The new ordinance spells out that animals are required to be given proper food and shelter and adequate water, and enough room to stretch out and roll over when penned. Animals also would be entitled to proper grooming, adequate light and veterinary care. Birds would be included in Baton Rouge's legal definition of animals for the first time and would be afforded the same protections as other animals.

Like all misdemeanors, cruelty to animals could result in a $500 fine or six months in jail, or both.

The law on impounding strays also would be changed. If a pet bites someone when provoked and has all of its shots and papers, it could be kept under the 10-day rabies watch at the owner's home instead of at a vet's office or the pound.

"What we are doing is giving responsible pet owners a break. We are actually rewarding them for vaccinating their animals," Cole said.

Stray dogs and cats that end up at the pound now must be kept for six days before they are destroyed, to give their owners time to find and collect them. The proposal would cut that to four days for cats.

That might be tougher on the owners, but Cole said it is easier on the cats, which get stressed and ill in the tight confines of a cage.