



# Laurel Cats, Inc & Beltsville Community Cats, Inc. Laurel/Beltsville Expansion Project

Project #  
FY20-538

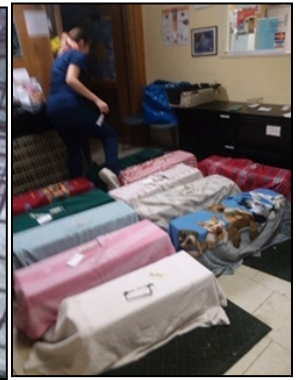
County: Prince Georges, Anne Arundel, & Howard

<b>Number of Cats Spayed:</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>Number of Dogs Spayed:</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Number of Cats Neutered:</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>Number of Dogs Neutered:</b>	<b>0</b>

<b>Amount Received: \$8,250</b>	<b>Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): \$0</b>
---------------------------------	--

### Project Synopsis:

This project expanded TNVR services into the previously under-served community of Beltsville, Maryland while continuing maintenance TNVR in Laurel, Maryland.



### Project Description:

Laurel Cats, Inc is a well established, all-volunteer TNVR group serving Laurel Maryland. Over the years we have received numerous TNVR help requests from the neighboring community of Beltsville, Maryland. Working with former Prince George's County councilwoman Mary Lehman, we identified a group of Beltsville residents interested in providing TNVR services to Beltsville. Through a fiscal sponsorship agreement, we brought them into our organization as Beltsville Community Cats (BCC) a program of Laurel Cats. In July of 2020 BCC completed all steps towards independence and was recognized by the IRS and State of Maryland as an independent organization. In addition to helping our group fix XXX cats, this project provided some of the seed money needed to help BCC get off the ground by beginning to address the significant cat overpopulation problem in Beltsville. It also allowed Laurel Cats to continue to fix the remaining unfixed cats in Laurel. Laurel Cats has reduced the number of cats from Laurel who are entering our municipal shelters to a tiny trickle while greatly increasing the knowledge of Laurel residents about spay/neuter, community cats, and TNVR. Beltsville Community Cats wishes to do the same.

### Summary of Approach:

FROM BELTSVILLE:

#### Outreach:

- In 2019, Emmanuel United Methodist Church (EUMC) adopted Beltsville Community Cats as a mission of the church. In addition to providing meeting space prior to COVID 19, BCC uses announcements at church services, in the church bulletin and occasionally in the monthly newsletter to get the word out about BCC's mission and successes. Church members have referred several people to BCC as a result of this outreach.



**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
**SPAY AND NEUTER GRANTS PROGRAM**



- Every month, BCC submitted an article for possible publication in the Beltsville News as a means of educating Beltsville residents about feral cats and BCC's work in the community. With the exception of a couple of months, these articles were published and a number of people contacting BCC mentioned hearing about us through the Beltsville News and appreciating what they learned through BCC's "Kitty Posts."
- BCC used Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) to do outreach and inform people about BCC's work, to distribute announcements about upcoming events such as fundraisers, and to advertise kittens available for adoption. BCC launched a new, significantly improved website in August 2020, which will be used increasingly to inform people about upcoming events and BCC's ongoing TNR work.
- BCC has found the best form of outreach is word of mouth, particularly during the COVID pandemic when going door to door has not been possible. In January, BCC began working in Beltsville Heights, a lower-income neighborhood where the feral cat population is significant and growing. The residents we work with often pass on information about BCC to other residents. As deemed safe, BCC volunteers will approach neighbors when trapping at a specific location as a means of identifying other caregivers.
- Outreach in North Creek continues to be a challenge because of their strict no soliciting policy which prevents all door knocking and posting any flyers on people's doors or on their mailboxes. When a BCC volunteer posted something on Nextdoor, encouraging people to contact her, the HOA President got angry and contact BCC to stress again the no-soliciting policy. As a result, BCC is relying mostly on word of mouth for outreach to North Creek. We are no longer trapping solely on common grounds in North Creek because we have had very little success without the cooperation of individual homeowners.
- Prior to COVID, BCC conducted monthly fundraising events at local restaurants. These events were another opportunity to outreach to the community to educate them about BCC and the importance of fixing feral cats.

#### TNR Activities:

- In addition to conducting mini-mass trappings where the cat population warrants this approach, BCC continues working with Beltsville residents who call for assistance in trapping and fixing feral cats that they feed or that simply show up on their property. We prioritize requests for assistance based on the presence of kittens 8 weeks old or younger, and on the size of the colony and the number of cats needing to be fixed. However, the limited availability of low cost spay/neuter surgeries often comes into play, preventing us from trapping as many cats as we would like at a single trapping event. Another limiting factor is finding somewhere to house these cats overnight the day before and the day after surgery.

