

Performance Audit Report

PIERCE COUNTY
ANIMAL CONTROL AND PET LICENSING

Performance Audit Committee

September 24, 2009

by

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Pierce County

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September 24, 2009

To: Performance Audit Committee

From: Matt Temmel, Performance Audit Coordinator

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Re: Animal Control and Pet Licensing

In January 2009 Pierce County Auditor Jan Shabro requested a performance audit of animal control and pet licensing services, which are housed in the Auditor's Office. The Performance Audit Committee approved the request and, after a competitive process, obtained the services of contractor Mark Kumpf as a subject matter expert on animal control and licensing.

Mr. Kumpf directs the Animal Resource Center in Dayton, Ohio and is responsible for animal control and licensing in Dayton and other parts of Montgomery County. The Animal Resource Center is nationally recognized and has received awards from the National Association of Counties. Before coming to Ohio, Mr. Kumpf worked in animal control and licensing for two cities in Virginia, first Norfolk and then Newport News. He is immediate Past President of the National Animal Control Association.

This report, besides examining animal control operations, analyzes pet licensing in Pierce County, identifies best practices about pet licensing in other jurisdictions, and makes 12 recommendations. The central question is to what extent pet licensing sales can be increased to provide more support for animal control operations. The report includes comparative data on the incidence of pet licensing and discusses how other jurisdictions have increased license sales.

Conclusions and recommendations are made in the last chapter (page 22). The Auditor's Office agrees with 11 of the 12 recommendations, as discussed in the agency response (page 28).

Mr. Kumpf made a site visit to Pierce County in June. Besides interviewing Pierce County staff, he spent time with animal control and licensing staff from Tacoma, Puyallup, Sumner, and Eatonville. After the site visit, much time was devoted to reviewing and verifying the local information and collecting information about pet licensing in other states.

We appreciate the cooperation received from staff members in the Pierce County Auditor's Office. Mary Schmidtke, Lisa Drury, Tim Anderson, and others provided extensive materials for review and were very helpful in answering questions and resolving data issues.

Rick Talbert, Research Analyst in the Performance Audit Office, worked closely with Mr. Kumpf, the staff in the Auditor's Office, and other local jurisdictions to develop the local information presented in this report. Matt Temmel, Performance Audit Coordinator, oversaw the project and reviewed draft reports in detail to ensure that the work meets performance audit standards.

Note on Compliance with Audit Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives.

Executive Summary

In early 2009 Pierce County Auditor Jan Shabro requested a performance audit of the animal control and pet licensing functions that have been provided by the Auditor's Office since 2006. Pet licensing services include dog, cat, and pet business licenses. Animal control services cover the unincorporated areas of Pierce County and two towns, Wilkeson and South Prairie, which are served under contract. Authorized funding for 2009 for the services is \$1,699,750, with revenues budgeted at \$592,340.

The Humane Society provided these services through 2004, and the Sheriff's Department provided animal control in 2005, and then the Auditor's Office in 2006 became responsible for both animal control and licensing. Shelter services are still provided by the Humane Society under contract at a cost of \$548,140, or almost one-third of the Animal Services annual budget of \$1.7 million.

The audit objectives were:

1. Review the organizational placement of animal control and licensing.
2. Identify best practices to increase pet licensing.
3. Analyze whether animal control and licensing can be revenue-neutral, e.g., whether licensing revenue can be increased to support another animal control officer.
4. Analyze the staffing levels for animal control and licensing.
5. Identify opportunities for inter-local agreements to share resources.
6. Review animal control dispatch and record keeping.

Overall, the report expresses a favorable opinion of the animal services program, while pointing out operational problems and making suggestions on how to improve pet licensing sales. The operational problems exist mainly because the Pierce County animal services program is young and is still experiencing growing pains.

The main conclusions reached in the report are as follows:

- Organizational placement of animal control and licensing in the Auditor's Office is an optimal location.
- Pierce County's pet licensing efforts are comparable to national licensing programs but are under-performing. Pierce County is now licensing pets at roughly half the 1996 rate on a per capita basis.
- Pet licensing sales can be increased greatly, but the increases will not make the animal services program self-supporting.

- The key to increasing pet license sales is to establish outpost locations where licenses can be purchased conveniently, such as pet stores, veterinary clinics, hardware stores, and other retail outlets.
- Vendor fees for pet license sales should be moderate, and the current vendor fee charged by the Humane Society (two-thirds of the license amount) should be re-negotiated.
- Cost savings could be achieved by inter-local purchasing agreements and by contracts for services with nearby jurisdictions.
- Animal control dispatch and recording keeping is operating at average efficiency, but improvements are needed in internal controls, such as developing reports on response times to animal control complaints or requests for service.
- The animal control program should resolve inter-departmental issues with the Sheriff's Department about administration of polygraph exams and whether animal control officers should have access to criminal justice and DOL driver license and vehicle ownership records.

The recommendations include:

1. Develop a marketing program for Animal Control and Licensing which promotes the value of the services provided.
2. Review and revise the current licensing educational materials.
3. Consider privatizing the licensing function by contract.
4. Expand the pet license canvassing program.
5. Establish "outpost" locations for pet license sales.
6. Implement online license sales and renewals.
7. Establish outpost license vendor fees by ordinance or policy at \$4.00 or less.
8. Negotiate sheltering contracts with other agencies, e.g., with Metro Animal Services of Puyallup.
9. Consider joint purchasing agreements with other agencies for supplies and equipment.
10. Resolve information technology issues about current lack of data interconnectivity in order to eliminate duplicate data entry.
11. Resolve internal control issues such as developing program policies and procedures and developing improved statistical reporting.
12. Resolve inter-department issues with the Sheriff's Department regarding polygraph testing of animal control officers and their level of access to criminal justice and DOL records.

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Chapter I: Background

A. Introduction

Animal control and licensing services are currently available to residents of unincorporated Pierce County by staff of the Pierce County Auditor's Office. The Humane Society for Tacoma and Pierce County provided the services until 2004, when the Humane Society stopped contracting with local jurisdictions to provide animal control. In 2005 the Pierce County Sheriff's Department took over animal control, while pet licensing remained under the Humane Society that year. In 2006 the Auditor's Office became responsible for both animal control and licensing.

The two primary functions of animal services are:

- ❑ Animal control in unincorporated Pierce County and in two small towns, Wilkeson and South Prairie, served under contract.
- ❑ Licensing in the same areas, including pet licenses and animal-related businesses for which licenses are required under Title 6 of the Pierce County Code.

Exhibit 1 is an organizational chart of the Auditor's Office, with shading for the positions that provide animal services. Those positions include, at the left, the animal control supervisor, four animal control officers, and a recording / licensing technician who provides administrative support. Pet licenses can be sold by the animal control officers or (moving to the right in the chart) by most of the 19 recording / licensing technicians. (Most technicians are cross trained and can sell various kinds of licenses.) For budgeting purposes, two recording / licensing technicians are charged to animal services, as indicated by shading in Exhibit 1.

Authorized funding in 2009 for animal control and licensing is a total of \$1,699,750, and revenues are budgeted at \$592,340. Exhibit 2 shows revenues and expenditures since 2006. The 2009 figures are budget data as of July 28 this year. As shown in the exhibit, expenditures have increased significantly since 2006, and the growth has outpaced the increase in revenues.

