



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Don Bland, Chief Animal Services Officer
Austin Animal Services

DATE: September 22, 2021

SUBJECT: Audit and Finance Item 004 – Animal Advisory Commission Bylaws

The purpose of this memo is to provide information regarding Item No. 4 on the September 22, 2021, Audit and Finance Committee regarding proposed amendments to the Animal Advisory Commission's bylaws.

At their September 13, 2021, meeting, the Animal Advisory Commission made a recommendation to change their bylaws to create a committee that would provide oversight of sustaining and advancing No Kill in Austin. It was communicated that this would be a standing committee that would meet every month to work on big picture items related to No Kill.

Background

To be considered No Kill, a community must maintain a 90 percent or greater live outcome rate; meaning 90 percent of animals leave the shelter alive. The City's commitment to remaining a No Kill community is clearly evidenced by the following City Council policy actions:

- Council [Resolution 20100311-021](#), which formally adopted the [34-point No Kill plan](#).
- Council [Resolution 20190328-034](#), which reaffirmed the City Council's commitment to Austin's No Kill animal-sheltering policy and supporting Austin Animal Center's goal of a 95 percent or greater live-release rate.
- Council [Ordinance 20191017-025](#), adding additional life-saving directives.

The Animal Services Office (ASO) has exceeded Council's standards for the last ten years and, despite significant challenges resulting from the COVID pandemic, the City has a current live outcome rate of 97 percent for Fiscal Year 2021 due in large part to staff implementing innovative operational protocols. ASO has never fallen below the City Council mandate of maintaining a 95 percent live outcome rate and has always looked to identify and implement efficiencies and best practices in support of our No Kill status.

Innovation and Process Improvements

The pandemic challenged both ASO and our partners in how we conducted our everyday business. Even those with contractual obligations to provide services were not able to help ASO as they had in the past. The pandemic challenges enabled ASO to implement new innovative measures to provide improved

services to our residents and our animals while maintaining compliance with Council's 95 percent live outcome mandate. Some of the tools/tactics implemented include:

Adoptions

- Waiving adoption fees since March 16, 2020, to incentivize adoptions.
- Streamlining the adoption and foster procedures to make the process more customer friendly and to cut down on wait times. Since implementation, the percent of sheltered animals adopted increased from 48 percent to 62 percent.
- Establishing virtual processes for Adoptions and Fosters to continue getting animals into homes while maintaining safety protocols due to the pandemic.

Community Resources and Outreach

- Dedicating staff to work solely on out-of-area transports of dogs which aligns with best practices established by American Pets Alive! and Best Friends Animal Society.
- Being the first city shelter to implement a chatbot to answer questions from the public regarding animal related questions and services. The chatbot relieved adoption staff by freeing up 80 hours a week in email response time. This in turn allowed the adoption staff to focus on adoptions.
- Incorporating the Pet Harbor "Lost Report" which allows a pet owner to report a lost pet onto a public database. To remain No Kill, we strive to reunite lost pets with the owners instead of having those animals come into the shelter. Having a public place where pet owners can post their lost pets has assisted in reuniting pets with their owners. We are currently averaging 5.33 lost reports filed each week.
- Activating a text back program with LostATX and FoundATX to share information on lost and found pets and to provide guidelines on what to do to reunite pets with their owners.
- Creating a Pet Reunification Guide which provides residents who find a pet a step-by-step process on how to reunite the animal back with its owner. This is sent out as one part of the text back program as well as to anyone who files a lost/found pet report.
- Calling finders of Confined Stray Dogs to triage the situation to determine whether the animal truly needs shelter services.
- Providing support to pet owners through the Neighborhood Level Program which continues to service areas and populations in most need. Staff have distributed 28,000 pet food kits via the Austin Eats initiative, as well as documented over 4,500 field contacts and deferred 200 animals from being owner surrendered to the Austin Animal Center. It costs an average of \$42 a day to maintain an animal at the AAC. Those 200 deferred animals saved the City \$8,400 a day.

Microchip

- Establishing free, drive-through microchip clinics to area residents to identify lost pets and reunite them with their owners. Since inception six months ago, Animals Services has microchipped more than 200 pets

Fosters

- Increasing our foster program to help with space capacity and to decompress animals who may be experiencing shelter stress.
- Creating a Telemedicine Program for fosters to reduce trips to and from the shelter when potential medical issues arise. City veterinarians and vet technicians average about 37 service requests a week.
- Creating the Cactus Cats program which provides homes for independent cats that are shy, reserved and a little prickly. The program has placed 25 cats since its inception in October 2020.
- Continuing community cat trapping operations to ensure area community cats are being altered and cat colonies are being properly managed.

- Establishing a Behavior Foster Program for long-stay dogs to ensure these specific dogs are provided a chance to decompress from shelter stress and to have a successful adoption.

Lost & Surrendered Pets

- Establishing the Hornsby Bend Neighborhood Group to help reunite lost pets with their owners.
- Changing rescue pulls to allow for faster response from the rescue organizations to ensure animals are transferred from Austin Animal Center as efficiently as possible
- Initiating telephone consults through the Pet Resource Center with all owner surrenders to determine if specific services may be needed to defer the surrender and keep the family together.
- Adding a Microchip Scanning Station at the entrance of the Pet Resource Center so individuals who may have found a lost pet can scan the animal for a microchip and begin the steps to reunite with the owner.
- Establishing a home-to-home pet listing service for people who need to rehome their pets instead of surrendering the animal to Austin Animal Center.

Other

- Constructing a new Neonatal Kitten Nursery that increased Austin Animal Center capacity from nine kennels to 36 kennels.
- Creating a dedicated Exotic Pets Area at the Austin Animal Center for animals such as rabbits, guinea pigs and hamsters.

This memorandum provides a snapshot of staff efforts and our continued commitment to the community. The Animal Services Office will ensure that Austin remains a leader in the No Kill community.

Should you have any questions, please call me at 512-978-0521.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Anne Morgan, Interim Deputy City Manager
Stephanie Hayden-Howard, Assistant City Manager