



Pet in Housing Overview

# Executive Summary

- **Issue**: A lack of pet friendly housing was identified as an obstacle to owner acquisition and retention of pets in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, particularly in difficult economic times.
- Found Animals evaluated this topic to understand if and how a positive impact could be made on the number of pet friendly units.
- **Process**: Informally surveyed landlords' attitudes toward renting to pet owners, research existing pet-friendly housing resources in Los Angeles and best practices in pet-friendly housing programs.
- **Findings**: Identified primary concerns including 1) damage to rental unit and common areas, 2) nuisance to other tenants and 3) dog bite liability.
  - Due to the fragmented nature of the landlord landscape in Los Angeles, and logistical challenges of potential remedies, no “silver bullet” solution was identified. Found Animals determined the best approach to the problem would be through basic education and resources for both landlords and tenants.

# Problem Statement

Many rental properties in the Los Angeles area prohibit tenants from having pets or have restrictions on dog breed and size. This prevents potential pet owners from acquiring pets and forces many pet owners to relinquish their pets.

- A high demand for rental housing enables landlords to avoid renting to pet owners when pet-free tenants are readily available.
- This shortage creates a problem for:
  - Renters who would acquire pets if their housing permitted
  - Renters with pets and victims of foreclosure crisis who are forced into rental housing
- Restrictions on dog breed and size create a problem for owners of:
  - Larger dogs and certain breeds often including some of the neediest populations including “pit bulls” among other breeds often mislabeled as dangerous or aggressive

# Background Data

“Landlords” and “moving” are among the top reasons given by owners who relinquish their pets in the City of Los Angeles (Source: LAAS)

Only 9% of housing allowed companion animals without any significant limitations on size or type (Source: FIREPAW)

Between January and August, 2008, more than 2,500 cats and dogs were surrendered to Los Angeles Animal Services because of landlord and moving related problems (Source: LAAS).

Large dogs were the most difficult to get housing for - only 11% of housing allowed these animals (Source: FIREPAW)

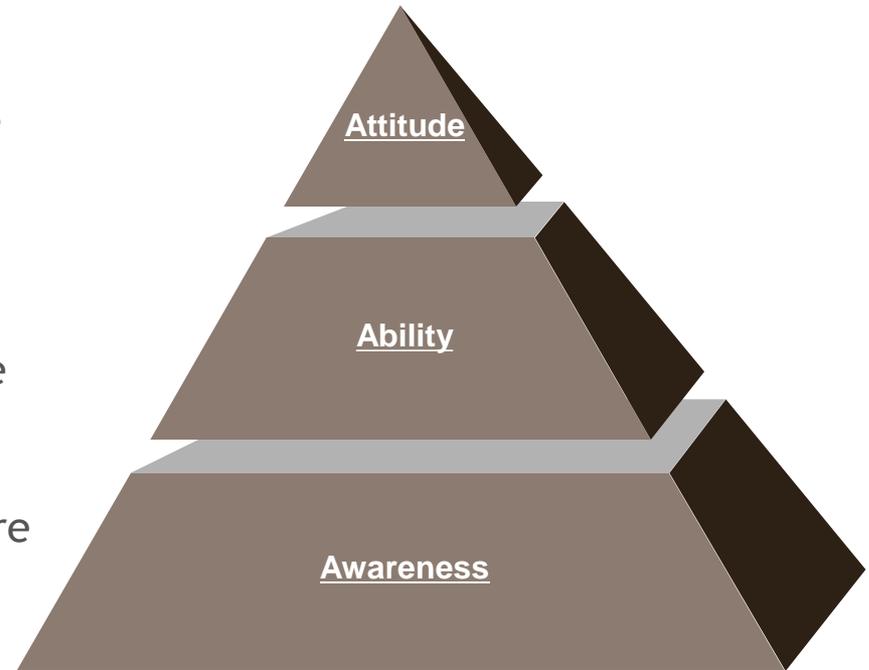
82% of tenants with animals reported having trouble finding a rental unit that would take their pet (Source: FIREPAW)

It is estimated that 35% of households would acquire a pet if their housing permitted and if all housing was pet-friendly, approximately 6.5 million animals could be placed in new home (Source: Hart LA, *Potential pet ownership in U.S. rental housing.*)

# Landlord Landscape

While Found Animals informally interviewed Los Angeles area landlords, further assessment is needed to determine perceptions and attitudes toward pet-friendly housing policies as needed to begin planning how to tackling this problem.