The Humane Society continues to provide shelter services for Pierce County as well as for the City of Tacoma and other jurisdictions. Impounded animals are transported to the shelter where they are held pending redemption by their owner or possible future adoption. The 2009 Pierce County budget for shelter services is \$548,140, or almost one-third of the total Animal Services annual budget of \$1.7 million.

Exhibit 1

Auditor's Office Organizational Chart

As of August 10, 2009

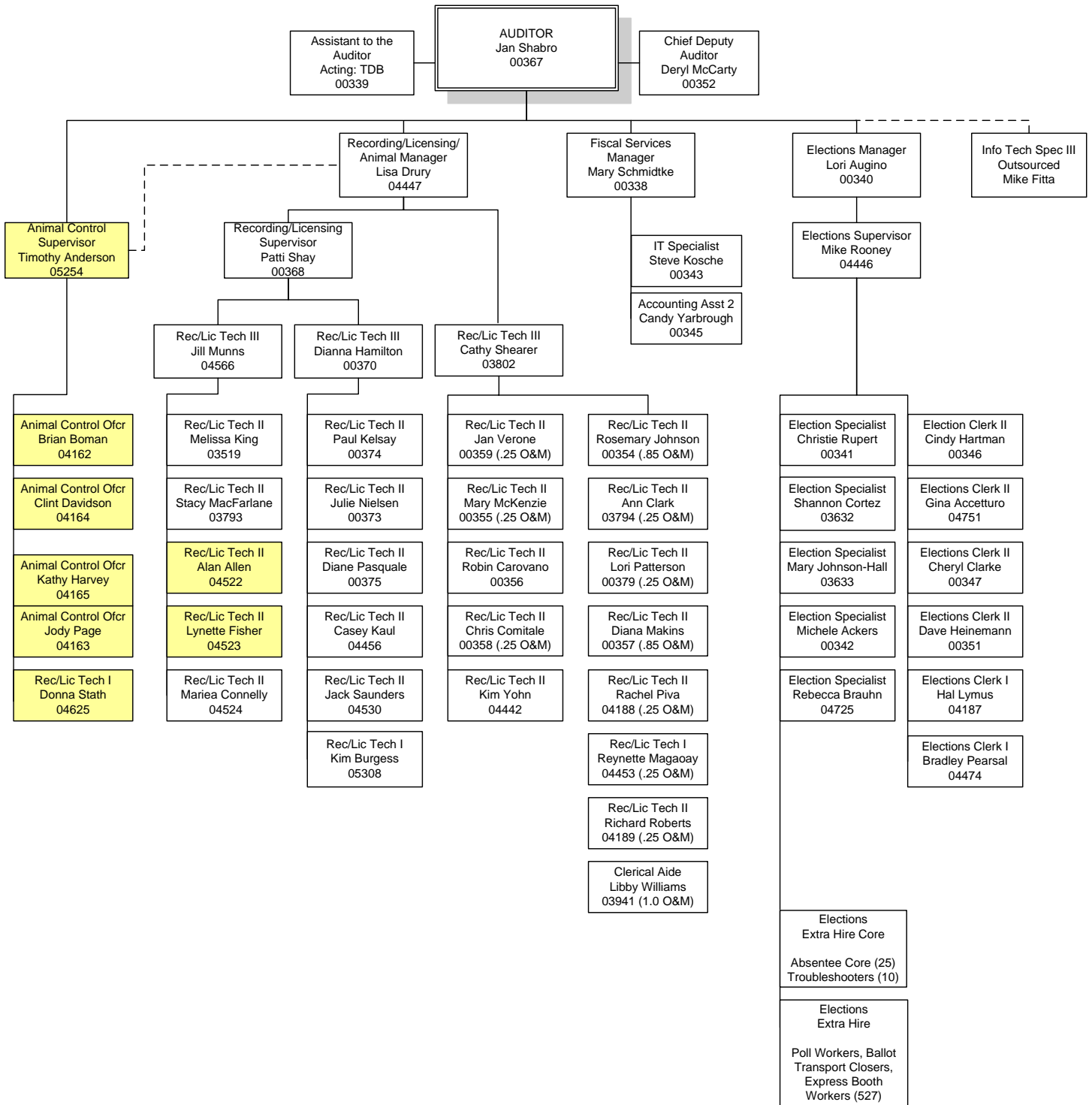
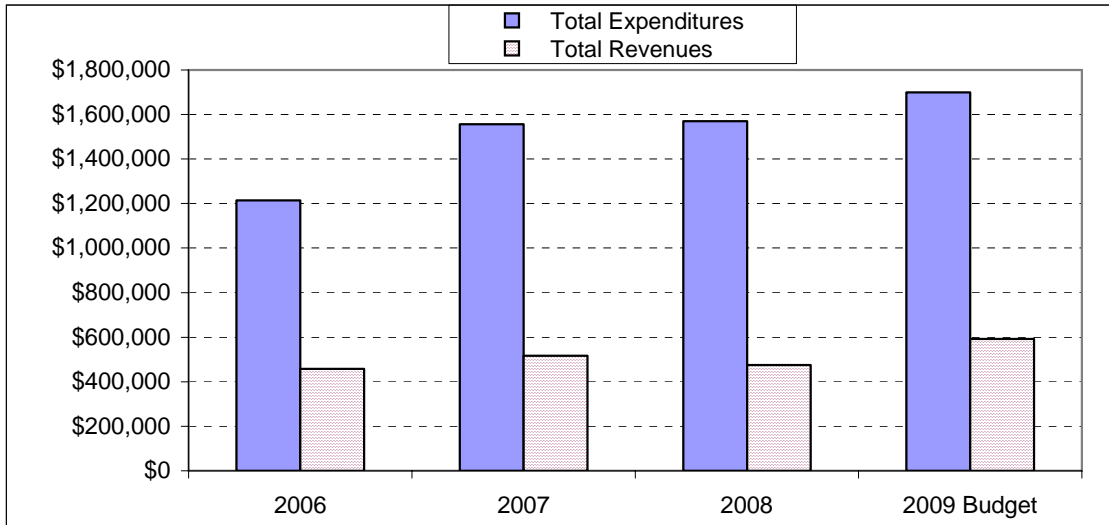


Exhibit 2

Animal Services Revenues and Expenditures



EXPENDITURES	2006	2007	2008	2009 Budget	Percentage Change	
					since 2006	since 2007
Licensing	\$242,301	\$311,128	\$314,436	\$349,260	44%	12%
Animal Control	\$971,411	\$1,223,791	\$1,249,627	\$1,338,390	38%	9%
Other	-	\$21,070	\$6,057	\$12,100		
Total Expenditures	\$1,213,712	\$1,555,989	\$1,570,120	\$1,699,750	40%	9%

REVENUES	2006	2007	2008	2009 Budget	Percentage Change	
					since 2006	since 2007
Animal Business Licenses	\$35,765	\$29,400	\$23,125	\$36,000	1%	22%
Animal Licenses	\$419,802	\$485,797	\$391,476	\$535,000	27%	10%
Contract Revenue	-	\$857	\$2,624	\$3,340		
Other	\$1,623	\$647	\$57,657	\$18,000	1009%	2682%
Total Revenues	\$457,190	\$516,701	\$474,882	\$592,340	30%	15%

Variance (Revenue less Expenditures)	-\$756,522	-\$1,039,288	-\$1,095,238	-\$1,107,410	46%	7%
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Revenue as % of Expenditures	38%	33%	30%	35%
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Data Source: Pierce County Auditor's Office, from accounting system data as of July 28, 2009.

