

Mandatorily Optional? Optionally Mandatory? Huh?

*'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone,
it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less.'*

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'

– from Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll

San Antonio is currently overhauling its municipal animal code, called Chapter 5. The ordinance now under consideration by City Council modernizes and cleans up the entire code, legalizes progressive life-saving techniques like Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), closes loopholes in the state's cruelty laws, makes licensing free as a way of collecting information to reunite lost pets with their families, creates an Excess Animal Permit to allow families who take good care of their pets to keep more than the limit, and a whole host of other important improvements.

But opponents of any government infringement of owners' rights to do as they choose with their companion animals — no matter what the consequences to those animals, their offspring, or other city taxpayers — have chosen to focus on a single narrow issue, distorting the language of the ordinance and using scare tactics in an effort to sink the proposal.

That issue is spay/neuter of owned cats and dogs, which opponents of the proposal are calling "mandatory spay/neuter." But the fact is that the proposal's language calls for cat owners to bring their cats indoors *or* spay/neuter them, and for dog owners to purchase an Intact Permit *or* spay/neuter them. But calling those options "mandatory spay/neuter" has got San Antonio all tangled up in a non-conversation about an ordinance that isn't being proposed.

Feel a little bit like Alice yet? So do we.

*"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."
– Inigo Montoya in The Princess Bride*

But that's alright. Check out the proposed ordinance for yourself at Animal Care Services: <http://www.saacs.net/Chapter5.asp>. Just click on "Proposed Chapter 5 Redline Version (10-17-07)" and go to Section 5-163 (page 48) for dogs and Section 5-201 (page 59) for cats. You'll find your way out of the rabbit hole in no time at all.

For more information or to join Citizens for Pound Reform, visit <http://www.changethesapound.org>.

man·da·to·ry [**man-duh-tohr-ee**]

adjective. Law. permitting no option; not to be disregarded or modified

op·tion·al [**op-shuh-nl**] *adjective.*

Left to one's choice; not required or mandatory: *Formal dress is optional.*

per·mit [*n.* **pur-mit, per-mit**] *noun.*

An authoritative or official certificate of permission; license: *a fishing permit.*

*from Random House Unabridged Dictionary,
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