

Idaho Falls Police Citizen Review Committee

Sub-Report Animal Services

Prepared By

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I. Purpose of the Citizens Review Committee (CRC)

The purpose of the Citizen Review Committee (CRC), as described by Mayor Rebecca Casper, is "to encourage city-wide efficiency and innovation in an open atmosphere. The city needs committees that reflect a broad array of interests and opinions about local government. It is hoped that 'fresh eyes' will reveal new or exciting directions for city management, budgeting and innovation."

II. CRC Meeting Information

The CRC is composed of nine people with various professional and educational backgrounds. In another report, the committee covers a wide variety of topics about the Idaho Falls Police Department. This sub-report covers only observations and recommendations for Animal Services.

III. Animal Services Administration

Chief Mark McBride – Oversees all activities in the IFPD

Captain Joe Cawley – Services Captain, overseeing Animal Services

Ms. Irene Brown - Animal Services Supervisor. Manages the animal shelter, animal control officers, and works with the IFPD administration concerning animal ordinances.

IV. Observations

Observations about Dog Problems

CRC members had conversations with numerous Idaho Falls citizens about Animal Services. People generally fell into one of two categories. Citizens either had concern, sometimes very strong, that off-leash dogs were a problem, or they liked to have their own dog off-leash.

Some of the people CRC members contacted regularly visited Idaho Falls City parks. A few of these people had been in what they described as a threatening incident with an off-leash dog, in which words were exchanged with the owner. Most people had been in more minor, but still annoying and potentially threatening, incidents. Some of these people said they chose to no longer call Animal Services because they were generally not responsive. When Animal Services did respond, the people we contacted could easily see that there was only a verbal warning and no citation.

One person we contacted was a dog owner who goes to Community Park and takes his dog off-leash to play, who said, "Where else am I going to go with my dog?"

The CRC also found that off-leash dogs are common in neighborhoods, especially where houses are close together such as on the numbered streets. There are some places where people are concerned about letting their small children out of the house without supervision. A CRC member had her family dog on leash during a walk when an unleashed dog attacked her and the family dog. Her dog had to get 18 staples to close the wound. The CRC member has also been charged at by other off-leash dogs and she has to spray them with pepper spray. She does not walk around the neighborhood anymore.

The CRC also talked to numerous people who bike extensively in Idaho Falls. Many of these people carry either pepper spray or "club" to ward off problem animals. In general, the bikers also did not find it useful to call Animal Services because they were too slow to respond or only gave a warning.

The Animal Services Department has a staff of seven individuals. The staff is responsible for both animal care and patrol. This is a small staff and currently focuses more on animal care and less on patrol. There are generally two Animal Services patrol vehicles on weekdays and only one on weekends. Several citizens noted that Sundays were a particular problem for off-leash dogs.

The CRC observed that there is an unwritten policy to only give a warning unless the person is a habitual offender. This is substantiated by information provided by Ms. Brown that in calendar year 2015, Animal Services has written 46 citations and only 13 of these citations were for Dog at Large (off-leash).

Ms. Brown told the CRC that the Animal Services Officer on the street does not take down either owner names or dog names or tag numbers. She claimed that Animal Services did not have any way of tracking names or numbers that would really work very well. She also indicated that officers communicate with each other on a daily basis and pass on information about individuals breaking the law. This informal communication leaves the city with no actual record of repeat offenders. Considering that there are at most two officers on patrol, the CRC thinks that not recording names of animals and owners creates space where repeat offenders can evade detection. The CRC also thinks that typically giving unrecorded verbal warnings leads to a general belief by some that they don't have to have their dog on leash and that the worst consequence will be a verbal warning.

Another issue noted by Ms. Brown was that some citizens do not respect the authority of Animal Control Officers. Sometimes people will just walk away when they are approached by an Animal Control Officer. Many times the Animal Control Officer will have to call for Police back-up because a citizen does not believe they should have to listen to Animal Control.

Observations about Cat Problems

Several of the people contacted by the CRC noted problems with feral cats. These problems ranged from defecating in gardens, leading to a concern of toxoplasmosis, to destruction of property. Ms. Brown told the CRC that Idaho Falls does not have any program in place for trying to control feral cats. She told us that property owners can "borrow" traps from the Shelter

for a small deposit and then bring the cat back once it is trapped. Animal Services then determines if the cat is feral. If the cat is feral, it is euthanized. If the cat is not feral, it is held for 3 days and then put up for adoption.

Observations of Animal Services Management

When the CRC met with Captain Cawley, who oversees Animal services, he at first seemed to cede authority and responsibility to Ms. Brown concerning animal control. Only after Captain Cawley saw that some CRC members were concerned about animal control did he start to take responsibility. Captain Cawley even asked "do we really want to start giving citations for off-leash dogs on the green belt?"

Observations about the Animal Shelter

The CRC visited the Animal Shelter and in general thought that it was well run. Both people and procedures seemed professional. Ms. Brown reported that the animal shelter has reduced euthanasia rates for dogs from 45% to just a 4%. Much of this reduction seems to come from shipping dogs to other shelters in the area. The CRC feels that enforcing the existing leash ordinance and dog at large fines would lead to fewer animals in the shelter and probably reduce their budget and increase revenue.

The CRC also noted what they see as a looming problem at the Animal Shelter. Dr. Stone basically gives his time and license for free to Animal Services. When Dr. Stone retires, IF will most likely have to pay for these services. Ms. Brown estimated the costs to be about \$10k per year. The CRC thinks that number may be low.

IV. Recommendations

- Off-leash animals are a continuing problem in both neighborhoods and public parks and the CRC would like to see fewer animals off-leash in Idaho Falls. The CRC recommends that the existing ordinances be enforced more completely.
- The CRC recommends that Animal Services increase awareness of the existing leash ordinance through both the Post Register and local TV stations. Chief McBride and Captain Cawley should be part of this process in order to educate citizens about the authority of Animal Control Officers.
- The CRC generally agrees to allow Animal Services the option of giving an initial warning to those who are in violation of the leash ordinance. The CRC, however, strongly recommends that simple system be implemented to record the name of the owner and animal when a warning is given. Any second offense by either an owner or animal should lead to a citation.
- Increase Animal Services patrols in problem neighborhoods, such as the numbered streets.
- Increase patrol on Sundays and Saturdays, both in public parks and neighborhoods.