B. Audit Objectives

This performance audit was conducted at the request of the Pierce County Auditor in order to determine how well animal services are currently organized and operated. The audit has six objectives.

1. Review the organization of animal control and licensing in the Auditor's Office and evaluate whether that is the best organizational placement.
2. Identify best practices to increase pet licensing.
3. Analyze whether animal control and licensing can be revenue-neutral or revenue-generating, e.g., whether licensing revenue can be increased to support another animal control officer.
4. Analyze the staffing levels for animal control and licensing.
5. Identify opportunities for inter-local agreements to share resources and develop contracts for service with other Pierce County jurisdictions.
6. Review animal control dispatch and record keeping.

C. Methodology

Contractor Mark Kumpf worked with performance audit staff and collected extensive information about animal control and licensing to address the audit objectives. A site visit was conducted in June for three days, and further data were collected later from both Pierce County and other jurisdictions.

Materials reviewed from Pierce County included licensing materials, animal control operations manual, budget and expenditure data, various program materials, and the 2002 performance audit report by the American Humane Association.

Interviews were conducted with program managers and staff from the Auditor's Office as well as the Humane Society, Sheriff's Department, Canine Advisory Board, City of Tacoma, City of Eatonville, and Metro Animal Shelter in Puyallup.¹

¹ Interviewees from the Auditor's Office included Jan Shabro, Pierce County Auditor; Deryl McCarty, Deputy Auditor; Mary Schmidtke, Fiscal Manager; Lisa Drury, Licensing Manager; Tim Anderson, Animal Control Supervisor; and Jill Munns, licensing tech lead worker. Interviewees at the Humane Society were Kathleen Olson, Director, and Denise McVicker, Deputy Director. Other interviewees in the Tacoma area were Lieutenant Jerry Lawrence, Pierce County Sheriff's Department; Connie Ellis, director of Metro Animal Shelter in Puyallup; Carol Cain and Candy Marzano of the Canine Advisory Board; Danielle Larson of the City of Tacoma animal licensing program; and Tera Pine, animal control officer in Eatonville.

In addition, the contractor contacted national industry leaders and organizations to identify animal services standards and best practices. The organizations included the National Animal Control Association, American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, American Humane Society, International City/County Management Association, and Humane Society of the United States.

Extensive information was also collected from selected counties in Washington and in other states, including Ohio, Minnesota, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. Some of the data is presented in this report.

As result of these data collection efforts, this report contains information on types and levels of service found in other jurisdictions. This helps to provide criteria and models for analysis of animal services in Pierce County, with the focus on ways to increase the number of pet licenses.

It is recognized that the populations and service areas of the other jurisdictions are different from Pierce County. For example, the primary external comparison in this report is with Montgomery County, Ohio, which covers 462 square miles and has a population of 516,000, or 1,117 people per square mile. Pierce County has a smaller population (383,000 in the service area), is far more extensive (approximately 1,200 square miles, excluding federal land), and is less densely populated (approximately 333 people per square mile).

Driving distances and population density clearly affect both the work of animal control officers and the sales of pet licenses, and thus the comparisons with the other jurisdictions should be considered cautiously. While the report does make such comparisons, more emphasis is placed on the approach to pet licensing and the promotional practices in the other jurisdictions. Those matters, it is hoped, will be of interest to Pierce County.

D. Organization of the Report

Chapter II analyzes animal control in unincorporated Pierce County.

Chapter III addresses pet licensing.

Chapter IV reviews the material and presents conclusions and recommendations.

The response by the Auditor's Office appears as Appendix 2.

Chapter II: Animal Control

Pierce County Animal Control is a section of the Pierce County Auditor's Office comprised of six staff members, including a supervisor, four animal control officers (ACO's), and one records / licensing technician who works in dispatch and records. The 2009 budget for Animal Control is \$1,338, 390.

Primary duties include enforcement of state and local animal laws. These include handling various animal-related issues such as:

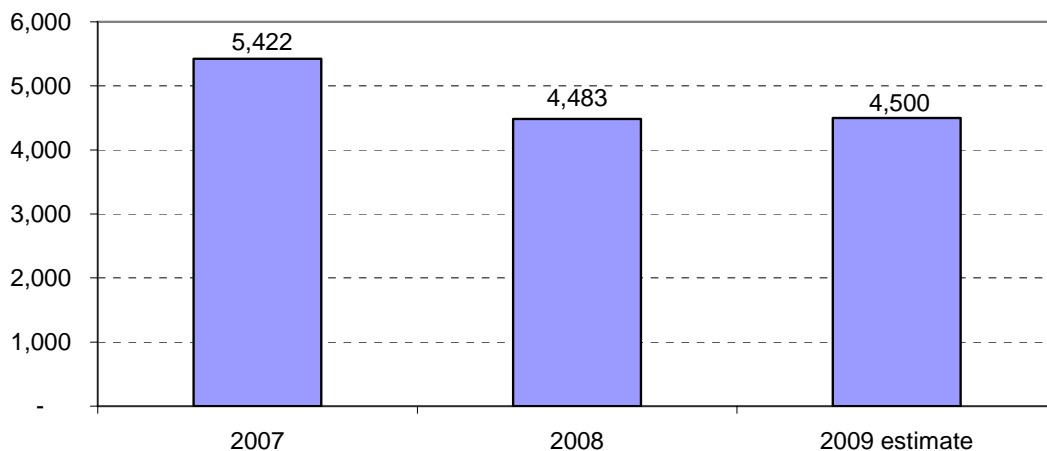
- Vicious animal complaints
- Animal bites
- Barking dog complaints
- Police department assistance
- Patrol requests
- Cruelty investigations
- Domestic animals running at large
- Injured animal rescue
- Loose livestock on roadways
- Animal licensing investigations

A. Calls for Service

Exhibit 3 shows the number of field trips by animal control officers in response to calls for service. The 2009 total is an estimate based on an average of 375 calls for service per month through July.

Exhibit 3

Animal Control Calls for Service



Source: Auditor's Office

Strictly speaking, the "calls for service" are the calls that officers responded to by making a field visit. The decline since 2007 reflects adjustments or improvements in call handling and "triage" within the Animal Control unit. In

general, routine inquiries that in the past would have resulted in an officer responding by going to the scene are now handled by telephone or other means.

According to the Animal Control supervisor, four specific policy changes have played a role in the reduced number of calls for service to which officers respond.

- In 2008, Animal Control initiated a cat trap loan program. Residents can borrow a trap and transport trapped cats to the shelter.
- In 2007, Animal Control adjusted the end of shift from 8:00pm to 6:00pm.
- Starting in 2008, callers with confined stray dogs that were not injured or aggressive were encouraged to bring those animals to the shelter.
- In 2008, Animal Control initiated “complaint resolution by phone” and “infractions via mail” programs for repeat nuisance calls where the parties had previously been contacted in person by an ACO.

Animal control dispatching of officers includes a combination of 9-1-1 calls for service, resident calls to the agency office via the PETS line, and officer-initiated matters. Response time data are maintained only for the 9-1-1 calls (18% of the responses this year). These calls include aggressive animals, bites, animal cruelty in progress, assistance to law enforcement, injured stray animals, and animals in traffic.

Data on calls for service should include response times by type of complaint or type of issue. Some limited reports on response times to 9-1-1 calls are available now, but they do not provide a clear picture of program performance. According to the animal control supervisor, response time reports are being developed, and they will be ready for use within two months.

