

GARLAND

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Richard Briley, Managing Director of Health & Code Compliance

THROUGH: William E. Dollar, City Manager

DATE: September 30, 2009

SUBJECT: Humane Euthanasia at the Garland Animal Shelter

Recent media reports focusing on the Garland Animal Shelter have raised concerns in the minds of many Garland residents (and others outside of our community) that the methods used to euthanize animals at the Garland Animal Shelter are not humane and do not comply with state laws or accepted veterinary practice. My purpose in drafting this memo is to correct misperceptions about the operation of the Garland Animal Shelter and to delineate steps that have already been taken to respond to Garland citizen concerns.

Departmental management, with advice from the City Veterinarian, regularly updates policies governing euthanasia methods at the Garland Animal Shelter. These policies, which are based on American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) guidelines and State of Texas regulations, guide staff when administering humane euthanasia. All staff members who euthanize animals are required to undergo twelve hours of detailed euthanasia training. Currently, each instance of euthanasia at the Garland Animal Shelter is reviewed to ensure full compliance with euthanasia law and policy. If mistakes are noted, management takes appropriate corrective actions.

My management team has thoroughly investigated the allegations in recent news reports alleging illegal activity associated with humane euthanasia at the Garland Animal Shelter. After reviewing the records from 2007 provided by the media, there does appear to be one instance of an animal younger than four months of age that was euthanized by respiration of carbon monoxide. It was euthanized by a Shelter Attendant who is no longer employed by the City of Garland. Management was not previously aware of the incident, or it would have been dealt with internally at that time.

I have full confidence in the training and integrity of my staff at the Garland Animal Shelter. Shelter management uses education and disciplinary action as appropriate to prevent errors and address mistakes. Our staff members often work under difficult circumstances, yet they continue to provide both high-quality customer service to our citizens and humane care to the animals held at the Garland Animal Shelter.

Garland Animal Services has two equally important missions. One mission is to protect the public. Rapid response to citizen calls for assistance with feral, stray, or diseased animals is critical to preventing animal bites and the transmission of rabies to humans. The other mission is to provide a sanitary and humane shelter to house animals while they await adoption, rescue, or reclamation by their owner.

It is a sad truth that at times it is necessary to administer humane and statutorily-approved euthanasia at the Garland Animal Shelter. Euthanasia is performed either through injection of sodium pentobarbital or respiration of carbon monoxide. Both methods are administered in accordance with all applicable state laws and veterinary practice, and both methods are considered by the State of Texas and the AVMA to be equally humane.

The selection of euthanasia methodology has always been tied to resource allocation. Departmental management has been, and continues to be, unwilling to operate in a manner that will increase response time to citizen calls for service simply to use a less efficient, but equally humane, method of euthanasia (injection of sodium pentobarbital) more frequently.

However, Animal Services is currently undergoing a major software upgrade for its administrative functions, and is consolidating dispatch duties with the Garland Water Department. The software upgrade and dispatching changes have been planned for some time, and staff has been actively working to make those shifts in operations for many months. The software upgrade and consolidation of dispatching duties will result in more efficient operations, thereby freeing up resources that can be allocated elsewhere. I intend to reallocate those resources to the Garland Animal Shelter.

Before the end of the calendar year, staff at the Garland Animal Shelter will transition to using injection of sodium pentobarbital for the vast majority of animals that must be humanely euthanized. Only vicious dogs, feral cats, wild animals, or other animals that present a significant danger to shelter staff when handled will continue to be humanely euthanized via respiration of carbon monoxide. This compromise strikes a balance between ensuring continued rapid response times to citizen calls for service, maintaining the safety of shelter staff, and easing the minds of our citizens as to the operation of the Garland Animal Shelter.

Thank you for your continued support and, as always, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have concerns or questions involving any of my departments.