



City of Culver City

Staff Report

File #: 15-500, Version: 1

Item #: A-5.

CC - FOUR-FIFTHS VOTE REQUIREMENT (Budget Amendment Only) - (1) Approval of the City of Culver City Coyote Management Plan; (2) Authorize the Police Department to Implement the Recommendations Set Forth in the Plan; and (3) Approval of a Budget Amendment to Appropriate \$6,000 from the General Fund Reserve to Animal Control Contract Services.

Contact Person/Dept: Lt. Sam Agaiby
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Fiscal Impact: Yes No

General Fund: Yes No

Public Hearing:

Action Item:

Attachments: Yes No

Commission Action Required: Yes No Date:
Commission Name:

Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - City Council (01/21/16)

Department Approval: Scott Bixby, Chief of Police (01/12/16)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council (1) approve the City of Culver City Coyote Management Plan (Plan); (2) authorize the Police Department to implement the recommendations set forth in the Plan; and (3) approve a budget amendment to appropriate \$6,000 from the General Fund Reserve to Animal Control Contract Services (10140400.619800). **(A budget amendment requires a four-fifths vote.)**

BACKGROUND

The City has experienced an increase in the amount and severity of coyote encounters. These encounters have caused significant concern to residents throughout the City. In response to these concerns, staff consulted with experts from the California Department Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to weigh all options available to manage human-coyote interactions in Culver City. Staff also convened community meetings, during which staff and representatives from the CDFW provided educational presentations, answered questions, and gathered input from the residents. Staff also initiated the participation in the CDFW's Wildlife Watch Program, which is designed to educate and organize the community in addressing the coyote problem.

Due to the increased concerns in the community and the desire to manage the increased coyote

activity in neighborhoods, staff has prepared the Plan. Approval of the Plan will provide the Police Department and other City staff a framework in which to deal with coyote encounters and will outline specific response measures.

DISCUSSION

In the middle of 2015, the City, along with other municipalities in Southern California, began to experience an increase in the amount of coyote encounters. These encounters included numerous attacks by coyotes on pets that were off leash and in residential back yards, and an upsurge in sightings in areas populated by people (some were during day light hours). The encounters have caused a general sense of significant concern by some Culver City residents and a desire to manage the increased coyote activity in neighborhoods.

Historically, coyotes have existed in and around Culver City, finding safe haven in areas including the Inglewood Oil Fields adjacent to the Blair Hills neighborhood, Culver City Park, and the Culver Crest Neighborhood. Additionally, other areas within the City where dense brush is prevalent (hillside areas, in and around Ballona Creek, etc.) also provide locales where coyotes can safely build dens and reproduce. It is believed that the prolonged drought has limited potential food sources for coyotes and thus drawn coyotes to residential neighborhoods in search of food and water.

Coyotes are opportunistic, versatile carnivores that primarily eat small mammals, such as rabbits, ground squirrels, and mice. Coyotes tend to prefer fresh meat, but will eat significant amounts of fruits and vegetables during the autumn and winter months when their prey is scarce. Part of the coyotes' success as a species is its dietary adaptability. This dietary flexibility, coupled with a lack of prey and closer proximity to residents, has led coyotes to seek alternative food sources, including small pets, pet food, and fallen fruits and vegetables sometimes found in the backyards of homes. Generally, coyotes are reclusive animals which avoid human contact. However, with the urbanization of coyotes' habitats, they have realized there are few real threats in suburban environments. This has resulted in coyotes approaching people and even feeling safe visiting yards when people are present.

Prior to July 2015, coyote sightings and incidents were shared among residents through direct communication and social media and were not reported to the Police Department's Animal Services Division (Animal Services). Animal Services began actively tracking coyote sightings and incidents in July 2015. In December 2015, Animal Services staff became aware of the sightings and incidents reported among residents.

Based upon these reports, the following data is available:

- In 2014: 4 coyote sightings, 5 unconfirmed coyote killings of cats, and 1 unconfirmed coyote attack on cats
- In 2015: 34 coyote sightings, 1 coyote killing of a dog, and 1 coyote bite on a dog

In response to the rise of more aggressive coyote activity in neighborhoods, the City took steps to modify the behavior of coyotes and increase the public's awareness. Animal Services held two workshops in conjunction with CDFW, met with neighborhood groups and numerous individuals, posted new signage, mailed out flyers, and publicized educational information on the City's website,

social media, and local newspapers. Moreover, City staff researched the response from surrounding communities, reviewed existing coyote management plans, analyzed the Coyote Guidelines from the Humane Society of the United States, and researched coyote ecology to better understand and create an appropriate plan for Culver City.

Proposed Culver City Coyote Management Plan

The proposed Culver City Coyote Management Plan (Plan) follows a similar format to that found in the cities of Seal Beach, Newport Beach, Huntington Beach, Calabasas, and Rancho Palos Verdes. The Plan enables the City to manage the amplified presence of coyotes with an emphasis on education, hazing, and (as a last resort) employing lethal means of removal only when the safety of the public is at risk. The suggested actions in the Plan are designed to increase residents' knowledge and understanding of how coyotes behave and make clear how such behavior can be managed to reduce or eliminate conflicts with coyotes, especially between humans and household pets. The Plan requires active participation on the part of the entire community including residents, homeowner associations, volunteers, and City staff.

