



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

Public Spay/Neuter Program for Dogs
Minutes

Tuesday, August 11, 2026, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Commissioners' Boardroom
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231
Salem, Oregon 97301

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Kevin Cameron, Danielle Bethell and Colm Willis.

Board's Office: Jonathan Sanford, Alvin Klausen, Kendall Hall, Trevor Lane and Matt Lawyer.

Legal Counsel: Jennifer Rodgers.

Community and Economic Development (CED): Brian Smith, Kelli Weese, Carrie Sawyers, Lauren Thielke, and Glenda Hazard.

Zoom: Kathy Rogers

Commissioner Colm Willis called the meeting to order at 11:05 p.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Colm Willis

2. Public Spay/Neuter Program Options

-Lauren Thielke

- Marion County Dog Services:
 - Provides housing and care for stray and abandoned dogs in Marion County.
 - Has been at or above capacity for most of the past few years.
 - Has seen an increase in puppies and pregnant females entering shelter.
- A significant driver is limited access to affordable spay/neuter:
 - Individuals experiencing homelessness.
 - Low-income pet owners who cannot afford private veterinary care.
- There is a national veterinarian shortage, affecting local capacity.
- County has only one low-cost voucher program with waitlists and delays.
- In a prior work session, the Board directed staff to:
 - Develop a \$5,000 public spay/neuter voucher program.
 - Design a \$25,000 high volume spay/neuter event.
- Budget Direction Clarification:
 - \$30,000 decision package submitted for Fiscal Year (FY) 26–27 budget:
 - Not included in proposed budget.
 - Board previously gave explicit direction to fund this item.
 - Request may have been lumped into broader materials & services M&S line.
 - Reestablish \$30,000 allocation by supplemental budget or similar action.
- Regulatory & Veterinary Oversight Constraints:

- Once surgeries are performed on owned animals facility is treated as veterinary clinic and must:
 - Operate under a managing veterinarian designated to Oregon Veterinary Medical Examining Board.
 - Comply with clinic facility, inspection, and licensing requirements.
- State and local government facilities may be exempt in some cases:
 - It does not apply when performing procedures for the public.
- The shelter can:
 - Perform routine herd health intake procedures on impounded dogs.
 - Not perform elective surgeries on publicly owned pets without falling under clinic requirements.
- Option A: High-Volume Single-Day/Weekend Clinic:
 - Partner with mobile, high-volume and quality provider and/or veterinarians.
 - Weekend event with 2 days of surgeries and a day of wellness appointments.
 - Capacity & Services:
 - Aim for 30 dog surgeries per weekend.
 - Provide core vaccines and basic preventatives.
 - Mobile unit can serve cats and dogs, but:
 - Cat capacity is higher on the mobile unit.
 - Dog capacity is limited by kennel space in the vehicle.
 - Marion County Shelter can provide extra dog recovery kennels.
 - Operational Considerations:
 - Shelter would close to general public intake for the weekend, but:
 - Normal staff would still be on-site to care for existing dogs.
 - Law-enforcement-delivered strays will be accepted.
 - Volunteers for recovery monitoring, administration, and flow management.
 - Procurement and contracting steps must be completed before scheduling.
 - Estimated per-animal costs:
 - Approx. \$185 per neuter.
 - Approx. \$225 per spay (up to 80 lbs.).
 - Total weekend event estimate:
 - Approximately \$7,700–\$7,600 range for 30 dogs.
 - Risks & Liability:
 - Concerns about higher liability and aftercare:
 - County is not a full-service clinic for ongoing follow-up.
 - Risk that owners may not return to pick up dogs.
 - Medical liability:
 - Mobile clinic/managing veterinarian would hold medical responsibility and carry appropriate releases and consents.
 - Legal review required to ensure liability is clearly allocated and not shifted improperly to county.
 - Disease exposure:
 - Recovery dogs placed in cleaned and designated areas.
 - Preventative vaccines could be incorporated to mitigate risk.
 - Geographic & Funding Equity:
 - Desire to prioritize Marion County residents, homeless residents, and frequent shelter users.
 - Concern of being regional subsidy point if nearby counties don't contribute.
 - Explore Salem participation given impacts in city parks and public spaces.

