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CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE MEMO

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To: Mayor and City Council

From: City Administrator, Kim Downs

Date: April 23, 2018

RE: Feral/Stray Cats

A few months ago, resident came to us with their concerns of being fined for caring for feral cats and fearing for the feral cat's lives. To help you in your decision as to how you want to manage the issue of feral cats I have identified what a feral cat is and the differences between a feral cat and stray cat. There is as much information out there on the benefits of Trap, Neuter/Spayed and Release as there is as to how it doesn't work. I have summarized the research information on the pros and cons of managing feral/stray cats. Lastly, bulleted what the concerns the residents have.

Feral cats are not a new phenomenon. They have been around for hundreds of years-10,000 years.

Stray cat and Feral cat behaviors and opportunities to be socialized are much different for one then the other. Stray cats-have already been socialized with people at some point in their life but were left behind or lost their way back home, as well as most of their human contact and dependence. The benefit of a stray cat is it can be rehomed.

Feral cats have never been socialized, has had no human contact. Research states most feral cats are not likely to be socialize. Their kittens can be socialized at an early age and adopted by people. The ideal window to socialize feral kittens is within 8-12 weeks of age. As a result, researchers do not recommend socializing feral cats older than 12 weeks-it is dangerous and stressful to both the individual and the cat. The best thing to do for feral cats older than 12 weeks of age is to Trap Neuter, Vaccinate and Release (TNVR) according to Alley Cat Allies Guide to TNR.

Cats choose to live in locations-where there is a food resource and shelter. Something called the "Vacuum Effect"-when cats are removed from a location, those who were not removed will then breed to capacity. *A community will never be able to eliminate feral cats in its entirety-a fact that cannot be changed.*

Managing Feral/Stray cats is not the happy ending that many people may think-

In reading through the many articles and links provided by staff, the Iowa Human Alliance, Cedar Valley Human Society, city council members and some of my own I have bulleted the common threads below:

- It's a complicated, risky and time-consuming plan

- Trap-Remove-Relocate Trap at first glance seems to be the logical approach to solving community cat problems. *However, unless it is consistently performed with very high level of resources a manpower and addresses over 50% of a targeted population, it doesn't offset the root of the problem; ongoing reproduction of un-trapped cats.* Money and manpower simply don't exist in the budgets and capacity of government agencies or in terms of public support
- Communities that use trap and euthanize strategies typically do not realize reductions in the number of cat complaints, and cat intake at local shelters stays constant or continues to rise
- Feeding bans don't work because the community cats are strongly bonded to their home territories and will not easily or quickly leave familiar surroundings to search for new food sources. Instead they will move closer to the homes and businesses as they grow hunger, leading to more nuisance complaint calls, greater public concern for the cat's welfare and underground feeding by residents.
  Bans will force feral cats to forage through trashcans and kill wildlife, such as birds, squirrels, and rabbits. Establishing feeding stations (The resident in our case) ensures a healthier colony and allows human interaction with the colony and provide care for any cat that is under stress who need medical attention.
- Feeding stations bring feral cats to a central location and help establish trust, making trapping an easier task
- To maintain a healthy feral cat population comes with great responsibility. Feeding stations, shelter, bedding, health care, flea control, deworming and record keeping
- Lifespan of feral cats are not that much different then pet cats. A TVAR program noted that 83% of the cats in an observation area lived for more then 6-years-meaning that the cat's lifespans were comparable to the mean lifespan of *7.1 years for pet cats.*
- Relocation should be a communities last option
  - Creates stress on the cat causing .....
  - *Do not bargain-don't get involved in agreeing to relocate cat colonies, find homes or take them to a sanctuary. You may be taking on an impossible*
- An article released by the Center of Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention in 2012 warned maintaining feral cat colonies can lead to an increase of rabies, transmission from cats to humans and other diseases such a typhus and the bubonic plague. These have been documented within the U.S.
- The CDC paper disagrees with the notion that TNVR programs cause feral cat colonies to slowing decrease in size as cates die of natural causes. It cites studies showing that many continue to increase over time, either because not all animals are neutered or because of the arrival of new cats drawn to the food. USA Today August 18, 2013
- The CDC estimates that 16% of people in the United States who undergo rabies treatment are exposed to the deadly virus are from cats. They must be treated with a series of shots
- Feral cats reduce natures wildlife-urban bird population
- Trespassing cats- they are low tech methods to discourage feral cats from hanging out where they are not wanted; like neighbor's gardens, yards, porches or vehicles
  - Motion activated sprinklers and ultra-deterrents (scarecrow & cat stop)
  - Covering sandboxes
  - Deer netting over gardens
  - Plastic forks or bamboo chopsticks staked in soil

