

Memorandum



Date: August 30, 2023

To: Honorable Chairman Oliver G. Gilbert, III
and Members, Board of County
Commissioners

Agenda Item No. 2(B)(1)
September 19, 2023

From: Daniella Levine Cava
Mayor

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniella Levine Cava".

Subject: Feasibility Study Regarding the County's establishment and operation of a dog sanctuary in District 8, and preferably the Redland, and to provide a report - Directive No. 230203

Like communities across the nation, Miami-Dade is facing a crisis of surrendered animals, including an unprecedented number of dogs in our care. Miami-Dade County and the Animal Services Department (ASD) are committed to tackling this crisis with every available resource, and to finding innovative solutions so that all animals in our care can be safe and comfortable.

On March 7, 2023, the Board of County Commissioners (Board) adopted Resolution No. R-214-23, sponsored by Commissioner Danielle Cohen Higgins, which directed the County Mayor to conduct a feasibility study regarding the County's establishment and operation of a dog sanctuary in District 8, and preferably the Redland, and to provide a report.

The adoption of this Resolution requests the following information: 1) the expected fiscal impact of a dog sanctuary, including potential funding sources for its establishment and operation; 2) the availability of existing County-owned land or the purchase or lease of suitable land in District 8; 3) the ongoing operation and maintenance of the facility, including what equipment, inventory, and staffing would be needed; and 4) the expected short-term and long-term benefits that the facility would provide.

Although initially suggested as a potential solution to the homeless dog population, after further research the Department does not recommend the establishment of a dog sanctuary in Miami-Dade. A third facility to house dogs would not be the most effective long-term solution to manage the large dog population and would likely reach capacity within a year. The proposed open-air dog sanctuary would house the long-stay and problematic dogs, but those are the ones that often cannot be housed with other dogs, making a sanctuary approach untenable. A sanctuary also would not be a sustainable solution as it would quickly fill up with dogs that would need to be cared for during their remaining years of life.

After careful review, we instead recommend allocating these funds towards enhanced and expanded animal services to reduce our shelter population, increase adoptions, and increase spay and neuter services. The Mayor's FY23-24 proposed budget includes \$2 million dedicated to enhanced animal services including programs to expand both adoptions and spay/neuter services. ASD has also enlisted the input of animal welfare experts to help identify additional forward-thinking, humane solutions to this crisis, and further detail is included below in this memo.

1) Expected Fiscal Impact and Potential Funding Source

The estimated fiscal impact to the County to create the sanctuary would be \$3,201,104 for the first year to include start-up cost. Subsequent yearly cost is estimated at \$911,444/year to support operations and supplies. The potential funding sources for any capital expenditures would be determined based on whether or not the project is developed on county owned land and could not be determined at this time. Funding for any proposed operating related expenditures would be funded from the Countywide General Fund, if available.

2) Availability of Existing County-owned Land or the Purchase or Lease of Suitable Land within District 8

Immediately after this Resolution was adopted, Animal Services Department began working with the Internal Services Department to determine the availability of existing County-owned land or the feasibility of purchasing land in the Redland area. It was determined that the fair market value range for vacant land in the Redlands area is estimated at \$60,000 - \$200,000 per acre. If 10 acres were purchased at the midpoint range of the market value cost, the cost for the vacant lot could be estimated at approximately \$1,400,000. Another option would be to use County-owned property for this project. In working with ISD, they provided a 10-acre vacant lot property, folio no. 30-6823-000-0390, which is located outside the Urban Development Boundary (UDB) that seems suitable for a sanctuary. The property is within the Redlands area and suitable to create a sanctuary/off site open-air adoption center. If we were to move forward with this proposal, it is estimated that the design phase for this facility could take anywhere from 3-6 months at an approximate cost of \$60,000. It is also estimated that the development phase could take up to 10 months as broken down below:

- 30-day timeline for lot clearing at a cost of \$75,000;
- 30-day timeline for Infrastructure build outs including well and septic at a cost of \$25,000;
- 8-month timeline for construction of 3,200 sq. ft. pavilion structures and kennels at a cost of \$320,000.

