

TO: Austin City Council and City Manager
FROM: Animal Advisory Commission and City Staff
RE: Plan to Implement Policies and Programs to Reduce Intake and Increase Live Outcomes
DATE: February 16, 2010

Dear Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, Council Members and City Manager,

Thank you for the invitation to prepare a plan for Austin to join the ranks of America's "No Kill" cities by implementation of programs and policies proven to decrease shelter intake and increase live outcomes. (See Resolution 20091105-040 "Resolution"). To implement your request, we have convened 4 regular meetings and 16 subcommittee or special meetings of the Animal Advisory Commission (AAC or Commission) that were very well-attended by the public (Appendix 7), and sought and received input from citizens, city staff, and community stakeholders. Public input was highly encouraged throughout this process (both in e-mail form and in oral presentations and proposals at meetings), and the public was very helpful and thoughtfully engaged in the process.

We strongly believe that by implementing this plan, Austin can and will save at or more than 90% of all sheltered animals at Town Lake Animal Center (TLAC) within 12 months. As you will see below, the plan has three primary aspects: (1) changing the mission of Animal Services to incorporate life-saving as a core goal and principle; (2) implementing policies and programs proven to increase live outcomes at other shelters; and (3) continuing and enhancing the City's commitment to decreasing shelter intake. Based on the experiences of other cities that have achieved No Kill success, we believe these programs and policies can and should be implemented at marginal cost by reducing other budgetary costs. However, based on the information provided by City staff, we are not able to determine current comprehensive program expenses in order to propose specific budget cuts.

Citizen communication focused primarily on dogs and cats, but we recommend that this implementation plan should apply to every species that enters TLAC. We look forward to continuing to work with City staff on carrying out this Implementation Plan and achieving No Kill status.

I. Recommendations for Structural Changes to Enhance Lifesaving

A. Revise the Mission of Animal Services

1. Description: Revise and/or create the goals and objectives of Animal Services to reflect Council's directive to reduce the killing of lost and homeless pets by increasing live outcomes and reducing shelter intake.
2. Process: The Commission elicited input from Assistant Director Dorinda Pulliam, non-profit animal-service providers, as well as members of the public regarding the mission of animal services. Members of the public encouraged the Commission to adopt a bold mission statement that truly reflects the initiative to eliminate the killing of animals at TLAC by October 2011.
3. Recommendation: That Animal Services adopt the following mission statement: The mission of Austin/Travis County Animal Services is to develop, implement and enforce policies, procedures and programs that will make Austin/Travis County a no-kill community, encourage compassionate and responsible behavior toward animals, and reposition Austin/Travis County as a recognized state and national leader in the field by saving at least 90% of the live animals that enter the City-run shelter.

4. Projected cost: Zero.

5. Notes: Austin/Travis County Animal Services should be the protector and safe harbor for lost and homeless animals in Austin. By October 2011, TLAC should be saving the lives of and find appropriate live outcomes for all the animals that enter TLAC, except those that have terminal medical conditions which cause great suffering with little hope of respite and those that have serious aggression issues that pose a health and safety risk to the public. Every animal should be treated as if it is the most important animal in our shelter system, receiving the care and outcome that is to that animal's greatest benefit. Euthanasia is reserved for use under only the strictest definition of the term (See Section V, terminology).

B. Reporting Public Information

1. Description: Add performance measurements to those reported by TLAC in order to track implementation of this No Kill plan. Create a technology solution that will provide better public reporting and track animals within the Animal Services system as required by the Resolution.

2. Process: The Commission elicited input from Ms. Pulliam, non-profit animal-services providers, as well as members of the public regarding additional performance measures. Two special meetings of an AAC subcommittee were held to discuss reporting needs.

3. Recommendation: Implement a sound performance-measurement system that clearly connects shelter operations to the new, life-saving Mission Statement and the AAC Recommendations. Performance measures should be posted to the COA/TLAC website by the 14th of the following month. The specific performance measurements identified as necessary by the Commission are attached in Appendix Tab 3 and include number of off-site adoptions, number of animals in foster homes, and number of empty cages. We further recommend that the City evaluate and discuss with the AAC the internal pet tracking software (Chameleon) and website for possible upgrade or replacement.