Based on existing policy, the animal control officers often prioritize calls themselves and decide how to respond. This may not be the most desirable method, but it makes sense given the current limited level of resources. In our opinion, the animal control officers have established a strong work ethic and self-organizational pattern that indicates above average supervision and superior leadership. The ACOs take a particular pride in their ability to handle a consistent workload despite infrastructure limitations.

According to the program staff, the top priorities for responding to a call for service are, in this order, (1) matters of public safety, (2) injured animals, and (3) animal nuisance complaints. We agree with those priorities, but of course it would be most helpful to have reports that document response times to those and other types of calls.

Animal Control involves extensive coordination with the Sheriff's Department, and we interviewed the deputy sheriff who is assigned as the liaison to hear his impressions of the quality of service. According to this source, Animal Control coordinates and cooperates with deputy sheriffs and does an exceptional job of responding to calls for service. The previous placement of Animal Control under the Sheriff in 2005 helped to establish this rapport, and the two agencies have maintained a close, positive working relationship. While there are issues regarding access to data by animal control officers, the representative from the Sheriff's Department emphasized that there are no issues of consequence that impede service to the public.

B. Software and System Issues

Animal control officers are equipped with portable radios, PDA compatible cellular telephones with direct connect service, Mobile Data Terminals, and vehicle radios. Calls are dispatched via all four means. The calls for service from the public are logged via an in-house software program known as "CALI" (Companion Animal Licensing and Incident). Officers are responsible for entering all 9-1-1 dispatched incidents into CALI as well. The duplicate data entry is obviously not as efficient as possible.

According to the information technology staff member who works on these matters, CALI integrates animal licensing, animal incident reporting, and dispatching in one package. The problem of duplicate data entry stems from the highly secure nature of the 9-1-1 CAD system (operated by the Law Enforcement Support Agency) and the reluctance of LESA to allow interconnectivity with any system. The Auditor's Office is aware of the issues and is pursuing a data interchange agreement that will fit into LESA's security model.

C. Officer Access to Records

One area needing resolution involves access by animal control officers to criminal justice data bases and Department of Licensing records (driver's license and vehicle licensing) that officers need to check on occasion as part of their job. Through 2005, persons hired as animal control officers were subject to a full background and history check because they were employees of the Sheriff's Department. However, the service was transitioned to the Auditor's Office in 2006, and the Sheriff's Department has not done full background and history checks since that time.

The result is that the three animal control officers hired by the Sheriff (they now work for the Auditor's Office) have access to the criminal justice and DOL records, while the two officers hired later do not. This issue should be resolved in order to insure that all ACO staff are able to perform at the same level of functionality. Current animal control officers and new hires should be subject to

the same criminal history and background investigations. This would include a polygraph examination.

It is unclear why this matter is an issue in Pierce County but is not controversial in other jurisdictions. In Snohomish County and Thurston County, for example, Animal Control is not located in the Sheriff's Department, yet the Sheriff's Office in those counties conducts full background checks and administers polygraph exams to animal control officer candidates. Thus, when an animal control officer is hired, he or she has access to criminal justice and DOL records.

According to the Auditor's Office, internal discussions with the Sheriff's Department regarding its ability to administer polygraphs to personnel not employed by the Sheriff are yet to be resolved. The issue should be resolved in a timely manner by further discussions. An alternative is to seek legislation or a state level legal opinion confirming that the necessary background investigations may be performed on animal control officers without regard to the agency by which they are employed.

D. Internal Control Issues

Work on developing Standard Operating Procedures for Animal Control began in the summer of 2008 and is still under way. During our site visit in June, a printed copy of the SOP manual was not available for review in the office, although we later received an electronic copy of the document. The manual covers standard policies and instructions for patrol operations, case investigations, report types, personnel issues, and many other matters. Overall, in our opinion, the content, organization, and applicability of the manual are above average when compared to other agencies nationwide, but the manual should be available in the office in hard copy for easy access.

As mentioned above in the discussion of calls for service (page 7), the agency has limited statistical data on animal control operations and performance. According to section 9.5 in the Standard Operating Procedures, the Animal Control supervisor is responsible for collating and maintaining this information on the activity / statistical record spreadsheet and notes that it is the Animal Control Supervisor's responsibility to collate and maintain this information. While much information was forwarded for review during this performance audit, the materials did not include a standard data sheet in electronic or manual form that was readily available for review.

A related problem is that multiple systems (such as 9-1-1, CALI, and ANTHEM) must be accessed to gather information regarding operational projections and performance accountability, and in some cases the information from the various systems is not comparable. Effective performance requires good data and effective documentation. Anecdotal performance data, especially when not maintained in a consistent fashion, does not serve a meaningful purpose.

E. Animal Sheltering

Pierce County sheltering services are contracted to the Humane Society of Tacoma-Pierce County. All impounded animals are transported to the shelter where there are held pending redemption by their owner or possible future adoption.

Pierce County payments to the Humane Society in 2009 will total approximately \$548,140 to provide shelter services for 6,500 animals, or a base rate of \$84.33 per animal.² The base rate appears reasonable compared with per animal costs in other shelters around the nation.

Under the current contract, fees collected by the Humane Society are retained by that organization as a supplement to the annual contracted amount. In addition, when pet licenses are sold during the adoption process or as part of an after-hours redemption, two-thirds of the license fee is retained by the Humane Society. This practice is the same as in the City of Tacoma, but it is quite different from what occurs in other states, as addressed later in the report (p. 16).

Within Pierce County, there are other inter-local agreements for animal sheltering. The cities of Sumner and Puyallup established the Metro Animal Services Joint Board to collectively operate a regional shelter facility. Both share in the operations costs. The facility handles approximately 1,200 animals per year. The cities of Edgewood and Bonney Lake contract with Metro Animal Services for animal control and sheltering.

The Metro Animal Services facility is insufficient to house the large volume of animals from Pierce County. However, it may be possible for Pierce County to develop an agreement with Metro Animal Services to use the facility as a satellite shelter. This would avoid always having to drive from areas in eastern Pierce County to the Humane Society shelter located in Tacoma.

² These are annualized figures, a combination of the 2008 rates that remained in effect in January 2009 and the 2009 rates in effect for February-December. The contract also provides for payments of various other fees.

Chapter III: Pet Licensing

The current placement of Pierce County Licensing services within the Auditor's Office provides the infrastructure and support for the data collection related to pet licensing as well as the financial processing for all pet and business animal licenses. This function has both dedicated and shared staff within the Auditor's Office. The program is designed to provide excellent public service within a multi-tasking office environment.

In our opinion, customer service at the office is exemplary. In interviews, staff members demonstrated a thorough understanding of the licensing program and its components. This refers to both the counter staff and the supervisors. Despite some software and technical compatibility issues, the overall operation is well organized and efficient.

Customers seeking to purchase licenses directly at the counter are met by courteous and knowledgeable staff members who also answer questions and handle transactions promptly. Mail-in licenses are also handled in a similarly efficient manner. Based on observations and interviews with staff members, the backlog in license processing is small and seldom exceeds five business days.

A. Pierce County Pet License Trend

The number of pet licenses is discussed below from two viewpoints:

- The short-term picture since 2006, when the Auditor's Office became responsible for pet licensing, and
- The long-term picture going back to the 1990's, when animal control and pet licensing were operated by the Humane Society under contract with Pierce County.

Exhibit 4 shows details of pet license sales since 2006.