- Humane feline deterrents-
  - Orbit-yard enforces motion activated pest deterrent sprinkler. Range in square feet 35-60. Cost $39.99-$99.99
  - Ultrasonic infrared field animal repeller-high frequency-reaches 4,000 square feet. Cost $69-$89. Imperceptible to humans

<u>Issues and concerns we want to address-</u>

A. Tucker-C Ave Residents are afraid of being fined
   I. 4- residents want to attempt to socialize the cats
   II. 2-residents want us to help find homes
   III. 1-resident wants us to ban cats from rental units
   IV. 1-resident has concerns about infectious diseases that can be transferred to other animals and humans
   V. 3-residents that do not want cats released back into the community. We have had a resident shoot and kill a feral cat recently
   VI. 1-resident-can't let her children go out and play in the back yard until she rakes to remove all the cat's feces due the colony making her backyard a community litter box
B. We don't really know what the colony population is. We believe there are at least 40 feral/stray cats
C. The colony is using one of the neighbors back yard as their litter box
D. Do we as the city want to invest in feral cats
   I. If so we would need to be aggressive in capturing cats and the associated cost
E. In our decision to allow TNR how do neighbors maintain their relationships if they don't agree with trapping, neutering/spaying and releasing
F. The risk of spreading diseases appears to be low in our region however, we should not rule out the possibility
G. Feral cat's resources to food is both the homes along C-Ave area and Scotty's restaurant. The other areas we see feral cats are at mobile home parks
H. Cedar Valley Humane Society provided a heat map that demonstrates the areas of feral/stray cats are mainly located in the mobile home park areas and the lower southeast corner of city limits due to a higher number of rental units