- **Attitude**: Those landlords who are aware of the problem and have the means to address it, but are not interested in participating.
- **Ability**: Those landlords who are aware of the issue, but do not have the means to address it.
- **Awareness**: Those landlords who are not aware of the issue or their options.



**N.B.** - further assessment of the landscape would be beneficial to determine how landlords would fall among this scale.

# Landlord Concerns

After conducting informal surveys of landlords and management companies Found Animals recognizes the top concerns as:

- **Liability**
  - Fear of being sued over animal attacks
  - Certain breeds are not covered by certain insurance companies
- **Damages to the rental unit and common areas**
  - Stains, odors, chewing
  - Infestation of fleas/ticks
  - Using patios & common area for bathroom
  - Not cleaning up after animal
  - Digging up yard/garden
- **Nuisance to neighbors**
  - Noise (barking, general noise on upper levels)
  - Allergies
- **Pros outweighed by the cons**
  - Renting to pet owners was viewed as time consuming and more of a hassle than it is worth.

# Landlord Concerns

## Liability:

- “My insurance won't cover pit bulls, Doberman, chow, or *rottts*.”
- “I take dogs up to 25 lbs. which eliminates all the big ones that could do damage with clawing or give a serious bite.”

## Damages:

- “Some definite No No's...puppies (they tend to chew things more), dangerous dog breeds”
- “Dogs that have to stay outside usually destroy the backyard in some way because they are bored, lonely and wanting attention. So if someone tells me they leave their dog outside all the time I don't rent to them.”
- “After too many years of putting up with the cost and work from pet damages, we decided this year, no pet. Yes, it is a bit slow, but we will have less cost and less work cleaning up behind pets.”
- “The cost and work with allowing pets is not worth it.”
- “Once you have walked into one of your rentals...after all the hard work that you put into your rental and have to rip out the carpet, you will never go back.”

## Nuisance to Neighbors:

- “Some folks are scared of dogs, some have allergies, another dog on the same apartment and they get into a fight, children around, general liability...”

# Landscape Assessment: Existing Pet-Friendly Housing Programs & Publications

The following are a few notable organizations committed to increasing pet-friendly rentals:

- San Francisco SPCA: a combination of education/outreach to the community along with innovative resources for landlords and tenants
- Hawaiian Humane Society: strategic planning and practical resources
- FIREPAW Foundation: research driven materials and reports for landlords and tenants
- MSPCA's Pets in Housing Program: working with the federal government to help enforce laws allowing elderly and disabled residents in government housing
- Doris Day Animal League: publication explaining federal laws that protect pet owners

# Landscape Assessment: San Francisco SPCA's: “Open Door Program”



- **Program Components:**

- Indemnified landlords from pet damages. Free for renters who acquired their pet from the SPCA. SPCA prescreened participants by assessing pet & addressing behavior concerns (offered free training). Policies were “underwritten” by SPCA.
- Offered “start-up kits” for landlords information on the benefits of allowing pets, guidelines for establishing a pet policy, checklist for screening tenants. Also provided tenants with a database of pet-friendly rentals in the area.

- **Results:**

- Established in 1990, cat friendly housing increased from 33% to 55% and dog friendly rentals from 11% to 29% in the first year. In 2007 the program opened 900 rental units that previously did not accept pets.
- No claims were filed and several dozen landlords participated.

- **Considerations**

- Indemnity program only included a small number of landlords and units.

# Landscape Assessment Hawaiian Humane Society



- **Surveyed Landlords:** Conducted surveys of landlords as needed to identify trends and “trouble spots.” Results enabled them to design materials to address problems.
- **Resources for Landlords & Tenants**
  - **Guide to Pet-Friendly Rentals:** listing of available pet-friendly rentals. Landlords can list available units by calling or submitting information online & renters view the bulletin board at the incoming animals desk (open 24 hrs) or online.
  - **Helpful Materials:** Developed packet of materials to assist landlords find responsible tenants, including checklist of qualities characterizing responsible pet ownership.

# Landscape Assessment: Research-Driven & Legal-Focused Programs



## FIREPAW - Foundation for Interdisciplinary Research and Education

- Conducted nationwide empirical study, examining the factors impacting the availability of pet-friendly rental housing. Study demonstrated it is economically viable for landlords to offer pet-friendly rentals while increasing profits.