The Exhibit 4 totals for 2006, 2007, and 2008 are 2% to 3% higher than what the Auditor's Office reported to the County Council in those years. The Auditor's Office recently discovered the data problem and corrected the reporting this year (e.g., in the report to the Public Safety Committee on August 24, 2009). The "old data" came from the agency's CALI system, whereas the "new data" (reported above) come from the receipting system (Anthem) and are considered more accurate than the previously-reported information.

Exhibit 4
Pet License Sales, 2006 - 2009

License Type	2006	2007	2008	2009 thru July
Altered Cat	5,996	6,197	4,762	4,061
Altered Cat Senior Owner	1,638	1,901	1,443	1,301
Altered Dog	12,413	13,428	11,013	8,970
Altered Dog Senior Owner	3,352	3,940	3,226	2,972
Juvenile Cat	0	0	13	12
Juvenile Dog	0	0	74	119
Replacement Tag	67	115	95	50
Unaltered Cat	27	10	21	12
Unaltered Cat Senior Owner	14	14	13	6
Unaltered Dog	949	1,076	992	732
Unaltered Dog Senior Owner	236	287	259	213
Total	24,692	26,968	21,911	18,448

Source: Auditor's Office "Anthem" (receipting) system.

As shown above, sales of pet licenses dropped sharply in 2008 to 21,911, which has stimulated interest in how to improve performance. Sales in 2009 have picked up, with over 18,000 licenses sold through July. At that rate, the estimated annual total for 2009 is a little less than 25,000 pet licenses.³ This would be an improvement over the 2008 sales, but it will be lower than the sales in 2007.

The long-term perspective is of interest. Pet license sales and the resulting revenue have decreased significantly compared to license sales administered by the Humane Society. The data were first presented in the 2001-2002 performance audit report by the American Humane Association.⁴

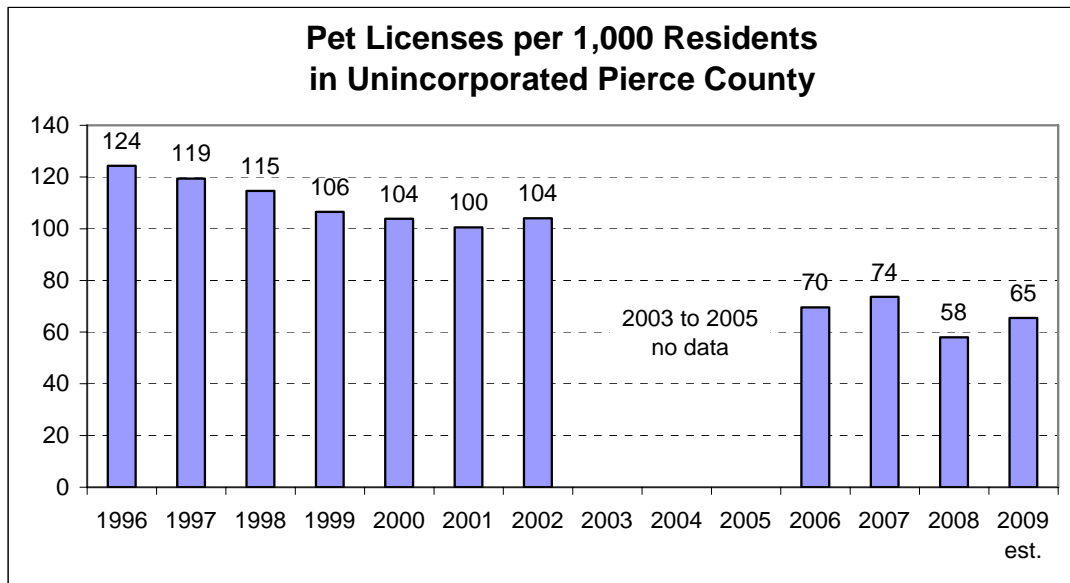
In 1996, the Humane Society sold over 36,000 pet licenses for Pierce County, and the sales trend has been generally downward since that time. Exhibit 5 shows the data for dog and cat licenses and the number of pet licenses per 1,000 residents in unincorporated Pierce County. On a per capita basis, the number of pet licenses now is approximately half of the 1996 level.

³ This estimate is based on data from the Auditor's Office on January-July sales in previous years, which were about 75% of the annual sales.

⁴ American Humane Association, *Program Evaluation: Pierce County, Washington, Contract for Services with The Humane Society for Tacoma and Pierce County*, January 4, 2002, pet license data on page 15.

**Exhibit 5
Pierce County Pet Licenses**

	Dog Licenses	Cat Licenses	Total	Estimated Population Unincorporated Pierce County	Pet Licenses per 1,000 Residents
1996	24,967	11,769	36,736	295,533	124
1997	24,606	11,339	35,945	301,196	119
1998	24,593	10,737	35,330	308,270	115
1999	23,619	10,081	33,700	316,566	106
2000	23,694	10,103	33,797	325,359	104
2001	22,782	9,750	32,532	323,741	100
2002	23,754	10,486	34,240	329,208	104
2003	No data, 2003 - 2005			332,980	
2004				339,477	
2005				345,940	
2006	17,017	7,675	24,692	355,089	70
2007	18,846	8,122	26,968	365,910	74
2008	15,659	6,252	21,911	377,660	58
2009 est.	17,500	7,500	25,000	382,115	65



Sources: Pet license data are from the Humane Society 1996 - 2002 and from the Auditor's Office since 2006, from the receipting system used by each agency. Population data are from the OFM population series for distribution of state revenue.

The data in Exhibit 5 come from the Humane Society and from the Pierce County Auditor's Office, and it is possible that the data are affected by the different information systems or different ways of counting used by the two organizations. However, we believe that the figures are comparable.

- The Auditor's Office numbers (2006 – 2009) come from the agency's receipting system (known as Anthem).
- The Humane Society numbers (1996 – 2002) were collected several years ago from that agency's receipting system, and the figures are consistent with the licensing revenue reported in the Humane Society's audited financial statements.

Our conclusion is that the figures are comparable and that Pierce County is now licensing dogs and cats at roughly half the 1996 rate.

Many persons interviewed for this report suggested that the drop in pet licensing reflects public confusion about licensing requirements and specifically about where licenses can be obtained. For many years, the Humane Society was the sole point of sale for pet licenses. It is now an "outpost" sales location (selling pet licenses when animals are adopted or reclaimed from the shelter), and the public does not clearly perceive the Auditor's Office as the new central sales location.

Another factor may be that the public is more willing to buy a pet license from a private nonprofit organization such as the Humane Society than from a governmental organization. However, as shown later in the report, sales of pet licenses by other local governments exceed the sales rate in Pierce County.

B. Licensing Outreach and Promotion

We reviewed the educational materials and license campaign information recently or currently used in Pierce County. A combination of posters, door hangers, and similar items provide information on license purchase requirements. A key means for notifying licensees is a mailed renewal notice. The renewal notice contains the pet information, animal educational notes, contact information for community programs, and information about Animal Control. The notice is comprehensive. However, some material used in license mailings or renewals is not optimally configured:

- Key information which would be better left with the customer is printed on the sections that must be returned for processing.
- Information is repeated resulting in wasted printing.
- The renewal notice does not include an envelope.

Using Montgomery County, Ohio as a comparison, changes to this template could help increase license compliance by 1%-2% while helping to increase public awareness related to animal control and licensing. Montgomery County license returns from a "return envelope" mailer versus a "reminder notice" showed 2% more renewals when an envelope was provided.