#### MEANWHILE IN LAUREL:

When grant MDA funding showed in In Fall of 2019, the world was a fairly normal place. Laurel Cats was constantly following up on leads for and free-roaming cats we may have missed and TNVRing these cats, pulling friendly cats or kittens we found on the streets into our foster program, and helping low income residents fix their cats. All of that came to a screeching halt in March when the pandemic hit. The first couple of weeks weren't so bad since trapping a community in "maintenance" is a solo activity and the Governor's stay-at-home order allowed TNVR per confirmation of our state delegate. Most of us were off work and now had extra time to trap cats! Then the state veterinary board put out the world's most ambiguous letter prohibiting vets from doing "routine" spay and neuter. Our primary vet tried repeatedly to get an interpretation of "routine" but getting nothing back, opted to stop fixing cats. This essentially shut us down despite Hogan's previous order declaring us essential. Fortunately, knew another vet in the area which did not "routinely" run a Sunday spay/neuter clinic for rescues and hence felt they could set such a thing up for us. This put us back in business. This arrangement was actually working pretty well until the rest of the vets began to reopen. At this point this new vet was exhausted from spending her Sundays from sunrise to sunset fixing cats for us and began to cut back the number of clinics she would run for us. While many of the other clinics in the area were now open, they had massive backlogs of customers trying to get appointments. This forced us start setting up accounts at numerous other clinics throughout the area and schlepping cats all over the state to get them fixed. This problem persists to today with our local clinic now making appointments for the end of the year.



Our regular outreach programs such as the Main Street Festival, and pet store adoptions have not happened since the pandemic began. Masked volunteers are still doing some limited door-knocking to spread spay/neuter information. Adoption activities have all gone on-line but continue at a steady pace.

**Accomplishments:**  
FROM BELTSVILLE:

Accomplishments:

- **TNVR Outcomes:** Between October 1, 2019 and September 30, 2020, BCC took 344 cats in for spay/neuter surgeries. Of those, 4 were already fixed with no ear tips and 4 were from College Park and paid for by College Park Animal Control. Of the remaining cats 336 cats, funding from the Maryland Department of Agriculture was used to pay for 60 cats (27 males and 33 females).
- **Care and Feeding of Feral Cats:** BCC volunteers continue to manage and monitor between 150 and 175 feral cats in about 12 colonies located at commercial and industrial sites throughout Beltsville. The management involves providing food and clean water every day as well as providing and cleaning cat condos. The daily monitoring is necessary to identify new litters of kittens, any sick cats, and any unaltered ferals or dumped house cats that show up in these colonies.

To provide Beltsville residents with information on how to care for feral cats, BCC published a Kitty Post in the Beltsville News on what to and not to feed ferals, and the importance of providing clean water every day. BCC also created a video on “Building an Outdoor Cat Condo” and shared it via email through our contacts list, through our December Kitty Post in the Beltsville News (“Winter Is Coming! Kitty, It’s Cold Outside”), through our Instagram page (#beltsville\_cats), and on our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/beltsvillecommunitycats](http://www.facebook.com/beltsvillecommunitycats)).

In November BCC conducted a “Winter Shelter Workday” in which 12 volunteers built 11 condos for use by their personal colonies and in the commercial and industrial colonies BCC manages.

Community Support:

- BCC is pleased to say that community support for our efforts has been growing steadily. We continue to receive calls for assistance from Beltsville residents as well as people outside of Beltsville who receive information and/or referrals to TNR and rescue services in their zip code areas. Many of the individuals that we have helped have spread the word about our services. Some residents have been very generous in donating to BCC and some donations continue coming in through social media and the mail. This type of support from the community has made it possible to do as many spay/neuter surgeries as we have.

MEANWHILE IN LAUREL:

Despite the pandemic, this has been a very exciting year for Laurel Cats. First, this was the second year in a row that we were able to bring every young kitten born on Laurel’s streets into our foster program. The number of intact females is so low now that is a very realistic goal for us and we actually had the capacity to bring in quite a few kittens from surrounding areas. The number of intact females is also low enough now that we have the ability to spend considerable time and manpower tracking down individual elusive queens using tools such as wildlife cameras.

Second, we are super proud of our Beltsville colleagues. As you may recall, they were just a small program under our fiscal umbrella when this grant began. In July they became their own, independent 501c3 TNVR group, with a respectable operating budget as well, I should add. They’ve done a great job as building a volunteer base, establishing a fundraising program, and otherwise setting up the infrastructure to be their own, successful group.



