

**Good afternoon. My name is Tawny Hammond and I am the Chief Animal Services Officer for the City of Austin.**

**I am presenting today on the Council Committee Agenda Item Referral to discuss and obtain information and public input on strategies to reduce animal shelter intake.**

**The referral item asked the following topics to be considered:**

- *Current data on intakes and 311 calls related to animal issues and requests for services*
- *City of Austin measures planned and taken to date to control population of cats and dogs and manage animal shelter intake and adhere to the No Kill Resolution*
- *The pros and cons of instituting a spay/neuter ordinance*
- *The types of ordinances adopted by other communities such as Waco and Los Angeles*

### ***1. Current data on intakes and 311 calls related to animal issues and requests for service***

- Calls from 2012 to 2015 increased 24% from 25,237 to 31,501.
- We would expect to see an increase in requests for animal-related services because of continued population growth and increased population density and will continue to see these increases in the future. Travis County population to include COA increased over 11% in the last five years.
- Public requests for assistance with stray and loose animals and sick/injured animals are majority of calls, but fluctuate from year to year. In 2015 we had 15,107 calls for stray or injured animals compared to 16,342 calls in 2012.

### ***2. City of Austin measures planned and taken to date to control population of cats and dogs and manage animal shelter intake and adhere to the No Kill Resolution***

Austin will celebrate five years of no-kill success in March 2016. Every year since 2011, Austin has saved greater than 90% of the homeless animals who enter the city shelter, earning Austin the title of America's largest No Kill city. Through innovative programs, community and rescue group partnerships and with a progressive lifesaving approach to animal protection and control, Austin is a beacon of hope to other cities and towns throughout the United States and even the world.

These policies, programs and partnerships were carefully laid out in a series of recommendations put forth by the Animal Advisory Commission and approved by City Council in 2010. The No-Kill

Implementation Plan was modeled on best practices in animal sheltering and the plan has proven that it worked. After five years, it is still the recommendations from the No Kill plan that guide our efforts today.

Back in 2010, The Advisory Commission's directive was to look at other successful No Kill cities and recommend policies and procedures that were proven to be effective at reducing animal intake and increasing live animal outcomes in those cities. Recommended strategies for increasing live outcomes included focusing on strengthening the adoption program and rescue partnerships, creating a largescale foster program, increasing live outcomes for feral cats and building a broad base of public awareness advocacy.

The following is a brief overview of recommendations of the No Kill plan which have been implemented and the results of their implementation.

- *AAC has achieved **live outcome rates** above 90% every month since 2011. In 2015, AAC averaged a live outcome rate of over 94%.*
- *Decreased shelter intake from a more than 23,000 animals entering the shelter system per year to fewer than 18,000 per year. In 2000, the intake per 1000 residents was about 27 animals. Today the intake per thousand residents is about 15 animals per 1000 residents. This is despite a steading increasing population size. While there is some volatility in intake numbers, the general trend is a decline in intake. Prevention and intake diversion programs are working.*
- *AAC does approximately 7000 **adoptions** per year and sends 5000 pets per year to **rescue groups**. Large scale partners include Austin Pets Alive!, which takes nearly 3500 animals per*

*year and Austin Humane Society which takes between 500 and 600 pets per year. AAC has 140 total rescue partners, helping us to save the vast majority of animals in our care.*

- *2500 animals were placed in **foster homes** in 2015. Foster homes increase shelter capacity by freeing up kennel and cage space at the shelter and more than half the animals that went to foster last year were adopted directly out of foster homes, saving the city resources and preventing the stress caused by the animal having to return to the shelter. Many of these pets are too young or too sick to thrive in a shelter environment. A dedicated staff person serves as the foster coordinator facilitating these placements and ensuring foster families have support.*
- *To increase live outcomes for **feral and community cats**, the plan specified creating a program through partnership with local non-profits to spay/neuter stray cats and return them back into the community. In partnership with Austin Humane Society, approximately 1200 stray cats were spayed or neutered (if not already altered) and returned to the community last year.*
- *AAC has strengthened its media presence both on social media and in the community over the last six months. AAC now has over 60,0000 followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Staff and volunteers participate in up to 10 television and radio news spots per week. A website redesign is in progress to make it more user friendly, which should be completed by May.*
- *Other elements of the plan which have been implemented are the 24-hour kill list hold, “call before killing” to give former owners the chance to reclaim their animal if euthanasia is the only other possible outcome and a moratorium on euthanasia when there are empty cages within the facility.*

- *This city's pet surrender prevention program continues to be run by APA!. AAC has also implemented return-in-field for stray animals picked up by Animal Protection. Last year, more than 500 stray dogs were returned in the field. The shelter also provides microchips for all adopted pets and free microchips and tags made available to the public.*
- *The city funds spay/neuter surgeries for owned pets through its partner organization, Emancipet. These are primarily done at mobile clinics in nine different zip codes, which include the highest intake areas. Public educators on staff also assist with transport to clinics if pet owners are unable to arrange their own. In FY15, almost 8000 owned pets were spayed/neutered and vaccinated. An additional 900 pets receive free vaccines and families receive spay/neuter information at bi-annual rabies clinics.*

### **3. The pros and cons of instituting a spay/neuter ordinance**

Spay/Neuter programs are a very important part of the lifesaving equation, but the impact on the community varies depending on how it is implemented.

