

Notes from Dog Walking Working Group 2.24.15; 7-9 pm; Austin Animal Center

Facilitated by: Meghan Wells, Animal Advisory Commissioner

Attendees: Ashley Erbe, Amie Tacka, Kelli Patrick, Will McKinney, Sasha Edwards, Marnie Reeder, Melissa Wyatt, Larry Tucker, Andrea Schwartz, Ron Dischert, Alicia Benoit

The group met to discuss status of dog walking at TLAC, and to propose solutions/pathways to improvement on the issue going forward. Discussion points included: orange tags still not being adequately addressed, winter time as most challenging time of year/greatest need for dog walking, specifics of volunteer involvement, standards of shelter care that includes more regular dog walking, use of donation fund or FoAAC funding, AAC messaging/media, and how programs work currently.

Questions were raised about the recent KVUE news story and the veracity of some of the information that was shared through that story, how can volunteers (including dog walkers) be more closely tracked in order to provide accurate reporting to Animal Advisory Commission and public, how to tie dog walking in with larger priorities such as behavioral enrichment, how to partner with outside group, how might FoAAC assist, and how might immediate needs be better met.

Through this discussion, five key recommendations emerged that the group felt should be put forward to the Animal Advisory Commission for consideration/action:

1. Recommend asking the City Manager and City Council to allocate funds for two full-time temporary staff persons to be added specifically for dog-walking, for a minimum of 6 months to address immediate need while longer-term solutions are explored
2. Recommend using the Donations Fund to contract with a community organization that would work with AAC on a 3-month pilot program focused on exercise and enrichment to meet established goals (e.g., each dog gets minimum of twice daily outings, provide targeted enrichment to dogs identified by staff and volunteers most in need, explore ways to combine enrichment with exercise, activate new volunteers and encourage retention of existing volunteers, etc).
3. Recommend including need for dog walkers and fosters in all public messaging (advertising, PSA's, news coverage, ATXN, etc.) to reinforce public involvement and interest, and increase postings on social media
4. Recommend adding info/instructions on dog walking to AAC website to encourage and educate potential new volunteers
5. Recommend immediately moving an average of 10-15 more dogs to TLAC to be walked more frequently