

RESOLUTION NO. 20220728-098

WHEREAS, in March 2010, the City adopted a No Kill animal sheltering policy as well as an Implementation Plan crafted by the Animal Advisory Commission (Commission) and City staff, with the goal of ending the practice of euthanizing healthy and treatable animals entering the City's municipal animal shelter (shelter); and

WHEREAS, the City has become a model for No Kill animal sheltering, with national, and international municipal leaders traveling to Austin to learn how to establish and implement No Kill programs; and

WHEREAS, since 2011, the shelter has achieved a 90% or higher live-release rate for impounded dogs and cats; and

WHEREAS, building on the success of the No Kill policy efforts, in 2019, Council raised the live outcome goal to 95% or higher, a threshold which the shelter has continued to meet or exceed, at times achieving a 98% live outcome rate, which is the nation's highest; and

WHEREAS, the City's No Kill animal sheltering policy has continued to improve and thrive despite changing leadership and significant infrastructure challenges such as operating in a shelter facility designed prior to the City's commitment to No Kill sheltering and thus focused on euthanasia solutions rather than behavior modification or training; and

WHEREAS, community and municipal challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic created strains and challenges for various departments across the City, with the Animal Services Center continuing to face both staff and volunteer shortages and reduction in services to the community; and

WHEREAS, despite the laudable efforts of Animal Services Department staff, animal advocacy groups, and volunteers to alleviate the strain, the Animal Services Office (ASO) has released multiple media advisories and memos reporting on a severe shelter space crisis, and in one case in 2021, warned of the possible use of euthanasia; and

WHEREAS, in response, the Commission committed to appoint a Shelter Space Issues Working Group to review available data and craft strategies to improve the flow of shelter operations and forestall any need to resort to euthanasia to resolve capacity issues, and work to increase public access to the facility; and

WHEREAS, the most recent audit of the department from 2015 reviewed state compliance issues and acknowledged ongoing challenges such as insufficient facilities and resources; and

WHEREAS, the focus of the findings in the most recent audit addressed many questions of compliance, but Council recognizes the need to broaden the scope of a future audit to review effectiveness and outline specific strategies and recommendations provided by the City Auditor, who would benefit not only from collaboration with City staff but also from external animal sheltering industry experts knowledgeable in No Kill policies and practices; and

WHEREAS, Council also acknowledges the role of the Commission, which must navigate disparate community voices and which, as a state-required advisory board, is tasked to provide expert guidance to Council; and

WHEREAS, as they have through other challenging points in the shelter's history, the Commission has issued recommendations to Council that support the City's No Kill policy; and

WHEREAS, Council acknowledges Commission Recommendation No. 2022613-004 regarding the resolution of No Confidence in reference to department leadership, and Council acknowledges the ongoing concerns being heard from volunteers, City staff, and community groups about the state of the shelter and condition of the animals; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Auditor is directed to perform an audit of Animal Services Office effectiveness (effectiveness audit) and to identify an external animal sheltering expert knowledgeable in No Kill policies and practices to assist in identifying strategies and recommendations for improved flow of operations, quality care for animals, and a successful, sustainable No Kill shelter. The following directions assume City Auditor collaboration with an external expert.

The City Auditor is directed to pursue the effectiveness audit and consider areas to review that include, but are not limited to, the following, and make recommendations in alignment with No Kill practices:

- Causes of recent kennel space shortages that have occurred alongside decreases in animal intake between 2020-2022, and identify necessary improvements;
- The flow of operations to provide faster availability of pets to new owners;
- Availability of services to the public for stray animal intake, spay/neuter programs, Pet Resource Center services, animal protection, and adoption services; and identify areas that need improvement and strategies to implement;

- Current staffing levels and recommendations for any necessary increased staffing;
- Optimal medical procedures and care to best serve the health needs of the animals and the capacity of the facility;
- Alignment of the Transport Program, which transports animals to other shelters and rescue organizations, with national best practices and the City's No Kill policies;
- Current Ordinance No. 20191017-025 reporting requirements for potential updates and recommend any changes for optimal public transparency;
- Current reporting of data for compliance with ordinance requirements;
- Provision of behavior services to shelter animals by professionals dedicated to humane training, in alignment with No Kill policies;
- History and status of ASO partnerships with animal advocacy, rescue partners, and volunteer and community groups, and recommend strategies to improve those partnerships;
- Staffing need for ASO community liaison personnel to secure healthy, collaborative relationships with key community partners and volunteers;
- Additional resources through local community partners that may be available to ASO;

- Existing shelter facility design/usage to meet the needs of the animals and the community; and
- Use of satellite locations for adoptions in City facilities or in partnership with community groups.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The Council directs the City Auditor to review the following Commission strategies to improve shelter operations and to achieve compliance with City Code and Council policies, and identify recommendations that should be implemented based on the completed audit:

- Commission Recommendation No. 20210809-3f as developed by the Shelter Space Issues Working Group to address the ongoing space crises at the shelter.
- Commission Recommendation No. 20220610-001 regarding the necessity for the department to follow City Code Section 3-1-25, Subsections (C), (I), and (J) in the disposition of an impounded animal.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to expedite the hiring process for candidates applying for Animal Service Department vacancies as soon as possible to help address the existing staff and volunteer shortages as well as to improve the living conditions for the animals, working conditions for staff and volunteers, and in recognition of the public service that is provided by this department as essential to public health and safety.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to explore adding the Animal Services Department to the Strategic Direction update with the appropriate metrics attached.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Auditor is directed to prioritize the effectiveness audit given current workload, identify an external expert at the earliest opportunity, and offer details on progress and a timeline for the project at the September 21, 2022 Audit and Finance Council Committee meeting.

ADOPTED: July 28, 2022

ATTEST:



Myrna Rios
City Clerk