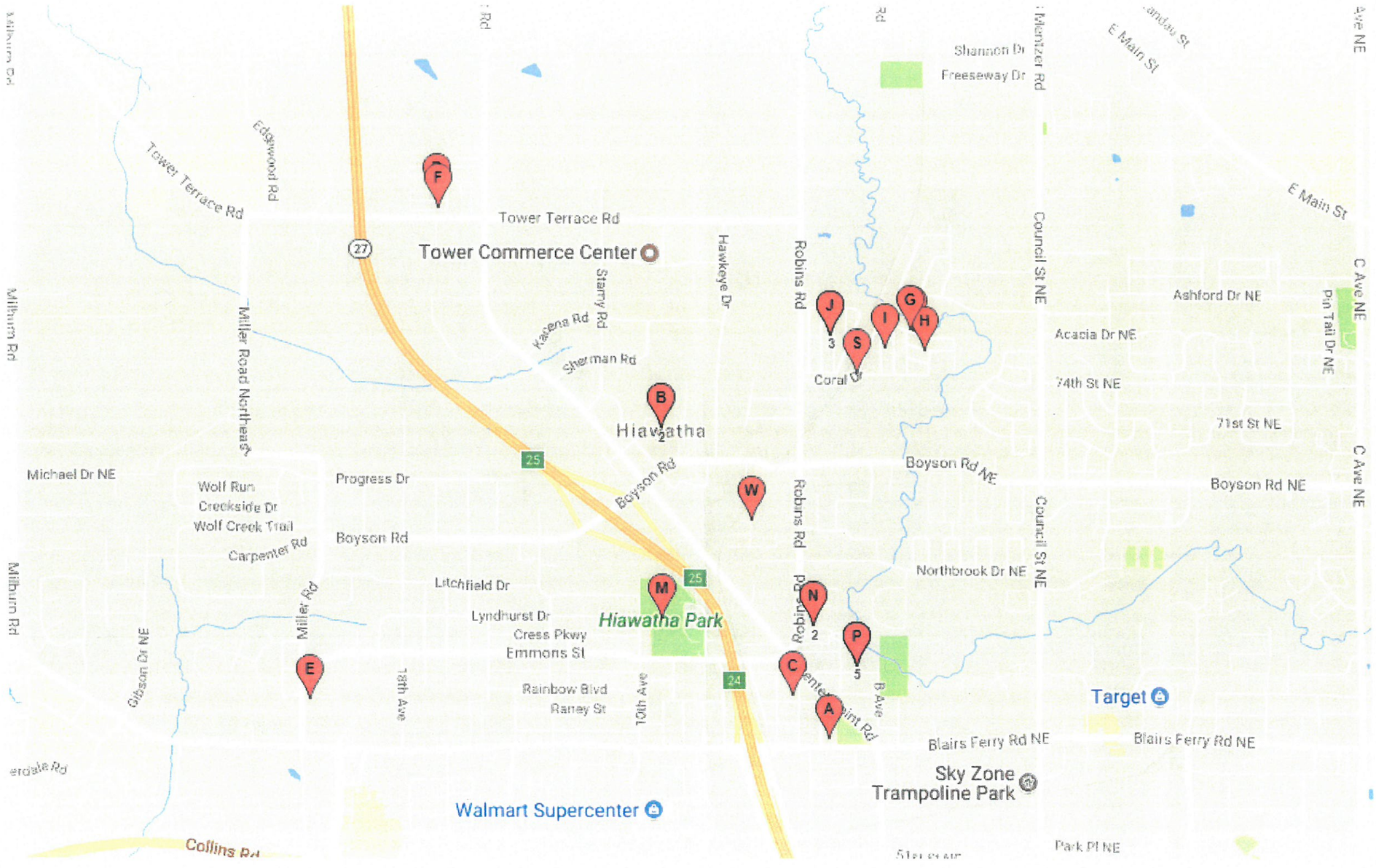
Is the answer to require all cats be trapped, spayed/neutered, licensed, microchipped and kept indoors?

At this point with the many hours spent on reading through the research and reflecting back on the citizens' concerns you may want to test the results yourself through a short-term resolution verse changing the city ordinance until you feel certain a trap, neuter/spayed, release program is in fact addressing our feral/stray cat's colony issue.

A resolution could read as follows:

Animal Care and Control Regulations Relating to Feral/Stray Cats

A. The city of Hiawatha recognizes the need for innovation in addressing the issues presented by community cats, and
B. For a period of three (3) years the city council agrees to permit residents to trap, neuter/spayed, release their neighborhood feral/stray cats back into the community without being fined. The purpose is to provide the city time to realize the effectiveness of a trap, neuter/spayed, and return back to the community which allows for a humane method to manage, and over time, reduce the population of community cats, and
C. Free-Roaming cats shall be allowed in the City of Hiawatha as long as all of the following requirements are met:
    a. Cat must be spayed or neutered
    b. Cat must be vaccinated for rabies
    c. Cat must be ear tipped
D. This resolution does not limit residents who choose not to trap, neuter/spayed and release from taking feral/stray cats whether neuter/spayed to the Cedar Valley Human Society
E. If the approved requirements are not met city staff will be required to follow Chapter 55- Animal Protection and Control.

Or you could go simpler and direct staff to not proceed with fines; allow residents who want to TNR stray/feral cats to do so and for those residents who don't can continue to take the cat(s) to the Cedar Valley Humane Society.

2017 Stray Cats—Hiawatha