4. Projected cost: Near zero. Minimal up-front costs may be necessary to create protocols, upgrade reporting software, and train shelter staff to implement new performance measurements. Pet tracking software (Chameleon) cost to be estimated prior to October, 2011.

II. Increasing Live Outcomes

A. Comprehensive Adoption Program:

1. Description: Increase adoptions through implementation of off-site adoptions, increased care and kennel capacity, in-house behavioral programs, and public-awareness campaigns.

2. Process: The Commission elicited input from Ms. Pulliam, non-profit animal-services providers, as well as members of the public regarding increasing adoptions to meet the new, greater-than-90% live-outcome goal. The City staff did not prepare or propose any plan to meet the new no-kill goal. Austin Pets Alive (APA) presented a Comprehensive Adoption Plan to increase lives saved by 3,750 animals in year one. See Appendix Tab 1. Austin Pets Alive also presented a smaller plan to implement only off-site adoptions for TLAC, a plan that is included in the larger APA comprehensive adoptions proposal.

See Appendix Tab 2. Love-A-Bull requested a campaign specifically intended to increase live outcomes for pit bulls and pit-bull mixes (see later in Part II.E.). Several members of the public commented on the importance of customer service and identified specific problems and poor experiences from interactions at TLAC. In addition, individuals discussed the importance of behavioral training and socialization for impounded dogs.

3. Recommendation: To become a No Kill city, the City of Austin should partner with the non-profit Austin Pets Alive to operate TLAC's adoptions program, including medical work-up services for adopted animals.

a. Description: The City should partner with Austin Pets Alive, Austin's largest provider of adoptions for TLAC euthanasia-list animals, to increase live outcomes through a comprehensive adoptions program. The partnership outlines a contract between the City of Austin and Austin Pets Alive! to operate all adoption activities. The partnership will allow a major organization to focus 100% of efforts on the weakest sector of the City's Animal Services. The organization promises an increased efficiency of spay/neuter and work up of adopted animals thereby increasing turnover of animals and maximizing cage space, a customer-service overhaul, increased public-access hours, a messaging campaign to the public to increase customer interest through a comprehensive, dynamic website and use of the media, and will provide a behavioral program for adoption dogs. The partnership will also provide a clear safety net for an anticipated increase in intake at the new animal shelter.

b. Projected increase in lives saved in rollout year: 3,754; Projected save rate when implemented (based on current intake): 84%.

c. Projected Cost to City: \$1,047,225 annually (about \$1 per person in Travis County)

d. Notes:

i. Further details of the Austin Pets Alive Adoptions Program proposal are attached in Appendix Tab 1. Please note that Austin Pets Alive also presented a smaller proposal to conduct off-site adoptions for the City (attached as Appendix Tab 2). The off-site adoptions proposal is included in the larger Austin Pets Alive Adoption Program proposal. The Commission is very supportive of both proposals, but fundamentally believes that the off-site adoptions proposal alone will not achieve the Council's No Kill directive. As a result, the Commission fully endorses Austin Pets Alive's larger proposal for Austin to achieve No Kill success by partnering with the non-profit adoptions group to run the City's adoption and corresponding medical make-ready services.

ii. The Commission believes that an audit of internal TLAC costs for adoption programs is needed to determine the cost of current TLAC programs that would become redundant when the APA Comprehensive Adoptions Program is implemented.

iii. To allay concerns regarding current shelter staff and to ensure quality of services, the City could enter into the comprehensive adoptions partnership with APA for a "pilot" period of 12 months. Pursuing the partnership in this way would allow TLAC to redirect all current adoptions

staff to enhance other TLAC priorities such as community spay/neuter and lost-and-found services. If the pilot program is not successful, TLAC staff could be redirected back to previous duties without harm. If the pilot is successful and other animal services are enhanced, Council could elect to continue funding both the partnership program and the enhanced TLAC services.

iv. The Commission recommends that the City explore possible City and County sites to be utilized for offsite adoptions and other animal services.

B. Future Use of Current TLAC Site

1. Description: Develop a plan for maximizing the utility and usage of the Davenport Building and existing shelter structures.

