



CITY OF NORMAN, OK
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING
Municipal Building, Executive Conference Room,
201 West Gray, Norman, OK 73069
Tuesday, December 17, 2024 at 5:30 PM

MINUTES

The City Council Study Session of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Regular Session in the Executive Conference Room in the Municipal Building, on Tuesday, December 17, 2024 at 5:30 PM, and notice of the agenda of the meeting was posted at the Norman Municipal Building at 201 West Gray and on the City website at least 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

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CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Heikkila called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

PRESENT

Mayor Larry Heikkila
Councilmember Ward 1 Austin Ball
Councilmember Ward 2 Matthew Peacock
Councilmember Ward 3 Bree Montoya
Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant
Councilmember Ward 6 Joshua Hinkle
Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman
Councilmember Ward 8 Scott Dixon

ABSENT

Councilmember Ward 5 Michael Nash

AGENDA ITEMS

1. DISCUSSION REGARDING UPDATES TO THE ANIMALS ORDINANCE.

Ms. Jeanne Snider, Assistant City Attorney, introduced Ms. Kellee Robertson, Animal Welfare Center Manager; Major Brent Barbour, Supervisor; and Dr. Amy Tyler, Veterinarian, and provided an overview of potential amendments to the Animals Ordinance. Updates were characterized as *housekeeping* revisions following multiple major ordinance changes over the past 12 years. Staff identified areas needing clarification, including definitions for "abandon," "animal," "community cat," "community cat caregiver," "exotic wildlife," and "native wildlife."

Item 1, continued

Ms. Snider provided examples of animals being abandoned at the shelter gates without Staff approval, highlighting the need for a formal definition of “abandon.” The definition of “animal” was broadened to include mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and other non-human species. “Community Cat and Caregiver” definitions were added to support the Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program. A new, expanded definition of exotic and native wildlife was proposed to address public safety risks from ownership of species such as primates and coatis.

Other Key Discussion Points:

- Exotic Animals:
 - Incidents involving exotic animals (e.g., a coati found on a playground) underscored the need for clearer prohibitions.
 - Councilmembers asked whether invasive species (e.g., pythons) were addressed. Staff confirmed that some species were covered, and Oklahoma’s climate limited survival of many invasive reptiles.
 - Staff clarified that exotic or native wildlife cannot be owned within city limits. Limited allowances exist for certain reptiles (e.g., non-hazardous snakes), with a registry in place for public safety purposes.
- Zoos: Any future zoo in Norman would be required to have national accreditation.
- Community Cats and TNR Program:
 - Updates align with national best practices.
 - Staff explained training is being developed for community caregivers.
 - Councilmembers raised concerns about conflicts between caregivers and property owners. Staff described mitigation strategies, including a barn cat program for relocation.
 - Concerns about feeding stations attracting skunks were noted, and Staff are exploring best practices.
- Animal Cruelty:
 - The ordinance will add “willfully” to the definition of cruelty to align with state law, strengthening enforceability after a past municipal court case.
- Pet Licensing:
 - Staff recommended repealing the outdated pet licensing requirement.
 - Microchipping was identified as the more effective identification method.
 - Council discussed current microchipping practices, including field scanning to return animals directly home without shelter intake.
- Spay/Neuter (SNIP Program):
 - Since June, over 300 owned animals have been spayed/neutered through grant funding.
 - Every animal leaving the shelter is spayed/neutered, microchipped, and vaccinated.

Council briefly discussed allowing goats in the city limits. The current ordinance allows goats if setback requirements are met (25 feet, and 100 feet from nearest neighbor). Councilmembers noted goats could serve as vegetation control and may be no more disruptive than other permitted animals (e.g., laying hens). A specific example was raised regarding former Mattoon property, where rough terrain prevents mowing, but goats could be used effectively.

Concerns arise when goats remain onsite for several days, as neighbors may view them as “kept” animals rather than temporary service animals. Council explored potential solutions, including a business permit or exemption for temporary use of goats in vegetation control defining the difference between “keeping” versus “utilizing” goats and crafting a limited exemption (e.g., allowing goats for a maximum of three days).

Staff agreed to research best practices and explore possible code amendments to allow short-term use of goats for vegetation management with proper controls (e.g., portable fencing). Staff will prepare a revised ordinance for Council consideration in January 2025, incorporating the discussed definitions and repealing the pet license requirement.

2. DISCUSSION REGARDING UPDATES TO THE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS FOR THE CITY OF NORMAN.

The following information was presented by Ms. Jane Hudson, Director of Planning and Community Development, and Ms. Jeanne Snider, Assistant City Attorney.

Staff recommended consolidating the Parks Board, Greenbelt Commission, and Tree Board under a single Parks Board to streamline processes and reduce applicant and Staff burdens. Staff emphasized that trail easements, sidewalks, and open space dedications are secured through the platting and development process, regardless of Greenbelt Commission review. Repealing the Greenbelt Commission would not reduce the City’s ability to secure easements or fund trail projects. The Tree Board’s advisory duties would be transferred to the Parks Board, while tree protection ordinances would remain in place.

Proposed Amendments

- Staff proposes to increase the Board of Adjustment and Norman Election Commission from five to seven members to improve quorum reliability.
- Discussion on whether Planning Commission should have one representative from each ward:
 - Supporters cited improved ward representation and accountability.
 - Opponents noted difficulties in recruiting qualified applicants in all wards.
 - A compromise suggestion was made ward-specific appointments preferred, but at-large allowed if vacancies persist after a set time (e.g., 6–8 weeks).
- Addition of a Parks Board member with interest or expertise in urban forestry to replace Tree Board expertise.
- Formal codification of the Animal Welfare Oversight Committee:
 - Established originally by resolution but never codified.
 - Proposal: seven members, including a veterinarian, one representative from a local animal welfare organization, and one rural citizen.
 - Purpose: advise Council on shelter operations, spay/neuter programs, animal care standards, ordinance updates, and budget priorities.
 - Members will be subject to terms and rotation.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Attest:

City Clerk

Mayor