



# CITY OF COSTA MESA

77 Fair Drive  
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

## Agenda Report

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**File #:** 26-162

**Meeting Date:** 4/21/2026

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**TITLE:**

**INTRODUCTION AND FIRST READING OF THE CITY OF COSTA MESA, CALIFORNIA ADDING CHAPTER IV, TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN, TO TITLE 3 OF THE COSTA MESA MUNICIPAL CODE TO ESTABLISH A TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY CATS**

**DEPARTMENT:** POLICE DEPARTMENT

**PRESENTED BY:** STEPHANIE A. SELINSKE, LIEUTENANT

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** STEPHANIE A. SELINSKE, LIEUTENANT  
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**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends the City Council introduce for first reading Ordinance No. 2026-XX adding Title 3 Animal Regulations of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code 3-171 to establish and regulate a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program for community cats within the City of Costa Mesa.

**BACKGROUND:**

The City of Costa Mesa Municipal Code does not allow for any person or organization to Trap-Neuter-Return any community cats within the City of Costa Mesa.

The City of Costa Mesa currently addresses issues involving free-roaming and community cats through existing animal-control regulations and case-by-case responses. Community cats, which are defined as unowned, free-roaming cats that live outdoors and are not readily adoptable, present unique challenges related to animal welfare, shelter intake, and community concerns. Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is a nationally recognized animal management model in which community cats are humanely trapped, surgically sterilized, vaccinated (including rabies), ear-tipped for identification, and either returned to their original location or diverted for adoption if and when appropriate. Numerous jurisdictions throughout California and Orange County have adopted forms of TNR ordinances as a humane and effective method to control and gradually reduce the community cat populations in their respective communities. Additionally, TNR also assists with decreasing impacts on local animal shelters and euthanasia rates.

The proposed ordinance (Attachment 1) would establish guidelines for a regulated TNR program within Costa Mesa to ensure that all TNR activities are conducted in a manner consistent with animal welfare and best practices, with City oversight via the Animal Services Unit.

Legalizing TNR and establishing an ordinance in Costa Mesa has been a long-time goal of the City's Animal Services Committee (ASC) and local animal welfare advocates. The proposed ordinance was created in consultation with the ASC and public comments at multiple ASC meetings over the past six months. At the January 28, 2026, ASC meeting, the committee voted unanimously to support

the draft ordinance and recommended that the City Council consider its adoption.

**ANALYSIS:**

The proposed ordinance authorizes and regulates Trap-Neuter-Return activities within the City by establishing a clear framework. It would require registration and pre-approval through the City's Animal Services Unit. TNR would require sterilization, vaccination (including rabies), and ear-tipping for all returned community cats. The proposed ordinance would establish clear recordkeeping and reporting requirements and provide enforcement mechanisms and corrective measures for public nuisances caused by community cats.

Participation in the TNR program will be authorized to individuals, nonprofit organizations, veterinary clinics, or sponsor agencies that complete a city-issued TNR Registration Form (Attachment 2) and receive pre-approval from the Animal Services Unit. Approval will be valid for one calendar year from date of approval.

Authorized participants will be required to maintain detailed logs for each community cat processed through the program, including trapping location, veterinary services provided, sterilization and vaccination status, ear-tipping confirmation, and release locations. TNR providers will submit a log for each cat colony serviced. These records will be retained by the Animal Services Unit for a minimum of three years. Collected data will allow the City of Costa Mesa to evaluate program effectiveness, track community cat populations, and identify any necessary program modifications.

This proposed ordinance requires humane trapping, rabies vaccinations, and adherence to current veterinary public-health guidelines for all cats returned. Trapped cats will be assessed to determine if they are socialized and adoptable. Cats will also be scanned for microchips, and if a registered owner is identified, they will be contacted as necessary. Any cat that is seriously ill, injured or deemed suitable for adoption will not be returned to the community and will instead be managed in accordance with City Animal Services' protocols. Those cats that qualify for TNR will be surgically sterilized, ear-tipped for identification, and returned to their original location.

The ordinance preserves the City's authority to intervene in situations involving public safety threats, suspected rabies, or other dangerous conditions. Public feeding activities that create sanitation issues, property damage, or attract vermin or wildlife remain prohibited.

If a registered TNR provider is found to be in violation of the ordinance the City may take corrective actions including warnings, suspension or revocation of permit and/or citation. Denial or revocation of a TNR permit would be appealable to the City Manager and a final appeal to the City Council if necessary.

This ordinance does not establish a City funded TNR program and should not adversely affect our contracted animal shelter. All TNR activities and veterinary services would be provided by community volunteers, animal advocates, non-profits and sponsor organizations.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

This ordinance is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, because there is no possibility that the ordinance or its implementation would have a significant negative effect on the environment. (14 Cal. Code Regs. §

15061(b)(3).) A Notice of Exemption should be filed as authorized by CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

The City Council may introduce the ordinance as proposed; or modify the ordinance and direct staff to return with revisions.

The City Council may also decline to introduce the ordinance and maintain the City's existing approach to community cat management and continue to prohibit free-roaming cats.

**FISCAL REVIEW:**

There is no anticipated direct fiscal impact to the City's General Fund (Fund 101) associated with adoption of this ordinance. The TNR program relies on registered individuals and sponsor organizations to conduct trapping, veterinary services, and recordkeeping. Staff time associated with registration, oversight, and data review is expected to be absorbed within existing Animal Services Unit resources.

**LEGAL REVIEW:**

The City Attorney's Office has reviewed this report and the proposed Ordinance and approved them as to form.

**CITY COUNCIL GOALS AND PRIORITIES:**

This item supports the following City Council Goal:

- Strengthen the public's safety and improve the quality of life.

**CONCLUSION:**

Staff recommends the City Council to introduce for first reading Ordinance No. 2026-XX adding Title 3 Animal Regulations of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code 3-171 to establish and regulate a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program for community cats within the City of Costa Mesa.