

ORDINANCE NO. 2026-3

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 94 OF THE LA PORTE COUNTY
CODE OF ORDINANCES TO AUTHORIZE COMPREHENSIVE
COMMUNITY CAT MANAGEMENT, TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN, AND
SHELTER-NEUTER-RETURN.

WHEREAS, the La Porte County Board of Commissioners finds that traditional "trap and kill" models are ineffective due to the "vacuum effect," where new unsterilized populations move into vacated territories; and

WHEREAS, a comprehensive Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and Shelter-Neuter-Return (SNR) program is a humane, science-based method to stabilize populations, reduce nuisance complaints, and support rabies control; and

WHEREAS, this ordinance supplements, but does not replace, existing provisions of Chapter 94 and applicable Indiana state laws.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the La Porte County Board of Commissioners as follows:

Section 1. Definitions

Chapter 94 is hereby amended by adding the following definitions:

- **"Community cat"** means any free-roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents, known or unknown, and which has been humanely trapped, sterilized, vaccinated against rabies, and ear-tipped. A community cat may or may not be feral.
- **"Community cat caregiver"** means a person who provides food, water, or shelter to one or more community cats. A caregiver is not the owner, harborer, custodian, or keeper of the cat for any purpose under county or state law.
- **"Ear-tipping"** means the surgical removal of the distal one-quarter (approx. 1/4 inch) of the left ear of a cat, performed by a licensed veterinarian while the cat is under anesthesia.
- **"Environmentally Sensitive Area"** means any area home to endangered or threatened species where free-roaming cats pose a documented threat to biodiversity.
- **"Shelter-Neuter-Return (SNR)"** (also known as Return-to-Field) means the process where a healthy, free-roaming cat is brought to a municipal shelter, sterilized, vaccinated, ear-tipped, and returned to the vicinity where it was found.

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- **“Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)”** means the citizen-led process of humanely trapping, sterilizing, vaccinating, ear-tipping, and returning a cat to its original location.

Section 2. Authorization and Operational Standards

(A) TNR and SNR Authorization: TNR and SNR are expressly permitted and encouraged throughout the County. Free-roaming cats in good body condition received by the Animal Shelter shall be prioritized for SNR rather than traditional impoundment and euthanasia.

1. A person attempting to capture a free-roaming cat must do so in a humane manner. A trap that does not injure the animal, such as a live release trap, can be used to transport the free-roaming cat for evaluation, surgical sterilization, ear-tipping, and vaccination against rabies by a licensed veterinarian. The cat would then be released to the vicinity from where it was trapped or released to a community cat caretaker.

a. It shall be unlawful for a person, attempting to capture a free-roaming cat, to fail to inspect the trap at least once every three hours.

b. Traps should be covered to protect the trapped animal from the elements.

c. It shall be unlawful for a person to attempt to use a trap during inclement weather.

2. A community cat, impounded by the Animal Shelter, will be returned to the vicinity from where it was trapped unless return to the area is a risk to the cat and/or public health.

3. Community cat caretakers shall report seriously ill or injured community cats to the Animal Control responsible for their jurisdiction. When necessary, the community cat care taker is responsible for transporting the community cat to a licensed veterinarian or to Animal Control.

(B) Stray Hold Exemption: Healthy, ear-tipped community cats shall not be subject to the mandatory stray hold periods defined in the 2019 ordinance and may be returned to their outdoor home immediately unless veterinary care is required.

(C) Surgical Protocols:

- **Age/Weight:** Cats must be at least 2 months of age and 2.1 pounds in weight to undergo surgery.

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- **Identification:** In addition to ear-tipping, microchipping is encouraged to assist in tracking health records and population attrition.
- **Recovery:** Cats shall be provided a recovery period of 12–24 hours for males and up to 48 hours for females before being returned to their territory.

(D) Feeding Restrictions:

- Feeding of community cats is permitted only on private property with the express permission of the property owner.
- Feeding on public property, including parks and rights-of-way, is prohibited unless specifically authorized by the County.
- Food should be removed within 15–30 minutes to prevent attracting wildlife or creating unsanitary conditions.

Section 3. Exemptions and Liability

(A) Ownership Shield: A community cat caregiver shall not be deemed to own, harbor, or control a cat for licensing, pet limits, or liability purposes.

(B) Abandonment Shield: The return of a sterilized and vaccinated community cat to its original location does not constitute abandonment.

(C) At-Large Exemption: An ear-tipped community cat shall not be deemed to be “running at large” or subject to impoundment unless it poses an immediate threat to public safety.

Section 4. Nuisance and Environmental Mitigation

(A) Nuisance Abatement: Upon receiving a documented nuisance complaint, the County shall provide the caregiver a period of 60 days to resolve the issue using humane deterrents or relocation before the animal is subject to impoundment.

(B) Wildlife Protection: The County reserves the right to prohibit or remove managed colonies from "Environmentally Sensitive Areas" to protect native wildlife and threatened species.

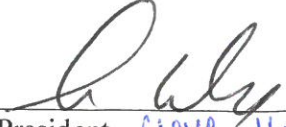
Section 5. Severability and Effective Date

If any provision of this ordinance is held invalid, the remainder shall not be affected. This ordinance shall take effect upon passage.

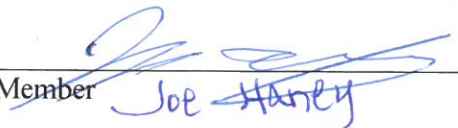
Adopted this ____ day of _____, 2026.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF LAPORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

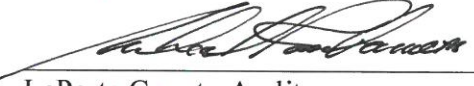
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President Steve Holifield

Absent
Vice President Connie Gramarossa


Member Joe Haney

ATTEST:


LaPorte County Auditor

First reading: 7-1-2026

Second reading: Rules Suspended 7-1-2026

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