3) Needs for Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of the Facility, Including Equipment, Inventory, and Staffing

The following chart depicts the details of associated costs to meet the needs for ongoing possible operation and maintenance of the facility to include equipment, supplies (inventory) and staffing:

Sanctuary Feasibility Outline

Description	Cost	Comments
One-Time Expenditure Total	\$ 2,289,660.00	Property & Facilities Set Up
Yearly Facilities & Operational Expenditure Total	\$ 451,188.00	\$35,099/month estimated
Yearly Staffing Total	\$460,256.16	
	Sum \$ 911,444.16	

- Regular wellness checks for the dogs to monitor population health;
- A contract with nearby local veterinary clinics in the event of injured dogs who may need emergency care and cannot be transported to the Doral facility;
- Supplies and food for an estimated population of 400 dogs;
- Further, the open-air sanctuary would be open 7 days per week, 7 hours per day should this sanctuary be created;
- and the pavilions along with other applicable structures would have to withstand hurricanes so pets can safely remain there during storms.

4) Alternative Solutions to Overpopulation

As we continue dedicating all possible resources to tackle the overpopulation crisis in our shelters, ASD is actively deploying and/or pursuing the following solutions:

- Collaboration with municipal community centers to provide residents ongoing resources to combat dog pet ownership hardships in efforts to increase retention.
- Provide printed materials of reference at county locations, where applicable, for services and resources provided regarding pet ownership resources.
- Partnering with District community engagement events to provide constituents pet support services.
- Partnering with dog behavior experts such as *Applause your Paws* and *Dogs Playing For Life* to assess the shelter population and recommend best pathway for each dog be it adoption, training or rescue. Staff will also be trained by them to run playgroups which will increase socialization for dogs at shelter.
- Providing free spay and neuter services throughout the county on a regular basis including contracting with local nonprofit organizations and veterinary clinics who wish to partner in a long-term Spay/Neuter initiative. Increase Spay/Neuter contract allocation for Miami Vet Foundation and The Cat Network allowing for more surgeries.
- Opening additional offsite adoption centers to make all shelter pets more accessible to all Miami-Dade County residents.
- Hosting large-scale adoption events and promote shelter dog adoptions. In addition to the annual MEGA adoption event held in October, solicit industry experts to ensure success of multiple adoption events throughout the year.

- Establishing a robust behavior management program to increase the likelihood of adoption for shelter dogs using the State Appropriations for dog training in the amount of \$250,000.
- Identifying root cause of stray dog population and surrenders to focus pet retention services on those issues and decrease shelter intakes.

Additionally, as mentioned above, ASD is working with experts such as Dr. Julie K. Levy, a professor of Shelter Medicine Education at the University of Florida, to identify additional innovative solutions. Through that work we have developed three major goals:

- **To perform an assessment of current population and categorization of dogs by temperament**, in order to identify the best pathway for each dog – such as adoption, rescue or behavioral training.
- **To revamp the County’s Spay/Neuter Initiative to work with even more partner groups and reach even more pets.** ASD holds monthly events that target 125 dogs each, with Miami Vet Foundation assisting in surgeries, and is increasing free spay-and-neuter services. The department continues to strengthen relationships with current sponsors as well as seek new ones to increase our high volume spay-neuter events throughout the community.
- **To host even more large-scale adoption events.** Since January, ASD has adopted approximately 4,000 shelter pets. In addition to Clear the Shelters, a month-long adoption event, the successful recent 12-hour adoption fair held on August 26 at the Doral Shelter had over 450 visitors and 65 dog adoptions. Additionally, ASD will hold the annual MEGA adoption event on Oct. 21, and another MEGA event is planned for early spring.

Our community’s support is key as we work together to ensure all animals in our care find forever homes, and we urge all residents who are able to consider adopting and/or fostering an animal. Visit miamidade.gov/animals for more information.

Should you require additional information, please contact Annette Jose, Interim Director at 305-418-7151.

Per Ordinance No. 14-65, this report will be placed on the next available Board meeting agenda.

c: Geri Bonzon-Keenan, County Attorney
Gerald Sanchez, First Assistant County Attorney
Jess McCarty, Executive Assistant County Attorney
Office of the Mayor Senior Staff
Annette Jose, Interim Director, Animal Services Department

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