## MSPCA's Pets in Housing Program

- Worked with municipal housing agencies to implement pet-friendly policies and enforce existing laws allowing elderly and disabled residents in government housing to stay with their pets.



## Doris Day Animal League - “Advancing Animals Advocacy”

- Published “Best Friends for Life,” which explains federal laws that protect that disabled individuals and people living in federally assisted housing as well as tools for landlords and information on how to be a responsible pet owner.

## Making a difference in the current landscape

- One of the top concerns among Los Angeles landlords was the misconception of the hassle and additional costs associated with renting to pet owners.
- Found Animals sees education as one opportunity to make a difference in the Los Angeles housing landscape.
- Renting to pet owners can be beneficial to landlords. A study conducted by FIREPAW found:
  - Tenants in pet-friendly rentals stayed an average of 46 months - compared to 18 months for tenants in rentals prohibiting pets.
  - The vacancy rate for pet-friendly housing was lower than “no pets allowed” rentals - 10% compared to 14%.
  - Advertising costs are also lower for pet-friendly units in terms of cost (\$14 vs. \$32) and time (pet friendly units rented in 19 days compared to 29 days).
  - Pool of applicants is larger (on average about twice as many people applied for pet-friendly units).

# Landlord Suggested Solutions

- “Make sure the pet is not banned in your area or by your insurance company. Make sure the pets they say they have are what they really have (a poodle isn't really a pit bull). Make sure the animal is flea treated, has all vaccinations and required licenses, is spayed or neutered, will be confined to the property and not allowed to roam, will be provided proper nutrition, water, and housing, and that the owner will clean up after the pet. Have a pet deposit to cover pet damages to carpets, walls, exterminators, etc.”
- “Take it on an individual basis.”
- “Require a pet addendum which says that I can require the pet to be removed from the premises at any time with 24 hours notice (in case you find the pet is doing damage). I require a copy of shot record, renter's insurance and photographs of the pet. Instead of a pet deposit which you have to give back, I charge an extra \$25 a month rent for the pet.”
- “Get a pet deposit. You can choose to raise the rent for the additional wear and tear...I would also inspect the place a few weeks after the dog has moved in to make sure he has it under control.”

# Tips for Landlords

1. **Policies & Procedures**: Create pet policies that are clear to tenants and easy to enforce, i.e. specify which areas of the premises dogs are allowed on, require dogs to be on leashed when outside the unit, etc.
2. **Rent to Responsible Pet Owners**: Screen prospective tenants and their pets. Require a “pet application” which mandates pet be licensed, microchipped, spayed/neutered, current on vaccinations, under a flea/tick regiment, provide veterinary & previous residence references.
3. **Pet Liability**: Make sure pets are insured through their owner’s renters insurance policy and/or require proof of obedience training or temperament testing. Also, work with an insurance company that does not discriminate against dog breed. Companies such as State Farm and Farmers will insure your property without regard to the breeds of dogs living on the premises.
4. **Pet Damages**: Make sure the deposit you charge will cover potential pet-related “accidents. ”

# How to Spot a Responsible Pet Owner

## A responsible pet owner will:

- Always clean up after their pet when on public property and dispose of the waste in a sanitary manner
- Have their dog on a leash at all times when not on their own property (or in an approved off leash area)
- Ensure that their dog/cat wears identification at all times and is licensed as required by the local authorities
- Sterilize their dog, cat, or rabbit so as not to add to the problem of pet overpopulation
- Provide appropriate training, physical care, socialization and medical attention
- Maintain an active flea and tick control program so these pests wont spread to neighboring units, the common areas of a building, or public parks
- Keep a pet portfolio that includes: proof of licensing, proof of spay or neuter, current records of vaccinations and veterinary care, obedience school diplomas, references from previous landlords, and emergency information

# Tips for Tenants

1. **Be a responsible pet owner**: train and socialize your pet, put a pet resume together and include references from previous landlords, and any certifications such as the Canine Good Citizen.
2. **Plan ahead**: finding pet-friendly housing can take time, so plan ahead and be patient. In Los Angeles, Found Animals discovered Westside Rentals and Craig's List are good housing resources for pet owners. At any given time ~60% of Westside Rentals' listings allow pets
3. **Show your pet off**: bring your pet with you when looking for housing. Show the landlord what a great, well-behaved pet you have.