- Option B: Voucher Program - Partner Clinic
 - County issues spay/neuter vouchers redeemable at a partner clinic.
 - Clinic performs surgeries and associated services.
 - Owners schedule and attend appointments directly with the clinic.
 - Advantages:
 - No additional direct medical liability for county:
 - Responsibility lies with the clinic.
 - Does not require shelter to become veterinary clinic or hire new staff.
 - Model can be sustained over time if budget is available.
 - Challenges:
 - Clinics often book months out, delaying impact.
 - Success depends on owners keeping appointments.
 - Proposed Partner:
 - Oregon Humane Society is primary local low-cost provider.
 - Plan to launch mobile unit in early spring 2027:
 - Focus on cat surgeries.
 - Should free up additional on-site dog surgery capacity.
 - Partnership Mechanics:
 - County would likely reserve a small number of weekly spots:
 - 1 to 2 surgeries a week.
 - Target frequent shelter users and owners with cost barriers.
 - Vouchers issued and controlled by county.
 - Cost:
 - Public rate at the clinic currently approx. \$275 per dog.
 - Partner rate under voucher contract could reduce to ~\$200 per dog.
 - Policy Concerns:
 - No desire to subsidize a large, well-funded nonprofit's core responsibilities without clear added value to county residents.
 - Need to understand:
 - How nonprofit prioritizes low-income clients.
 - Whether Marion County residents receive priority access.
 - General support for the model if:
 - The county controls voucher distribution and eligibility.
 - The partner's role and constraints are clearly defined.
- Option C: Expanding On-Site Veterinary Services (Full-Time Veterinarian Model)
 - Expand current contracted veterinary services to:
 - A full-time veterinarian.
 - Additional vet tech/assistant and administrative support.
 - Offer public appointments at shelter on at least one dedicated day per week.
 - Capacity & Revenue Potential:
 - Current surgical suite and support staff can perform ~7 surgeries/day.
 - With a full-time vet and expanded support:
 - Perform 20+ spay/neuter surgeries per week for the public.
 - Surgeries charged \$275 per procedure:
 - Additional revenue from:
 - Rabies vaccinations for all impounded animals prior to release.
 - Licensing fees, as rabies compliance drives licensing.
 - Advantages:
 - Long-term, scalable, and self-contained system not reliant on partners.
 - Increases regional surgical capacity, helping address vet access.
 - Creates a foundation to:
 - Add sliding-scale fees.
 - Consider free days for the homeless or high-need populations.

- Challenges & Costs:
 - Highest up-front and ongoing cost of the three options.
 - Fully burdened cost accounting:
 - Salary + benefits + overhead for vet and support staff.
 - Compliance with managing veterinarian and clinic requirements.
 - Board expects:
 - Detailed financial model showing if program can pay for itself.
 - More refined analysis for FY 27–28 budget development.

3. Public Outreach Presentation for Future Board Session

-Lauren Thielke

- Prepared presentation titled "Supporting Dogs and Strengthening Communities."
- Content highlights:
 - Overview of Marion County Dog Services' mission and public safety role:
 - Services provided to dogs and community.
 - Shelter capacity challenges and trends:
 - More unaltered dogs, puppies, and pregnant females.
 - Volunteer recruitment call to action.
- Feedback and Direction:
 - Board reviewed similar version and expressed no concerns with the content.
 - Encouragement to include a shelter dog at the board presentation to.

4. Discussion

-All

- Budget & Process:
 - \$30,000 previously directed should be honored likely through a supplemental budget.
 - Procurement and contracting for mobile unit and voucher partner will require time and administrative steps.
- Prioritization & Target Populations:
 - Prioritize frequent shelter dogs whose owners struggle to afford surgery.
 - Serve unsheltered and low-income communities and be realistic about ID and residency verification.
 - Concern about regional magnet effects if program draws high volumes from neighboring counties without shared financial contributions.
- Partner and Stakeholder Engagement:
 - Approach the City of Salem about:
 - Possible financial contributions or partnership.
 - Recognizing program benefits to city parks and neighborhoods.
 - Strained relationship with Oregon Humane Society but cautious openness to structured well-defined partnership through vouchers.
- Liability & Legal Framework:
 - Legal counsel raised concerns about:
 - Litigation risk if animals suffer complications or die after surgery.
 - Need robust consent and release forms.
 - Managing veterinarian or mobile clinic holds primary medical liability while animals are under their care.
 - County must ensure contracts and forms clearly allocate responsibilities and expectations.
- Disease Control and Shelter Operations:
 - Use separate, thoroughly cleaned kennel areas for recovery dogs.

- Limit cross-traffic with general shelter population to reduce disease risks.
- Longer-Term Strategic View:
 - Mobile events and vouchers address access and affordability in short term.
 - Expanded on-site services could be long-term structural solution for regional spay/neuter capacity.
 - Detailed, business-style financial analysis for any staffing expansion proposal.

5. Other

-All

- Public outreach/volunteer presentation:
 - Serve as tool to increase community awareness, support, and volunteer recruitment.
 - Concise and action-oriented, culminating in clear “Be part of the mission” ask.
- Avoid cats in current shelter setting:
 - Facility is better suited for dogs.
 - Cats would significantly increase noise and stress.

6. Next Steps

-All

- Proceed with pilot implementation within the previously directed \$30,000 framework:
 - High-volume mobile clinic (Snip Ship) pilot event(s).
 - Voucher-based partnership with an external low-cost provider.
- Complete procurement and contracting work for:
 - The mobile clinic event.
 - The voucher program partner ensuring contracts clearly address liability, roles, and rates.
- Develop and provide:
 - Cost and revenue model for expanded on-site veterinary services option:
 - Fully burdened staffing costs (salary + benefits + overhead).
 - Realistic volume and fee assumptions.
 - Possible sliding scale and special free/low-cost days concepts.
 - Detailed package for consideration in the FY 27–28 budget cycle.
- Process for supplemental budget or other mechanism to allocate the \$30,000.
- Explore external partnerships:
 - Contact City of Salem leadership to discuss potential financial or in-kind support.
 - Clarify expectations and priorities with any nonprofit clinic partners.
- Deliver “Supporting Dogs and Strengthening Communities” presentation at board session:
 - Bring shelter dog to enhance engagement and highlight the shelter’s work.

Adjourned – time: 2:41 p.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White