2. Process: In October 2007, the City Council voted to retain the Davenport Building as a "Satellite Adoptions Center" once the new shelter is built in East Austin. Over the course of several meetings, the Commission gathered input from the public, from shelter staff, and from the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) regarding the future use of the current site. The overwhelming view of public participants was that the Davenport building, kennels, and outbuildings should be retained for adoptions purposes once the new shelter is opened. The Department of Health and Human Services has not developed or proposed a plan for the site (but did offer suggestions for the Commission's consideration). However, in a presentation by PAR to the AAC, it was made clear that PAR is currently planning under the assumption that all or most of the TLAC buildings and kennels other than the Davenport building will be demolished. Austin Pets Alive requested use of all or part of the existing structures, including the Davenport building, kennels and outbuildings, as part of their Adoptions Program proposal. Other members of the public asked that parts of the Davenport building be used for "checking out" dogs for exercise on the hike-and-bike trail, and also for a post-surgery recovery site for feral cats.

3. Recommendation:

a. The Council should direct the City Manager to preserve both the Davenport Building and all of the remaining structures (kennels and outlying buildings) for adoptions purposes and to ensure that there is no increase in euthanasia when the main shelter moves to its new location. Our recommendation is that at least 90% of the Davenport Building and existing shelter structures be operated and maintained by a third-party non-profit entity or by the City of Austin for adoptions-use only in compliance with the Council's October 2007 directive. We also recommend that the Adoptions Center be made open to the public at a minimum of the same number of hours and number of days of the year that the new shelter is open to the public. We also recommend that dogs and cats be housed in the Adoptions Center (and not moved between facilities) in order to decrease stress on the animals and increase economic efficiency. It is important to keep the current site intact as a full-time adoption center to achieve the No Kill goal, and as a safety net facility to house the projected increase of 10%-25% in intake as a result of the opening of the new shelter which will have fewer kennels and cage space. We recommend that the TLAC campus open for the purposes stated within 30 days of the new shelter opening, or within 30 days of the TLAC campus being vacated, whichever is sooner.

b. TLAC buildings should be used for the following:

Davenport Building, adoption center;

Cat Adoption Center, adoption center;

Veterinary Services Building, feral cat surgery, recovery and treatment center;

Lost and Found/Intake Building, rescue partners adoption center;

The Barn, rescue partners storage.

Stray Cat Building, feral cat food bank.

Kennels and other buildings used for other purposes including offsite adoption housing, medical rehabilitation and behavioral rehabilitation.

4. Projected Lives Saved: 4,923 adoptions occurred from the shelter in FY 2009; at a minimum, we anticipate at or near the same number to occur year after year from this facility as long as the current facility remains in operation.

5. Projected Cost: Zero or near zero for a non-profit adoptions agency to run the Adoptions Center at the current TLAC location. The cost is unknown for the City to run the Adoptions Center itself because City staff has not presented a budgeted proposal for the Adoptions Center. We also recommend that the City budget \$106,289.67 per year (based on current expenses) for utilities.

6. Notes: The City may lease the Davenport building to a non-profit for adoptions purposes under the Council's October 2007 directive. The remaining structures (kennels and outlying buildings) were designated as parkland under the Council's October 2007 directive, restricting their future use under Texas law and the City Charter. Please note that there is no legal impediment to the City hiring a non-profit to operate either the Davenport Building or the remaining structures after the new East Austin shelter is built; the charter prohibits a lease of the property but not a contract for its continued operation. The City should work with those in the Parks and Recreation Department with expertise in contracting with vendors for the use of (but not the lease of) parkland in order to preserve not only the Davenport Building but also the remaining TLAC kennels and structures for adoptions purposes.

C. Large-Scale Foster Program

1. Description: Design and implement a large-scale volunteer foster program to immediately increase shelter capacity in order to save more lives.

