



COMMUNITY CAT POLICIES

Effective 11/2022

DEFINITIONS:

Community Cat—A cat or kitten who resides primarily outdoors, is not considered a household pet, and may or may not exhibit “feral” behavior when relating to humans.

Trap Neuter Return (TNR)—The practice of humanely trapping feral or free-roaming outdoor cats, sterilizing, vaccinating, micro-chipping and re-releasing to the original area from where it was found.

BACKGROUND:

The Office of Animal Services (OAS) supports the presence of community cat programming, community cats, and their caregivers in Montgomery County, Maryland. Cats have lived outside and thrived for centuries in all varieties of locations, weather conditions, and climates and did not become indoor pets until the 20th century. Community cats are used to living outdoors and are skilled at finding food and shelter. The OAS recognizes that for these cats, outside is home and these cats should remain in their home instead of facing high stress caused by being confined in a new home, relocating to a new area/colony, or housing if impounded to the shelter. The State’s Department of Agriculture has been funding grant opportunities for several years with the primary goal of reducing the number of community cats entering local animal shelters. The funds from these grants, though worthwhile, barely scratch the surface of the Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) needs of Montgomery County.

Community cat programming aims to stabilize or decrease the population size of a community cat colony through TNR programs. TNR is nationally recognized for its ability to effectively reduce community cat populations, which in turns lowers the number of nuisance complaints, curbs roaming behavior, improves the health of animals, reduces the number of cats/kittens taken in by the shelter, and provides rabies vaccinations to unvaccinated animals effectively limiting the spread of rabies in the community. OAS works with local non-profits to educate the public regarding humane and responsible co-existence and care of community cats.

The haphazard removal of individual cats from their home location is not an effective means of population management; in some cases, ad hoc removal has led to paradoxical population increases. The relocation of community cats should be reserved as a last resort. There are simply too many cats and not enough barns, farms, or sanctuaries available to take them or provide proper acclimation conditions. Relocation introduces additional risks to cats by encouraging stray or roaming behavior or aggressive attacks from other cats and/or wildlife residing in their new home territory, sometimes resulting in the cat being hurt or killed.

Community cat programs reduce shelter overcrowding, disease, and euthanasia and are endorsed by leading national animal welfare organizations including the National Animal Control Association, Million Cat Challenge, Best Friends Animal Society, the Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA, American Pets Alive! and others. Community cat programming has been validated in shelters across the country through data collection including tracking nuisance calls, monitoring population sizes of serviced groups of cats, dead-on-arrival pick-ups, feline intake, live release rate, and length of stay.

POLICIES:

1. OAS does not trap and permanently remove outdoor cats for the purpose of population control. In accordance with the evolving perspective in the animal welfare field and public opinion regarding the management of community cats, OAS is committed to supporting TNR efforts in the County.
2. Residents who bring trapped, ear-tipped cats who appear healthy to the shelter or the attention of an Animal Services Officer (ASO) will be encouraged to release the cat where it was trapped.
3. The overall health and body condition of the cat, as evaluated by trained staff, is sufficient anecdotal evidence that the cat is obtaining adequate nourishment in its environment. Community cats who appear too thin or are sick or injured should be taken to a veterinarian or the Montgomery County Animal Services and Adoption Center (MCASAC) for help.
4. In most cases, residents who find litters of 0–4-week-old neonatal nursing kittens that may have a mother will be encouraged to return the kittens to the location they were found and watch for the mother's return (refer to the OAS policy document entitled "Kitten Policies"). Neonatal kittens who are truly without their mother and older kittens who are young enough to be socialized will be taken into the care of OAS. Efforts are made to socialize kittens under six months of age for possible placement. OAS supports the TNR of kittens older than 8 weeks that cannot be socialized.
5. OAS will, on a limited basis, provide veterinary support for TNR services provided by rescues and community cat program groups operating within Montgomery County. When possible, OAS will provide spay or neuter, routine vaccinations, microchipping, and basic medical care at the time of surgery for community cats trapped from colonies located within Montgomery County.
6. OAS collaborates with caregivers, community cat advocates, and local TNR and rescue groups to TNR or return cats to their home area and provide support to mitigate nuisance complaints.
7. Before being returned home at their original location, cats are individually evaluated to determine if they are appropriate for return based on factors such as: age, health, or other circumstances.
8. Cats who test positive for FIV or FeLV will not be TNR'd or returned to their home area. Alternate placement in an indoor-only home, such as adoption, will be considered where possible based on the temperament of the cat and whether the cat is symptomatic or asymptomatic.
9. Public outreach and education efforts will include education on the benefits and resources for spay/neuter and vaccination, responsible feeding and management practices for those choosing to care for community cats, laws regarding accessing private property and/or removing property from privately owned properties and effective methods to humanely deter cats.
10. OAS offers a relocation program, Freelance Felines, (see "Freelance Felines" SOP) for community cats who pose little to no risk to human safety and cannot be safely released into the area they were impounded from. Before placement in the Freelance Feline program, cats are individually evaluated to determine if they are appropriate for placement due to age, health, and other circumstances.
11. Through the OAS transfer program, OAS may transfer an impounded community cat to a shelter, rescue, sanctuary, or other animal care and welfare operation approved by the Executive Director or their designee.
12. OAS makes cat food available to community cat caregivers through its pet food pantry and partnerships with partner non-profit organizations.