Pet licensing in unincorporated Pierce County is not currently available via the Internet, nor are there additional outlets for license purchases throughout the county. These areas present significant opportunities to increase license sales. The Auditor's animal control web page generates considerable traffic, with 4,159 visits to the page this year through July 12. This represents a valuable outlet to increase sales and promote operations.

The Auditor's Office indicates that online license sales and renewals are under development. The only online pet license function available currently is a pet license request form that can be downloaded from the website. Implementation of online sales has the potential to increase license sales overall by 3% or more. Online license sales will also reduce counter traffic allowing for possible cost savings in the Auditor's Office.

The City of Tacoma implemented an online licensing renewal program in May 2008. During the first month, online renewals amounted to 5% of license sales totals and reached 10% in three months. During the first fifteen months of online license availability in Tacoma (through August 18, 2009), 9% of total pet license sales were made online, and the monthly web percentages have been over 11% each month in 2009. These figures apply to renewals only. Online sale of new licenses is in the planning stage.

Montgomery County, Ohio established an online licensing program in 2007 that accepted both new and renewal license purchases. Previously, only an application or renewal form was available online, as is the case in Pierce County currently. Online sales were slow in 2007 but took off the next year. In 2008, online license sales accounted for 9,098 pet licenses with 1,150 renewal forms downloaded. Figures for 2009 year to date account for 11,198 online licenses and 719 downloads of renewal forms. Online license sales currently account for more than 16% of all licenses sold in 2009, and each online sale includes a \$2.00 convenience charge.

Establishing "outpost" sales locations is highly desirable as a method to increase pet license sales. Pet stores, veterinary clinics, hardware stores, and other retail outlets are viable license sales locations. Increasing accessibility to license sales will continue to yield increased license sales. Outposts may yield another 2%-3% increase in sales, or possibly more, depending on how the sales are organized and promoted.

The one current outpost location is the Humane Society (located on Center Street in Tacoma), which sells pet licenses for animals adopted or reclaimed from the shelter. This service started in February 2009 by agreement with Pierce County and includes unusually high vendor fees.

During a sample week in June, the Humane Society collected \$457 in gross revenue for pet licenses and retained \$306 (67%) as its share. Further inquiries were made, and we obtained sales data over six months (February-July 2009). During that time, according to the Auditor's Office, the Humane Society sold 688 pet licenses (3.7% of Pierce County total license sales). The gross revenue was \$12,845. Under the terms of the contract, the Humane Society compensation was two-thirds of the gross, or \$8,606.15, and Pierce County received the rest.

The licensing and related administrative work performed by the Humane Society does not appear to justify the high level of this charge. The Auditor's Office is aware of the situation and notes that other jurisdictions that contract with the Humane Society for shelter services incur a similar charge for licensing.

In other jurisdictions with which the author is familiar, local ordinances provide that a small vendor fee may be added to the license cost as a fee for completing the transaction, usually in the range of \$1.00 to \$4.00. In Montgomery County, Ohio, outposts may charge \$0.75 as a vendor fee for each pet license sold. In Norfolk, Virginia, local code allows a handling fee of \$1.00.

Besides outpost sales, there are vendors such as Pet Data, Inc. who administer licensing programs around the country.⁵ This vendor provides services in Lakewood and Steilacoom, Washington for a similar per license cost. This vendor provides all services related to licensing, such as

- Mail license tags, notices, and reminders
- Process license applications and online license sales
- Maintain privacy of licensing data
- Deposit license revenue
- Provide customer service to pet owners and agencies.

C. Pet Licensing in Tacoma and Eatonville

We conducted a limited review of licensing activities in other Pierce County jurisdictions, with the focus on the City of Tacoma (population 203,400) and the Town of Eatonville (2,405). While these jurisdictions are not comparable to each other or to Pierce County, they illustrate certain features about pet licensing.

⁵ See <http://www.petdata.com/cs/lak/>

The City of Tacoma contracts with Humane Society for shelter services, on terms similar to Pierce County, employs its own animal control officers, and administers a pet licensing program. Tacoma handles licensing similar to Pierce County, although the city has already implemented on-line license renewals.

One key difference is that Tacoma uses the Chameleon software, which has integrated animal control and licensing components; the system is used for dispatching, incident recording, and pet licensing. Tacoma staff members indicate that Chameleon is a great asset, and they credit the software with a large role in allowing the city to operate animal control and licensing successfully.

We made a visit to the Tacoma office and observed that the licensing and animal control staff members are professional and customer oriented.

We also visited the Town of Eatonville, which has a small holding kennel and contracts with the Humane Society to accept any unclaimed dogs or cats after the required holding period. Eatonville has a part-time animal control officer who is also responsible for pet licensing.⁶ According to the national formula for estimating pet populations, Eatonville has approximately 632 dogs. In 2008, the town sold 696 licenses. This high level of performance is possible due to the small population, the ability to visit every household, and the dedication and outstanding work of the animal control officer.

Canvassing as occurs in Eatonville is not practical for Pierce County as a whole, as hiring the needed number of canvassers would be cost prohibitive because of the large geographic area. However, targeted canvassing in selected heavily-populated areas is possible using seasonal or temporary employees. If canvassing is well organized, it can bring in a significant amount of net revenue.

Current canvassing efforts in Pierce County are limited. Animal Control has an “extra hire” position that is used to assist on occasion. Recent canvassing events focused on pet-related businesses and on apartment complexes where animal control problems were known to exist. A large number of animals were impounded, but there were virtually no license sales.

“Door to door” canvassing in residential neighborhoods was tried in the summer of 2007, but the costs exceeded the revenue from the sale of pet licenses. The canvassers did not have authority to issue citations for unlicensed pets, whereas an animal control officer would have such authority, but the canvassing costs would be much higher. In nearby counties Thurston County has stopped canvassing, while King, Snohomish, and Clark counties canvass during the summer, but the efforts are not notably successful for raising revenues.⁷

⁶ Town of Eatonville 2009 License Compliance Report.

⁷ Information from personal contacts and from Pet Licensing Canvassing Program Report, Pierce County Auditor’s Office, May 5, 2008.

D. Licensing Coverage in Pierce County and Other Jurisdictions

Exhibit 6 shows pet licensing fees and animal control information for selected counties in Washington. The Pierce County fees are about average.

Exhibit 6
Pet License Fees

County	Dog Fee (a)	Cat Fee (a)
Pierce	\$20 / \$55	\$12 / \$55
Snohomish	\$20 / \$40	\$20 / \$40
Kitsap	\$12.50 / \$37.50	\$7.50 / \$37.50
King	\$30 / \$90	\$30 / \$90
Spokane	\$20 / \$40	\$15 / \$215

(a) Altered / unaltered.

Last year, the Performance Audit Committee reviewed and compared Pierce County's pet license performance in terms of pet license sales per 1,000 residents and as a percentage of the estimated number of dogs and cats using national estimating formulas. It was found that Pierce County in 2007 licensed 13% of the estimated number of pets compared with 11% in both Snohomish and Kitsap counties. License sales appear to be related to the population density of the service areas, and thus Tacoma and King County had the highest licensing rates (23% and 22% of the estimated number of pets). The King County service area, which includes 20 contract cities as well as the unincorporated county, has a denser population than unincorporated Pierce County.⁸

That analysis is valid, in our opinion, and can be repeated here with similar data from Montgomery County, Ohio (Dayton area). That jurisdiction does not require cat licenses, so the following analysis is limited to dogs. Unfortunately, we had to drop Snohomish and Kitsap counties from the analysis because, while the total number of pet licenses is known, records are not kept breaking down the total into the number of dog and cat licenses.