2. Process: The Commission elicited input from Ms. Pulliam, non-profit animal-service providers, as well as members of the public regarding the implementation of a large-scale foster program. Austin Pets Alive presented information and statistics on their Dog and Cat Foster Program, which is entirely volunteer operated and cares for over 700 cats per year and over 100 dogs per month, and also proposed a plan to partner with the City of Austin to, at-a-minimum, double the number of foster homes that TLAC currently uses. City staff did not present a plan to create a foster program on the scale of those in

communities that have achieved No Kill success. However, Ms. Pulliam and David Lurie informed the Commission at a later meeting that the shelter has hired a full-time Foster Coordinator (who replaced a Customer Service Lead Position at the beginning of FY2010). Ms. Pulliam anticipates that the shelter's current foster program will double in capacity without a partnership with Austin Pets Alive.

3. Recommendations:

a. The City should partner with Austin Pets Alive to run and expand TLAC's foster program, as part of the proposed comprehensive-adoptions program, which would be a good fit because 100% of fostering activity is for adoption-program animals. All other foster partnerships should remain intact.

b. The City should create a "Foster until Adoption" program for people who surrender a found pet to TLAC, cannot adopt it, but would like to help find it a home. This would also include citizens who want to foster euthanasia-list pets until adoption.

c. The City should create an "Adoption from Foster" program to allow fosters to find adopters for the pets in their care, eliminating the need for foster pets to take up cage space at the shelter when they are ready for adoption.

4. Projected Lives Saved: All underage puppies and kittens, any fearful dogs and cats, and all animals requiring a foster home to recuperate from illness or injury.

5. Projected Cost to City: Zero or near zero if the City or Austin Pets Alive is able to use the person identified by Ms. Pulliam as the new Foster Coordinator and this position should be retained. Increased veterinary costs should be offset by adoption fees and foster-funded care.

D. Increase Feral Cat Live Outcomes

1. Description: Reduce the number of free-roaming cats killed at TLAC.

2. Process: The Commission elicited input from Ms. Pulliam, non-profit animal-services providers, as well as members of the public regarding the implementation of programs and policies to reduce feral-cat euthanasia. Members of the public expressed a very high level of support for increasing live outcomes for feral cats through education, adoption opportunities, alternative placement opportunities, a food bank, a post-surgery recovery and rehabilitation site and improved processes at TLAC. The Austin Humane Society gave a presentation on its current feral cat spay-neuter program, which aims to sterilize 5,000 cats per year, but indicated that it is not able to expand capacity at this time. Commission Chair Larry Tucker presented a study of stray cats, and public opinion on the humane treatment of stray cats, by Harris Interactive and Alley Cat Allies. The study is attached as Appendix Tab 4, and indicates, in part, that (1) stray cats lead good lives without being picked up by a municipality; and (2) 81% of the public would prefer a stray cat to be allowed to live its life in the community rather than "put down" at a municipal shelter. The Commission also noted that Jacksonville, Florida, currently provides a program that spays and neuters impounded stray cats and returns them to the place they were captured, as long as they are in good health and the person who surrendered the cat and the surrounding neighbors agree to care for the cat.

3. Recommendations:

a. The City should use Jacksonville, FL, as a template, to develop a plan to partner with local non-profits such as Austin Pets Alive, the Austin Humane Society, and feral-cat trappers to safely relocate stray cats back into the community from where they came, after spaying or neutering them. The City should also ensure proper identification of cats capable of stray living who are not a threat to the community, and should encourage neighborhood support for relocation of strays by implementing outreach and education programs.

b. The City should task the Foster Coordinator with partnering with feral-cat Trap-Neuter-Return groups to provide foster, socialization, spay/neuter and adoption of underage kittens who are trapped in colonies. The program will allow feral-cat trappers to focus their energy on what they do best, Trap-Neuter-Return.

c. The City should find and provide a city-owned and/or partner location to house a food bank for feral-cat colony managers to access cat food on a regular basis. The location may be volunteer-operated one day per week.

4. Projected Lives Saved: 1,721 stray cats were euthanized in FY 2009, at least 75% could be saved in this relocation program.

5. Projected Cost: \$78,446.61 for medical "make ready" of 1,299 stray cats using volunteer corps for relocation and education efforts. Note: this cost could be zero if these cats are made ready through the Austin Humane Society spay-neuter program.