We assist, encourage, educate and provide spay/neuter through current programs and policies which I described in the previous sections and will mention again here. We run a spay and neuter outreach program to provide services and education in low income and high intake areas. We fund thousands of spay/neuter surgeries for owned pets and community cats through our partnerships with Emancipet and Austin Humane Society. Additionally, all animals adopted to the public and transferred to rescue are spay and neutered prior to leaving the Animal Center. Lastly, spay/neuter services are offered to those reclaiming stray pets, and on the second impound, the pet is required to be altered prior to be reclaimed. These measures are working to reduce the overall population of homeless pets in Austin and Travis County, despite rapid population growth.

The key barriers to people getting their pets spayed or neutered are financial limitations, lack of information and having no access to veterinary services. Because of this, we do not advocate the passing of a spay/neuter ordinance. There are several reasons for this:

- No major animal welfare organization promotes or endorses mandatory spay/neuter as a means to increase live outcomes or decrease shelter intake including: ASPCA, American Veterinary Medical Association, Best Friends, No Kill Advocacy Center and the Humane Society of the United States. What these organizations DO support is effective community outreach to give residents the information they need to make a decision on the topic and facilitating access to spay/neuter services all of which our current programs strive to do.
- Mandatory spay/neuter ordinances have the potential for many unintended consequences. In many instances, including Los Angeles and Kansas City, intake and euthanasia has increased. Additionally, the burden of criminalizing unaltered dogs falls hardest on lower income neighborhoods. According to Petsmart Charities and HSUS, nationally, the majority of pet owners spay/neuter their pets. However, the lower income the neighborhood, the less likely pets are spayed/neutered. Research conducted by Petsmart charities shows only 4% of pet owners cited a mandatory spay/neuter requirement as a motivation to have their pets altered. Almost ¾ of all owners cited a desire to prevent unwanted litters and a belief that “it’s the right thing to do”, again pointing to the need for effective spay/neuter programs to bridge resource and education gaps and not criminalize behavior.
- Criminalizing behavior does not induce compliance. MSN frequently has the unintended consequence of increasing intake due to pet owners being unwilling or unable to comply with

the law and so choosing to surrender pets or surrendering pets in lieu of citations and fines.

MSN can make owners reluctant to reclaim lost pets for the same reason.

- Additionally, it has been shown to make some pet owners less likely to comply with other ordinances such as obtaining rabies vaccinations.
- MSN would result in increased staffing needs in a department that is already understaffed.

#### ***4. The types of ordinances adopted by other communities such as Waco and Los Angeles***

- Los Angeles and Waco both adopted MSN to questionable efficacy. Los Angeles' intake and euthanasia increased. Los Angeles dedicated 1.2 million dollars annually to MSN. In addition to MSN, The City of Waco also instituted a surrender fee and a disposal fee for animals brought to the shelter, so if overall intake has declined, it would be difficult to know what the predominant factor was. Santa Cruz CA implemented MSN and over ten years their budget almost doubled. It should be noted that Santa Cruz is a progressive community and instituted other lifesaving programs.
- Kansas City implemented MSN for pit bulls which increased intake of "pit bull type dogs," euthanasia of "pit bull type dogs" and confusion between animal control officers and the public about what dogs were "pit bulls" in the first place. After nine years, 75% of pit bull type dogs entering the shelter are unaltered.
- In the words of the ASPCA position statement: "To the knowledge of the ASPCA, the only method of population control that has demonstrated long-term efficacy in significantly reducing the number of animals entering animal shelters is the voluntary sterilization of owned pets."

There is also evidence that sterilizing very specific, at-risk sub-populations of companion animals such as feral cats and animals in shelters can also contribute to reductions in overpopulation. In contrast, the ASPCA is not aware of any credible evidence demonstrating a statistically significant enhancement in the reduction of shelter intake or euthanasia as a result of the implementation of a mandatory spay/neuter law."

## CONCLUSION

The Austin Animal Center is currently modeling animal welfare best practices to reduce intake and I will continue to evaluate any and all programs and policies that will utilize precious resources appropriately in lifesaving efforts. I am in regular communication with animal welfare leadership around the country and can assure you we are committed to staying abreast of changes and successes.

As we look for ways to further reduce shelter intake, we know the biggest barrier to reducing intake further is being under resourced in Animal Protection. According to the National Animal Care and Control field staffing levels, the COA only has a third of the Animal Protection officers needed. Much of the education, information sharing and assistance happens in the neighborhoods prior to an animal becoming lost or surrendered to the Animal Center. Additionally, according to the Office of the City Auditor, priority one calls are not being answered within two hours during the day and ten hours in the evening. Currently, Animal Protection Officers, are only scheduled seven days a week from 7 am to 5 pm with one officer scheduled from 2 pm until midnight.

Thank you for your attention