

TNR Ordinance Rejected by Las Cruces, NM; Called 'Decriminalization' of Feral Cats

April 8, 2014 | by **Phyllis M Daugherty**

After hearing residents debate the pros and cons of trap-neuter-release for feral cats in Las Cruces, New Mexico, City Councilors voted 4-2 on Monday, to reject a proposed TNR (trap-neuter-release) measure within the city limits.

Officials had described the proposal as a "decriminalization" of feral cats, because, rather than creating city-sanctioned feral cat colonies and managers, the TNR provision proposed removing penalties for abandonment by people who released cats that had been spayed or neutered, vaccinated against rabies and ear-tipped, reported the *Las Cruces Sun*.

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The city's broader ordinance proposal, which was being considered at the same time, would, conversely, prohibit anyone abandoning cats or feeding free-roaming cats that aren't microchipped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated against rabies and ear-tipped, said animal shelter Director Beth Vesco-Mock.

Cats entering the shelter that lacked the requirements still would have faced euthanasia, Vesco-Mock said. And a person would have to pay to reclaim the cat if it wound up in the animal shelter.

Several animal advocates reminded the Councilors that feral cats are already present in the area and a trap-neuter-release provision would prevent as many of them from reproducing.

Some residents had argued that the TNR measure could help reduce high numbers of cats being euthanized at the city-county animal shelter, known as the Animal Service Center of the Mesilla Valley.

Critics worried about the impacts of cats on wildlife, mainly birds.

City Councilor Nathan Small stated that he empathizes with TNR proponents, because he owned a cat that had been feral. He said he and his wife caught it and, after two years, it has become tame. Still, he said he doesn't think allowing for feral cats is the right decision inside city limits where there's a high density of development.



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Councilor Small said he would back trapping, neutering and releasing cats into "catteries," contained spaces for 10 to 15 cats.

"Ultimately, I'm unable to support the full decriminalization approach," Small said.

Councilor Pedroza said she had "way too many problems" with the feral cat proposal to support it. She said she questioned whether enough people would follow through with all the steps of properly maintaining the feral cats.

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 89,671

Councilor Gill Sorg, also an Audubon Society member, said he believes rather than a TNR program, the city should put more money and emphasis into educating people about spaying and neutering, and responsible pet ownership.

Councilor Levatino said she appreciated input from opponents and proponents of the feral cat measure, but she thought the council should have taken its cue from Animal Services Director Vesco-Mock, who is the city's main expert on the matter.

Some residents reminded the Council that the feral cat proposal also raises legal liability questions.

Source: [LCSUN News](#)