Owners Must Pay for Barking Dogs in Los Angeles

By Teresa Cajot

The benefits of dog ownership are undeniable. Dogs provide security, companionship, and according to research, pets can reduce stress levels. However, Los Angeles residents with excessively verbal dogs may actually be facing increased stress levels in the future. On the first of November, the Los Angeles City Council voted unanimously to amend the city’s barking-dog ordinance to include large fines for continuous barking.

It is anticipated that the ordinance will be signed by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and will go into effect before the end of 2011, setting fines at $250 for a first offense, $500 for a second offense, and $1,000 for a third offense. Ultimately, it will be up to a Department of Animal Services hearing officer to determine if the barking is excessive but the ordinance does provide guidelines. If barking continuous for ten minutes or more or continues on and off for at least 30 minutes within a three-hour time frame, the owner may be fined.

Unlike the old ordinance, the new one grants the department of animal services the authority to deal with unlicensed pets. In the past, city action was suspended and fines were not imposed upon the owners of unlicensed dogs. “Prior to this, it rewarded people who did not have licenses versus people who were law-abiding and had licenses,” said Assistant City Attorney Dove Lesel.

It seems likely that this new ordinance will bring additional cases before the understaffed Animal Services Department which, according to general manager Brenda Barnette, already has a six-month backlog of hearings, most involving excessive barking issues. ”If a dog hears somebody or something and barks, that’s a good thing. That’s a warning. If a dog just stays out and barks and barks, that’s not really reasonable,” said Barnette. She further asserts that dog owners should be informed of barking disturbances and given time to find a solution prior to being issued a fine.

If the ordinance does go into effect, it is likely to calm the nerves of irate neighbors who must listen to incessant barking day and night. However, for dog owners, it is likely to bring headaches and financial stress. Unfortunately, many owners will not find a way to deal with the issue and will ultimately be forced to turn their animals over to already over-crowded animal shelters, which is certainly not in the best interest of the animal, the owner, or the city.