Exhibit 7 shows the dog licensing performance in 2007.

⁸ Memorandum on pet licensing, Performance Audit Committee, October 16, 2008, posted at <http://www.piercecountywa.org/performance-audit>.

Exhibit 7

Estimated Percentage of Licensed Dogs, 2007

Locale	Estimated Dogs	Dog Licenses	Dogs % Licensed
Pierce County	92,502	18,846	20%
Tacoma	50,990	14,790	29%
King County	293,391	88,686	30%
Montgomery County, Ohio	130,445	73,062	56%

Based on the above figures (2007 data), if Pierce County could license 56% of the estimated dogs, it would sell 51,801 dog licenses. At \$20 per license, the additional gross revenue would be \$659,000.

Unincorporated Pierce County has greater distances and is less densely populated than Montgomery County, and for that reason it may not be realistic to achieve a 56% licensing rate. However, since the Humane Society achieved much higher licensing rates than currently exist in Pierce County, it is clear there is substantial room to improve license sales based on existing unlicensed animals.

It may be helpful to suggest a **licensing goal** for Pierce County. The 2009 estimate for sale of dog licenses, based on actual sales through July, is approximately 17,500. For a future year, we suggest a goal of 24,967 dog licenses, which was the number sold in 1996. (See above, page 13, Exhibit 5.) That would involve an increase of 7,467 dog licenses over the current level. If license fees remain the same (such as \$20 for an altered dog), the additional revenue would be approximately \$149,000.

This is an attainable goal, in our opinion, and the Auditor's Office or the policy makers can decide how soon it should be accomplished. If the goal is considered too low, then a higher number can be chosen.

E. Licensing Improvement Strategies

A number of strategies or approaches are available to increase revenue, such as increasing license sales, reducing overhead and operational costs, and achieving savings through joint operations. These approaches have been implemented successfully in various animal control and licensing agencies, and some examples are noted in this section. Pierce County has considered some of these options and may be able to utilize them to improve the ratio of animal services revenues to expenditures. As shown above on page 3, program revenues have supported 30% to 38% of expenditures since 2006.

Animal Control Management, a 2001 publication by the International City/County Management Association, includes good examples of ways to make small additional expenditures and increase revenues quite substantially. In 1996 Minneapolis animal control instituted a license promotion program that made license applications more widely accessible, expanded outpost sales to veterinary clinics, and conducted neighborhood licensing drives; license sales rose 12% the first year. A jurisdiction in Maryland invested \$5,000 in a licensing promotional campaign and increased revenue by \$54,000 in a year. Allegheny County, Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh) included a dog license registration form with a standard tax bill mailing that is reported to have jumped registered dogs from 44,000 in 1998 to nearly 100,000 in 1999.⁹

Montgomery County, Ohio reduced its 2008 advertising budget and is on track to increase license sales by 3% in 2009. Funds were reallocated resulting in overall cost savings from printing of \$7,000. Rather than printing license materials every year, the printing costs were reduced by designing mailing materials that were multi-year viable. License advertisements are produced in house and use a blended media approach with Internet advertising (Face Book, YouTube, and County websites), print media (local paper and advertising circulars), broadcast media (radio, television, and Internet), and press releases and local city publications. The advertising budget was reduced 40%, but we expect to achieve a 3% increase in license sales in a severely limited economy. Net revenue gain from savings and increased sales is expected to total over \$50,000.

Marketing campaigns that focus on penalties and ignore the benefits contribute to a negative perception of pet licensing and animal control. Dog or cat licenses may be perceived as just another “tax” to support government, especially if the message content is negative or does not provide good reasons to license a pet.

In Montgomery County, the focus is on the positive benefits of pet licensing. Messaging is constant and includes key points such as:

- A free ride home to the owner’s residence before impoundment.
- Extended holding times (14 days instead of three).
- Key means of reuniting lost pets with owners.
- Emergency veterinary care if needed.
- Special vacation registration programs for traveling owners.

⁹ ICMA, *Animal Control Management* (2001), pp. 22-23.

Appendix 1 of this report includes examples of Montgomery County advertising materials. The campaign poster includes a pet-friendly picture, a brief list of the benefits of licensing your pet, and clear contact information (mail, in person, or online). Enforcement is mentioned on both the poster and the pre-printed envelope, but the wording is positively phrased and is consistent with the positive tone of the overall message.

Appendix 1 also includes material from Spokane that compares a pet license to a driver's license. The idea is to build "necessity" into license purchasing by associating it with a driver's license, a form of identification that is widely accepted as desirable and necessary.

Other tools that can increase license sales include license penalty amnesty, extended sales dates, and microchip service discounts. A recent amnesty program in Montgomery County was promoted for two weeks using press releases, television and Internet advertising, and a daily radio announcement. The promotion cost \$1,500 in out of pocket expenses. During the campaign, a total of 1,207 dog licenses were sold generating \$19,132 in revenue, or \$12.75 for each \$1.00 spent. Other jurisdictions in Ohio have followed this program.

Special canvassing is utilized on occasion. Animal control officers are assigned to canvassing patrols at the end of the penalty-free license sales period. Using the license sales database and calls for service database, areas are selected for door-to-door foot patrol. In areas where license compliance is low and calls for service are high, officers are assigned individual streets or small blocks to check for license compliance. Clerical staff and officers also have a list of un-renewed licenses. Non-renewing pet owners may receive a telephone call, a mailed notice, or an in-person visit to secure license renewals. Since implementation of online service in 2007, pet owners with email addresses on file receive an electronic reminder to renew expired tags.

Finally, it should be mentioned that animal services agencies in different jurisdictions can achieve cost savings by cooperative purchasing agreements. Bulk orders or combined shipping are key savings points. Operational equipment and supplies such as vehicles, animal control equipment, and special cleaning products are all candidates for review. Montgomery County includes each of its two local humane agencies when making purchases that can benefit from bulk or enhanced orders. One such purchase for suture material resulted in a savings of \$6,000 that could not have been achieved by any one agency. A working committee of agency supervisors reviews purchasing needs on a quarterly basis. Such purchasing could be done in Pierce County if the various jurisdictions have or can develop close working relationships.

Chapter IV: Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Conclusions

The Pierce County Animal Control and Licensing program is facing the same challenges as many agencies across the country. Elected officials and program managers face declining revenues and rising expectations. Public perceptions and expectations for services are higher than in past decades, but it is also generally true that license sales and other revenue generating programs dependant on public participation are not keeping pace with service costs.

The Pierce County Auditor's Office has demonstrated its commitment to improved service by requesting a performance audit of animal services and by cooperating fully with the project as the work was being carried out.

A general conclusion of this report is that the Pierce County Auditor's Office is providing animal services that are comparable with other agencies in this region. This is a good accomplishment for a program now in its fourth year of operation. Pet licensing sales, however, are now much lower than in the past, and it will take vision, commitment, and public support to reverse the trend and significantly increase pet licensing sales.

The objectives of this study (page 4) addressed important issues, and our conclusions are as follows.

