

MEMO FROM EMMETT MAYOR GORDON W. PETRIE

SUBJECT: A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR A FERAL CAT ORDINANCE

The results are in from the community survey on feral cats. 357 of you said “yes” outright, while 102 said “no”. Nevertheless, when one parses through the really clever comments, such as, “Won’t do any good, cats can’t read,” (nyuk, nyuk) at least ten of the “no” votes were really “yes”—provided the city does *not* fashion an ordinance designed to euthanize feral cats. Twelve “maybes” that came in hinged on the same issue of euthanizing the cats, “no” if we did, “yes” if we did not. Hence, as seen below, where euthanizing will *not* be part of any proposal, after all explanations, the “yes” votes picked up another 22, making this a 379 to 92 response, slightly over a 4 to 1 margin. This clearly indicates it’s time to do something about the feral cats. Approximately 10% of the city’s utilities customers participated in the survey, a decent number for gauging the thinking of residents on any issue.

Whatever the proposal I make to the council on feral cats, it will be a modest one. For Emmett, we will be plowing new ground. Moreover, we have the advantage of exploring what the few municipalities in Idaho that have attempted such a thing did in theirs and what the current studies on feral cat control actually say is a best practice.

Let me first address what the proposal will *not* be. First, it will *not* be a proposal that attempts to control *all* cats, but only feral cats, that is, it will be designed to control their population. It will be a program designed to trap, neuter/spay (fix), and then return (commonly referred to as TNR) the cat to its original location. That is what the science tells us right now about successful programs controlling feral cat populations.

Our first mission, then, will be to discover and mark where the colonies are located (and we already have a 90% solution on this, we believe). This will facilitate an efficient methodology

of establishing their equilibrium. Bottom line: the recommendation will *not* be an ordinance that calls for the licensing of all cats in town or making their owners or caretakers put them on a leash anytime they are off their property. It will *not* be an ordinance that punishes anyone for feeding and caring for feral cats. As it turns out, not only is that a humane thing to do, studies show it's the right thing to do, provided they have been neutered or spayed. How does a community know if a cat has been "fixed"? For feral cats, at least, the tip of one ear is slightly clipped. Moreover, feeding feral cats helps to reduce their susceptibility to disease; hence, they will be less likely to "share" what ails them in both the feral and non-feral domains.

It most decidedly will *not* be an ordinance that calls for their "removal" unless that is the only humane thing we can do for them due to severe illness or injury. Finally, it will *not* be a proposal that turns our police department into cat herders. Pre-approved volunteer "cat trappers" will be mobilized under this model. Accordingly, we will rely heavily on grants and contributions from individuals and organizations to fund the program. Grants are available. Indeed, two pre-approved volunteers have even acquired their own. These intrepid trappers have already provided a great service to our community!

Since November of 2015, Darlene Junghans and Beth Stokes have (1) caused over 800 feral cats to be fixed through grants and community fundraising, (2) provided over 50,000 pounds of pet food (dog and cat) to low-income community members and (3) taken in over 210 cats and kittens, finding homes for them. These two Community Gems will comprise the very core of the volunteer trappers and provide expert training and advice to others who want to assist. Much is yet to be done, but we're getting there.