantine are introducing legislation to create a long-term strategic plan to provide recommendations on whether the County should build a new shelter, reorganize the delivery of animal services among different agencies, or reorganize animal services in partnership with other providers.

"Despite often heroic efforts by shelter staff, everyone agrees the current shelter falls far short of what's needed for them to care for the thousands of dogs and cats that move through the system each year," said Executive Sims. "We will continue our program and operational reforms already underway but the final answer is a new facility to replace a 35 year old structure originally built as a dog pound."

"Animal care has been an emotional and divisive issue," said Council Chair Julia Patterson, who led the Council's adoption of model animal welfare legislation in May 2007. "Today we choose to unite both branches of government to commit to achieve the goals of a model program together. The animals in our care deserve nothing less."

“We will immediately improve the care of shelter animals, while establishing a collaborative process to chart the best future for animal control services in King County,” said Council Vice Chair Dow Constantine. “It is critically important to add the voices of the people to this debate, as an engaged public is indispensable to saving animals’ lives. I invite everyone who cares about the welfare of animals to attend next Monday’s Town Hall meeting at the Highline Performing Arts Center in Burien.”

The joint proposal will be the subject of public comment at the Council's Committee of the Whole Town Hall meeting on animal care and shelter services on **Monday, April 14 at the Highline Performing Arts Center in Burien at 6:30 p.m.**

In the short term, the County will replace all of the cat cages and add dog runs in a separate area on the Kent shelter’s property or nearby. A shortage of space at the current facility has resulted in overcrowding, increased stress and risk of disease among shelter cats and dogs. Separate facilities for dogs and cats will greatly reduce stress on cats at the shelter. The funding would come from existing public donations in the Animal Benefit Fund, new Capital funds, and money redirected from the County’s capital improvement funds.

Sims is proposing new staff especially during peak animal population months and new training for staff. The new positions include another veterinarian and a veterinarian technician as well as additional veterinary contract services to provide on-going medical care as well as spay/neuter services. The number of new animal control officers at the shelter would vary depending on demand for shelter services.

The proposal calls for creation of a King County inter-branch animal services work group that will work over the next four months. It will consist of members from the offices of the Executive, County Council, Public Health, Sheriff and Prosecutor. The work group will develop an animal services Strategic plan, an Operational Master Plan, and a Facilities Master plan for the three-year period from 2009 through 2011:

- The Strategic Plan will develop a framework for determining how services are provided and who is best able to provide them, prioritize short and long-term goals, and create performance measures for each goal and specifying which County department will be accountable in achieving them.
- The Operational Master Plan will determine how we move forward in providing shelter and animal care services in King County and develop at least three options, including:
 - A status quo option of continuing to provide animal services as currently organized, or
 - A reorganization of animal services within the departments of county government, or
 - A reorganization of animal services in partnership with other providers.
- The Facilities Master Plan will inventory existing animal services facilities throughout the county, forecast the future needs for shelter facilities, including

where they should be located and, if a new shelter is called for, propose a six-year plan for financing construction.

This process will include an investigation into whether or not the county can create a model animal welfare program and should continue in the sheltering business. The three pieces of this policy framework will be reviewed by a group of community stakeholders before the Executive transmits the three plans to the Council by August 15, for Council review and potential adoption.

"I'm pleased with this agreement and thank Council Chair Patterson and vice chair Constantine for their support of a comprehensive look at our sheltering system and the needs in our community," said Executive Sims. "I first became involved in reforms to save animals 15 years ago as a county councilmember, and it is essential that we move toward getting a modern facility designed for the sheltering services needed in the 21st century."

"I have no doubt that the men and women in Animal Care and Control have the best interests at heart for the thousands of animals in their care," added Sims.

An appropriations ordinance and a motion establishing the process for the policy framework are expected to be introduced at next Monday's Council meeting for referral to the Committee of the Whole and Town Hall meeting Monday night.