E. Public Awareness & Advocacy

1. Description: The City must engage the public in efforts to increase live outcomes and reduce shelter intake.

2. Process: The Commission elicited input from Ms. Pulliam, non-profit animal-services providers and members of the public regarding opportunities to increase public awareness of shelter needs and sheltered animals. The Austin Pets Alive comprehensive adoptions proposal includes increasing community awareness and marketing of adoptable pets. The Austin non-profit pit-bull awareness group Love-A-Bull proposed an education and awareness campaign for pit bulls in the Austin community. See Appendix Tab 5. The proposal includes lowering adoption fees for pit-bull mixes, greater marketing for pit bulls, reestablishment of the pit-bull task force, and repositioning the image of pit bulls in the Austin community. Love-A-Bull further proposed that TLAC accurately identify bully breeds in their reporting system.

3. Recommendations:

a. The City should immediately organize a volunteer public-relations task force that focuses on promoting shelter needs, adoptable pets, volunteer opportunities and the new No Kill mission of the City.

b. The City should partner with Love-A-Bull to find revenue-neutral ways to promote positive outcomes for pit bulls, including reestablishing the pit bull task force.

c. TLAC should revamp its website to provide (1) much more information about each animal in its care (including where a stray animal was picked up, personality traits if known, etc.), (2) candor about the number of animals killed at

the shelter, and (3) opportunities to help reduce the unnecessary killing of sheltered animals.

4. Projected Lives Saved: Unknown

5. Projected Cost: Zero or near zero other than web-site costs, which should be included in the City of Austin's website redesign project.

III. Decrease Shelter Intake

A. Decrease Owner Surrenders

1. Description: Implement a plan to reduce the number of owned animals surrendered to TLAC.

2. Process: The Commission elicited input from Ms. Pulliam, non-profit animal-service providers, as well as members of the public regarding the implementation of programs to reduce the euthanasia of owned animals. Members of the public communicated a need for a more transparent message to owners that their pets may be killed if left at the shelter. There were suggestions for better, clearer signage, and disclaimer forms that outline a pet's chance of survival in the shelter environment. Austin Pets Alive! presented information about their Positive Alternatives to Shelter Surrender (PASS) Program, a database of information for owners who are rehoming their pets or need help addressing issues with a pet. Ms. Pulliam presented statistics on intake types (owner surrenders vs. stray). She outlined successful City of Austin intake-prevention programs such as free sterilization through Emancipet, City of Austin rabies clinics, Meals on Wheels, Parvo Treatment Program and Spay Street. She also presented programs in the community such as Animal Trustees of Austin's Emergency Care Program that provides support for animals in a medical crisis who would otherwise be surrendered to TLAC for euthanasia.

3. Recommendations:

a. Allow Austin Pets Alive to have volunteers present at TLAC intake area to freely converse, after approved City of Austin volunteer training, with owners regarding alternatives to shelter surrender.

b. Supply microchips to animals aided in order to track success of program.

c. The City should prepare an owner-surrender disclaimer to ensure that an owner surrendering the animal to TLAC fully understands the chances of the animal being adopted or killed. The disclaimer should clearly indicate the number of animals killed including chances of live outcome vs. killing by breed, age and health status in the prior year and shelter staff should read the disclaimer to persons contemplating surrendering their pet. City staff and the person surrendering the animal should sign an Agreement of Acknowledgement of possible outcomes.

d. The City's 311 operators and shelter employees should direct persons inquiring about surrendering their animal to include Austin Pets Alive's PASS hotline and appropriate rescue group websites.

e. City staff should immediately contact shelter officials in Reno, NV, to identify and implement additional opportunities to return animals to their homes.

f. Institute a full-time Behaviorist position for decreasing shelter intake, preventing return to shelter and to assist in providing information on shelter animals and rescue groups.

4. Projected Lives Saved and Decrease in Shelter Intake: Significant

5. Projected Cost: \$0-\$40,000 for PASS Coordinator. \$65,000 (approx.) for Behaviorist.

B. High-Volume, Free and Low-Cost Spay and Neuter Surgeries

1. Description: The City should continue and enhance its targeted intake-prevention efforts in the community.

2. Process: The Commission elicited input from Ms. Pulliam, non-profit animal-service providers, as well as members of the public regarding the provision of low-cost and free spay and neuter surgeries. A representative of Emancipet provided a "wish list" for funding of 2 new mobile spay/neuter clinics (\$382,000), additional "Spay Street" surgeries (\$85/animal), expansion of "Free Day" program (\$240,000), and 5 free spay/neuter clinics to coincide with City rabies clinics (\$40,000). See **Appendix Tab 6**. A representative of Animal Trustees of Austin reported on the organization's plan to build a 10,000 square foot medical facility, but did not request funding from the City.

