

City Council approves measure to capture, neuter, release feral cats

KENOSHA NEWS STAFF Jun 19, 2017

Feral cats Sweetie and Stinky eat while living at the Sherman Gardens in Evanston, Ill., in this file photo from October 2016. Sherman Gardens used feral cats to help control the rat population.

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Editor's Note

This article has been updated to clarify the way the program works.

After more than two hours of debate, the Kenosha City Council approved an ordinance on June 19 that would spare the lives of captured feral cats.

The approval came after numerous proposed amendments.

But in the end, the ordinance that passed was very similar to what was proposed, which pleased Bill Bohlman, president of the Safe Harbor's board of directors, who said the "essence" of the original was intact.

Safe Harbor worked with Aids. Kevin Mathewson and David Bogdala to craft the ordinance, which would allow captured feral cats to be neutered, vaccinated and released rather than euthanized.

The released cats would have a portion of an ear clipped for identification purposes and have a microchip added.

Safe Harbor officials have said that trap-neuter-release will allow the nonprofit agency to apply for more state grants, boost staff morale and help protect more cats.

Last year, Safe Harbor euthanized about 30 feral cats each month.

Bohlman said the organization is facing a large budget shortfall and lost its veterinarian because she did not want to continue euthanizing the city's feral cats.

Amendments

Safe Harbor offered additional amendments to the proposal to address questions and concerns from aldermen.

Among them: Freed cats would be released to so-called community cat caretakers — any person other than an owner of the cat who provides food, water or shelter to a feral cat.

“We’re not just going to take feral cats, spay and neuter them, and throw them out the door,” Bohlman said last week. “This is a detailed program that lays out everybody’s responsibilities.”

However, some aldermen said that they were concerned about the changes and offered their own alternatives and ideas.

Ald. John Fox questioned if a line should be included on “cat loitering.”

Ald. Anthony Kennedy also offered a handful of amendments to the ordinance during the meeting.

“This is significantly different than what was proposed,” Kennedy said.

Kennedy also offered the council a one-sheet from PETA which he said has significant concerns about trap-neuter-release.

In the end, the ordinance was approved with only three dissenters: Fox, Jan Michalski and Dave Pfaff.

Opposition

Michalski had been the most outspoken critic of the proposal, which saw two previous deferrals by the council.

Michalski said the plan would bolster feral cat populations and threaten wildlife. He was strongly opposed to earlier drafts of the ordinance, but said he is keeping an open mind.

Michalski also fears feral cats could harm children. He feels some area residents are too emotional with the issue.

“If they were skunks, there wouldn’t be an uproar,” Michalski said last week. “It’s an emotional thing.”

Support

However, trapping and killing leads other cats to move into that area because there is clearly a food source and now an opening for another feral cat to occupy a space that has been vacated, according to Anne Beall, author of “Community Cats: A Journey Into the World of Feral Cats.”

During an interview last week, Beall said she believes trapping, neutering and release works because fixed cats do not reproduce. Because cats are territorial, the number of cats in the area diminishes over time.

“TNR has been documented to work all over the world in major cities such as Rome,” she said.

In addition, feral cats have been used in other communities to control rodent populations.