Third, at the end of 2019, the Prince George's County Council passed CB19-46. The cat part of this animal bill was based directly on the work and hard data coming out of the Laurel Cats TNVR program showing a reduction in the cat population of Laurel, a reduction, in shelter intake and euthanasia of cats from Laurel, and a reduction in complaints about cats from Laurel. This new law for the first time take Prince George's County Animal Management Division firmly pro-TNVR and implements a return-to-field program run by local cat groups, for free-roaming cats that enter the shelter. This program has the potential to reduce cat euthanasia at the Prince George's County shelter by half. We would very much like to thank this grant committee for helping to make this possible. Your ongoing funding allowed us build such a successful TNVR program that Prince George's County has decided to reform its shelter practices and promote programs such as ours county-wide.

### **Lessons Learned: FROM BELTSVILLE:**

- Although BCC has more than doubled the number of feral cats altered last year, our ability to secure needed spay/neuter surgeries has been severely limited by the 2 month ban on these surgeries during the Governor's "Stay at Home Order," and the resultant backlog of spay/neuter appointments at all vets in the area (particularly Spay Now in Laurel). To address this challenge and stretch our limited resources as far as possible, BCC continues using the PG SPCA Feral Fix Clinic conducted the fourth Saturday of each month. BCC has also started taking cats to the following vets for surgery: The Animal Medical Center in Burtonsville, Spay Spa and Neuter Nook in Davidsonville, Spay Now in Grasonville, and Alley Cat Rescue. Even using all of these resources, BCC is still finding it difficult to get enough appointments to address all of the calls coming in from Beltsville residents. In addition, the inability to get multiple appointments and the restrictions associated with the COVID pandemic has severely limited BCC's ability to conduct large trapping events.

- To address the bumper crop of kittens that BCC has been dealing with as a result of the 2 month ban on spay/neuter surgeries, BCC recently started using the PG SPCA Pet Clinic to have kittens fixed and vaccinated prior to being adopted. BCC has also established relationships with two no-kill rescues (Sunshine's Friends Cat Rescue and the Animal Welfare League of Montgomery County) as well as continuing to partner with Laurel Cats on placing kittens in foster care when BCC does not have space available or when kittens are less than 2 weeks old.

BCC's approach to trapping was modified early in 2020 to accommodate the restrictions being imposed by COVID. Prior to COVID, BCC sent teams of volunteers to conduct mini-mass trapping events with the goal of trapping between 6 and 10 cats at a time. The size of these trapping events was limited due to three factors: 1) the availability of low cost spay/neuter surgeries (as described above); 2) the number of BCC volunteers with trapping experience and the number of volunteers who wanted to learn to trap; and 3) the willingness of residents to have several people on their property. In March, BCC changed its approach to trapping. Now one and occasionally two volunteers go out to assess the situation. The volunteer(s) works closely with the resident, often hard setting traps for few days before the planned trapping date. In some cases, a BCC volunteer will teach the resident how to trap. The residents are asked to monitor the traps and contact a BCC volunteer as soon as a cat is trapped. BCC has found that the residents feel they have a vested interest when they are doing the trapping. They get excited when they are successful and are often more likely to continue monitoring for any additional unaltered cats. As deemed appropriate, BCC also provided traps on loan and training on how to use traps to people calling from areas outside of Beltsville, particularly College Park.

### **MEANWHILE IN LAUREL:**

The biggest lesson learned is that pandemics really suck.

The next lesson learned is that the spay/neuter veterinary infrastructure of this state is woefully lacking. There wasn't enough spay/neuter capacity in the state before the pandemic and the shut down has shown just how bad this situation really is. I am convinced that in the future we are going to have to set up a clinic of our own



as we just cannot rely on any spay/neuter provider we have found to provide the volume of surgeries we need at any given time.

Finally, BCC was the first new cat group that we have helped set up. The process of setting them up went pretty smoothly, however separation was a bit of a bear as we were using a joint QuickBooks account to track our two checking accounts and sets of records. The next group we set up will need to have its own QuickBooks account from day one to avoid this problem.

**Attachments:**

**For More Information Contact:**

**Name:**

Woods, Helen

**Organization Name and Address:**

Laurel Cats, Inc.

PO Box 57

Laurel, MD 20707

**Email:** [info@laurelcats.org](mailto:info@laurelcats.org)



**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
**SPAY AND NEUTER GRANTS PROGRAM**