3. Recommendation:

a. The City should partner with Emancipet to provide 5 free spay/neuter clinics at City rabies clinics at a cost of \$40,000. To the extent the services are provided within Travis County but outside the City of Austin, the City should request that funding for the services be paid for by the County.

b. The City should partner with Emancipet to fund "Spay Street" surgeries for an additional 300 animals per year (increasing the total to 1,200/year) at a cost of \$25,500.

c. The City should enhance Spay Street to focus on owners in underserved zip codes, providing resources such as behavior and medical rehabilitation and community rehoming services. The City should partner with other organizations, such as Animal Trustees of Austin and Emancipet and add an Outreach Coordinator position to assist in this process.

4. Projected Lives Saved: Countless unwanted births prevented

5. Projected Cost: \$65,500 for items 3a and b. \$45,000 for Outreach Coordinator.

C. Adoptions as Prevention Mechanism: The Commission also notes that increasing adoptions also serves to reduce future shelter intake by providing altered animals (rather than unaltered animals from alternative sources) to meet the community demand for companion animals.

IV. Additional Policy Changes & Partnering Opportunities

- A. Partnering Opportunities:** Partnering opportunities are identified and recommended throughout the topic-specific sections of this implementation plan.
- B. 24-Hour Kill List Hold:** TLAC should create its "euthanasia list" 24 hours prior to the animals' final day at the shelter (with exceptions for suffering, medically untreatable animals) and circulate the list to all placement partners and rescue groups with an at-least 24-hour opportunity to find a positive outcome for the animal with the end-time clearly defined.
- C. Implement Call Before Killing (CBK) Policy:** An owner or person in the community who surrenders an animal who wants to be the last resort to prevent the animal from being killed may put a "Call Before Killing" hold on the animal. A TLAC employee must call and speak to the person and verify a lack of final interest before the animal can be killed. Verification of contact via e-mail, fax or SMS text message should be provided upon request.
- D. Ending Empty-Cage Killing:** TLAC should impose an immediate and permanent moratorium on the killing of any animal, unless it meets the criteria in F1 or 2 below when there are empty cages and kennels. There is no legitimate reason to kill a healthy or medically or behaviorally treatable animal when there is cage space available to give him or her a chance at adoption, and such killing is inconsistent with both the Council's No Kill directive and the Commission's view of guiding humane principles.
- E. Acclimation Task Force:** Task force made up of Staff, rescue and volunteer groups to work with stray cats and dogs to acclimate them to shelter life prior to euthanasia decision.
- F. Additional Partner Groups Task Force:** Create groups to address issues and opportunities that increase the live outcome of all animals that enter the shelter. Identify partners for wildlife rescue and feral cats and rescue groups.
- Items B, C, D and E should be implemented immediately and should continue until No Kill status is achieved.
- G. Failure to Follow Through on No Kill Millennium Commitments:** As part of the No Kill Millennium, the City committed to funding 6 part-time positions. This was not followed through on and is justification for the recommendations made in this report.

V. Terminology: Commonly used terms should be defined as follows:

1. **Euthanasia is permitted when there exists either:**
 - a. Terminal medical conditions which cause great suffering with little hope of respite defined as animals identified by a veterinarian who if not euthanized, will die an agonizing death regardless of where or under whose care it is housed (ie a veterinary hospital or foster home with access to hospice) .
 - b. Serious aggression issues or pose a health and safety risk defined as animals who have been identified and agreed upon by a behaviorist to pose a safety risk to the community, regardless of where or under whose care it is housed (ie a behaviorally-trained foster home or feral cat colony).
2. **Kill**

Taking of a life for any reason other than above.

3. Use definitions of "off-site adoption" and "foster" from recommended new reporting measurements.