The Plan is guided by the following principles:

1. Human safety is a priority in managing human-coyote interactions.
2. Coyotes serve an important role in ecosystems by helping control the population of rodents.
3. Preventive practices such as reduction and removal of food attractants, habitat modification, and responding appropriately when interacting with wildlife are key to minimizing potential interaction with coyotes.
4. Solutions for coyote conflicts must address both problematic coyote behaviors (such as aggression towards people and attacks on pets) and the problematic human behaviors (intentionally or unintentionally feeding coyotes and letting pets outside unattended) that contribute to conflicts.
5. Non-selective coyote removal programs are ineffective for reducing coyote population sizes or preventing human-coyote conflicts.
6. A community-wide program that involves residents is necessary for achieving co-existence among people, coyotes, and pets.

The main strategy is comprised of a three-pronged approach consisting of public education designed around co-existence with coyotes, enforcement of laws and regulations prohibiting the feeding of wildlife, and ensuring public safety by implementing tiered responses to coyote and human interactions. Following is a summary of the three tiers of the Plan:

Education

Education is the key to having residents make appropriate decisions regarding their safety or managing their property and pets. Education will involve written materials in mailers, the City's online Recreation Guide, and pamphlets available at City facilities and libraries. Educational tools will also include signage that will warn pet owners of the presence of coyotes. Volunteer groups will be formed to better educate residents in the affected areas. The goal of education is to decrease attractants, increase pet safety, and reshape coyote behavior through hazing and creating reasonable expectations of normal coyote behavior.

Enforcement

The act of feeding wildlife is known to lead to an increase in wildlife activity. Feeding can attract coyotes and their prey to an area, leading to an increased likelihood of creating habituated coyote(s), which results in increases in coyote/human interactions. California law and Los Angeles County codes prohibit feeding wildlife. The Culver City Animal Services Officer will strictly enforce the law(s) pertaining to this activity.

Response Plan

A detailed tiered response plan has been developed to provide a mechanism for identifying and classifying different levels of human/ coyote interactions. The Plan includes appendices with detailed information on coyote behavior and recommended responses to such behavior.

It should be noted that if a human is attacked and physically injured by a coyote, the Police Department will work with CDFW to thoroughly investigate the incident, identify, and lethally remove the responsible coyote(s). Lethal removal will also be considered as a last resort if there is a public safety issue, such as coyote(s) threatening people or resting in an area frequented by people, such as a yard, park, playground, school, etc. Since coyotes are considered "non-game wildlife" any resident or homeowner's association board of directors can initiate, at their own expense, action to protect themselves and their private property from coyote attacks.

Difficulties Managing Wildlife

In some cases, particular or traditional management tools are ineffective. For example, relocation of animals is not ecologically sound and is not allowed in California without permission from the CDFW. Generally, relocated animals do not survive the transfer. If they do, they rarely stay in the relocation area and tend to scatter to other locations where they may cause problems, be involved in territory disputes, or introduce disease. In some instances, the dispersed wildlife, especially coyotes, will go to great lengths to return to their previous territory, potentially adversely affecting residents. For these reasons, CDFW rarely allows relocation of wildlife.

As a last resort, lethal control measures, when employed, are controversial and non-selective. It is extremely difficult to ensure that problem-causing coyotes will be the specific ones located and killed. Since firearms are usually unsafe to use in urban and suburban areas, traps are generally the method used. Most traps are indiscriminate, capturing almost any animal that triggers them. Sometimes called "trash" animals by trappers, non-target species that have been found in traps include threatened and endangered species, birds, domestic dogs, and cats. These animals can sustain the same injuries as target species. Even if released, they may perish later from internal injuries or reduced ability to hunt or forage for food. If they are used, traps must be humane and in compliance with federal and state laws.

It is not economically, ecologically or in other ways efficient to attempt to remove all coyotes from the urban ecosystem. Attempts made by local, state, and federal agencies as well as private organizations over the past century to eradicate coyotes have proven to be ineffective. Moreover, during the past century, coyotes have expanded their territories to include every state except Hawaii.

The proposed Plan is a living document and will be updated from time to time as trends in coyote management change. The Plan is a first step with the ultimate goal of co-existing with coyotes and managing their behavior. The success of this Plan will be based on proactive coordination by City staff and active participation by the public. In the coming months and years, the Plan may require adjustments given the adaptability of coyotes and various environmental factors (e.g. continuing drought). The understanding of coyote behavior and management is evolving as wildlife experts continue to study the coyote in suburban environments. The City will need to be flexible and re-evaluate its strategy as necessary when new information and techniques become available.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

The fiscal impact to the City to implement the Plan is expected to be minimal and will vary dependent upon the City's response to more aggressive coyote behavior and implementation of education programs and materials. The cost for trapping and removing a coyote by a trapper certified by the CDFW ranges between \$1,500 and \$3,000 per incident. This cost includes setting of a trap for a specified period of time (7 to 10 days), removal and rebaiting if the animal captured is not the target animal, and removal and euthanization of the target animal once captured.

Should the proposed Plan be approved by the City Council, staff will seek a contract with a CDFW certified trapper for this service if the need should arise.

An estimate of one incident per quarter at \$3,000 per incident would require a total of \$12,000 per fiscal year. There are only two quarters remaining in Fiscal Year 2015/2016. Therefore, \$6,000 is requested to be appropriated from the General Fund Reserve to Animal Control Contract Services (10140400.619800). Funding for future fiscal years will be requested during budget adoption.

A budget amendment requires a four-fifths vote.

ATTACHMENTS

Proposed Culver City Coyote Management Plan

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S)

That the City Council:

1. Approve the City of Culver City Coyote Management Plan; and,
2. Authorize the Culver City Police Department to implement the recommendations set forth in the Plan; and
3. Approve a budget amendment to transfer \$6,000 from the General Fund Reserve to Animal Control Contract Services (10140400.619800) (A budget amendment requires a four-fifths

vote).