

City Business
Dog Gone! Who's Gonna Pay?
by Michael Leamons

If you've spent any time out and about, you're bound to have seen some of the stray dogs running around town. The City recently purchased a live trap, and the first stray has been captured. As was noted in this column recently, dealing with stray dogs is an expensive proposition. Once a stray has been captured, the City is required to impound it for 5 days. Then, on a space available basis, the stray is transferred to the Stephenville pound. By the time the whole process is over, the City is out \$150 to \$200.

Is it right to saddle taxpayers with those costs? Shouldn't they be borne by the stray's owners? The law allows for passing those costs on to the owner, if he or she can be identified, but rare is the day when anyone is willing to admit ownership of a stray.

What can be done to provide relief for the taxpayers? There are two options. The City could adopt a pet identification ordinance and have everyone pay a fee and tag their pets. But, who wants the expense and hassle of creating yet another layer of bureaucracy? There is a better way.

Currently, State law requires rabies vaccinations and periodic booster vaccinations for both dogs and cats. When an animal is vaccinated a certificate with, among other things, the owner's name and contact information and a metal tag with an identification number referencing the certificate are issued to the owner. Thus, through the identification tag, a stray animal's owner can be identified.

Hico's Animal Control Ordinance requires the rabies vaccination identification tag be affixed to a dog or cat's collar or harness. The owners of dogs or cats which don't have the required identification tags can be issued a citation and taken to Municipal Court. If satisfactory proof of vaccination is provided, "the case will be dismissed upon payment of a \$15 administrative fee."

To reduce the City's exposure to the impoundment costs related to strays, I have asked the Animal Control Officer to step up enforcement regarding the proof of rabies vaccination requirement. If you don't want the hassle of making an appearance before the Municipal Court or the expense of a \$15 administrative fee, please make sure your dog or cat has been vaccinated for rabies and is wearing the required identification tag. I apologize for the inconvenience to responsible pet owners who keep their pets properly secured. The intent is to ensure the costs incurred by irresponsible pet owners are paid by those owners rather than the taxpayers at large.

We would be very appreciative of any help the public is able to offer in dealing with our current stray animal problem

May God bless the City of Hico.