1. The placement of the Pierce County Animal Control and Licensing function under the Auditor's Office is an optimal location. Changes to this placement would further hurt license revenue.
2. Pierce County pet licensing efforts are similar to average national licensing operations, but they are under-performing. Pierce County is now licensing pets at roughly half the 1996 rate on a per capita basis. Pet licensing revenue can be increased significantly by adopting some or all of the strategies discussed in this report.
3. While pet licensing sales can certainly be increased, it is unrealistic to expect that increased sales perhaps combined with higher license fees could make the animal services program self-supporting. As shown in the exhibit on page 3, program revenues have supported 30% to 38% of the annual expenditures since 2006, and the "deficit" (expenditures less revenues) is in the range of \$750,000 to \$1.1 million per year. Increased pet licensing sales can narrow that gap significantly – but not eliminate it.

4. The current staffing levels for animal control and pet licensing are comparable to other jurisdictions in Washington as well as nationally. Staff increases for animal control would be beneficial and could be supported to some extent by increased license sales. In the current budget environment, however, we recognize that it would be an accomplishment simply to maintain the current staffing level.
5. Sheltering costs currently absorb about one-third of the animal services budget. These costs are average when compared to other shelters nationally.
6. To increase license sales, Pierce County should strongly consider adding outpost locations where pet licenses can be conveniently purchased, such as pet stores, veterinary clinics, hardware stores, and other retail outlets.
7. Vendor fees for license sales at outpost locations should be moderate. The current vendor fees charged by the Humane Society (two-thirds of the pet license fees) should be renegotiated.
8. Opportunities are available and should be pursued to develop inter-local agreements on sharing of resources and contracts for service. There are also significant opportunities for bulk purchasing of vehicles and other animal control equipment.
9. Animal control dispatch and record keeping is operating at average efficiency.
10. The animal services program has significant internal control issues such as a need for a completed policy and procedure manual, better statistical data on animal control operations, ongoing software or data issues, and some confusion about how to count the number of pet licenses that are sold. (The agency may have resolved the license counting issue by deciding recently to collect license data from the remittance system.) For the most part, these internal control problems exist because the Pierce County animal services program is young and is still experiencing growing pains.
11. The discussions between the Auditor's Office and the Sheriff's Department on the latter's ability to run background checks and administer polygraph exams to animal control officers and grant them access to criminal justice and DOL records should be brought to a fruitful conclusion. In other jurisdictions the issue appears not to exist, or it has been resolved successfully.

B. Recommendations

1. Promote the Animal Control and Licensing value of service to the community by developing a marketing plan that includes:
 - a. A mission statement and strategic plan with short and long term goals.
 - b. Emphasis on education, quality of community life (for both people and pets), and the value of animal control and animal licensing.
 - c. Expanded use of Internet and web based advertising such as Face Book, MySpace, and Twitter.
2. Review current license promotion materials and revise as noted:
 - a. License mailing reminder form should be reformatted to provide optimal information retention for residents. The current mailer returns key information to the Auditor's Office. Key information should be relocated on the form so that it can be retained by the pet owner.
 - b. Create thematic posters or flyers to promote value of licensing borrowing from national best practices.
 - c. Consider a self-contained license mailing envelope.
3. Consider alternative vendors such as Pet Data, Inc. for privatizing the licensing function by contract.
4. Expand canvassing program as noted:
 - a. Use license database information to create a daily canvass list.
 - b. Use seasonal employees to canvass in residential neighborhoods.
 - c. Advertise the canvassing program.
5. Expand "outpost" license sales locations as noted:
 - a. Add specific pet-oriented vendor locations such as veterinarians, grooming shops, and pet shops.
 - b. Add retail vendor locations such as grocery and hardware stores.
 - c. Attend community events both pet and non-pet related.

6. Implement online license sales and renewals. Incorporate e-mail notices to reduce mailing costs.
7. Revise the current license vendor fee agreements. Establish vendor fees by ordinance or policy at \$4.00 or less per license.
8. Animal sheltering costs and agreements should be revisited and may be improved through leveraged contracting among similar agencies.
 - a. Conduct feasibility negotiations with Metro Animal Services or a private contractor.
 - b. Negotiate Humane Society contract collectively with all jurisdictions participating.
9. Consult with local government agencies to determine if cost savings for equipment or supplies may be realized by bulk purchasing. Establish a local purchasing committee among shelters and animal control agencies.
10. Review software packages for animal services and resolve issues of data interconnectivity that would eliminate duplicate data entry.
11. Resolve internal control issues:
 - a. Create daily / monthly animal control statistical performance record to track productivity.
 - b. Organize and expand policy and procedure manual. Format it for written and online formats.
 - c. Decide the best method of counting the number of pet licenses.
12. Resolve inter-departmental issues with the Sheriff's Department about administration of polygraph exams and whether animal control officers should have access to criminal justice and DOL driver's license and vehicle ownership records. If necessary, inquire further in other jurisdictions in Washington and learn how they handle the issues. If necessary, seek legislation or legal opinion about the Sheriff's ability to administer necessary background checks and polygraph procedures for Animal Control Officer new hires so that all officers have the same level of access to data systems needed in their work.

Appendix 1
Sample License Campaign Materials



**SO EASY,
A DOG COULD DO IT.**

**NOW YOU'VE GOT MORE OPTIONS THAN EVER!
BY MAIL, IN PERSON, OR ONLINE AT WWW.MCOHIO.ORG**

The benefits of licensing your pet:

- ✓ Peace of mind: 24 hour identification and we know you care about your K9 family member
- ✓ A ticket home: Your \$16 license provides them a ride home and you avoid \$150 ticket
- ✓ Safe shelter: Good food, a warm bed and emergency care

License your dog today!
Licensing dates: December 1 through January 31
Montgomery County Animal Resource Center
6790 Webster Street • Dayton, Ohio 45414
937-898-4457 ext. 8
www.mcohio.org



MONTGOMERY
C O U N T Y

Adoption Hours: Monday-Friday 10:00-6:00, Saturday 10:00-4:00, Sundays & Holidays Closed

Montgomery County, Ohio Dog License Pre-Printed Envelope

The benefits of licensing your pet:

- ✓ **Peace of mind:** 24 hour identification and we know you care about your K9 family member
- ✓ **A ticket home:** Your \$16 license provides them a ride home and you avoid a \$150 ticket
- ✓ **Safe shelter:** Good food, a warm bed and emergency care



DOG LICENSE APPLICATION
PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

LICENSE FEE \$16

Owner Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Other Phone _____

Microchip # _____ Email _____

Pet Age _____ Breed _____ Hair Length (s) _____ (m) _____ (l) _____

Colors _____ Male Female Neutered Spayed

Enclosed is an additional tax deductible donation of \$ _____ for the Tiny Tim Injured Animal Fund. The Tiny Tim Fund helps treat injured or sick adoptable animals.

Did you remember to enclose:

- A check or money order made out to: Montgomery County Auditor.
- No cash please!
- Microchip number if available.
- Pet description is important!

For additional pets, enclose separate sheet.

Use this envelope to mail in your license fee or you can buy your DOG License at a number of outlets including:
Animal Resource Center
 6790 Webster St.
 (Credit Cards accepted at this location)
937-898-4457 ext. 8
 or visit www.mcoho.org

Montgomery County Auditor's Office
 401 W. Third St. or call for other licensing locations at **937-225-4314**
 or visit www.mcoho.org/dogs for more information.

Spokane, Washington License Promotion Flier



ID Required!

Prove that you care by licensing your pet today!

Benefits of licensing:

- Will help return your lost pet to you
- Pays for adoption and protection services to reduce or eliminate euthanasia of adoptable animals
- Avoids a fine of up to \$200 for an unlicensed pet

