

Revised Recommendation to Reduce Intake and Alleviate Overcrowding

At the Animal Advisory Commission's October 14, 2019 meeting, a recommendation was made to reduce intake and overcrowding at the Austin Animal Center (AAC). Chronic overcrowding has resulted in tremendous stress and strain on staff, volunteers and the animals. Several Commissioners mentioned that the cost for the original recommendation was potentially quite high, and that it should be pared-down, and AAC management should be consulted.

Based on consultation with AAC management, it was determined that the cost for the original proposal would be \$673,884.64. Although the original recommendation would have been ideal in terms of staffing, it has been revised and pared-down to a minimum. Here is the revised recommendation based on consultation with management. Although not ideal, it would make a significant positive difference.

Foster Program Staff – add 1 part-time position

AAC currently has 1.5 full-time foster coordinators. Given that current intake is 18,000 animals, and that the foster program averages 450-500 animals, this program is severely under-resourced. Adding a position would strengthen and expand the current program, increase foster outcomes, and help more long-stay animals get in to foster.

Veterinary Tech Staff – add 2 full-time positions

Given increases in animal intake and emergency cases, it isn't possible for current staff to keep up with spay/neuter surgeries and other procedures in a timely manner. Increased staffing would allow for quicker spay/neuter turnaround time so that animals could leave the shelter sooner, thereby maximizing kennel space.

Rescue Coordinator Staff – add 1 part-time position

Adding a position would allow for expanded collaboration with rescue partners and an increase in rescue transfers.

Animal Care Staff – add 2 full-time and 2 part-time positions

Due to current lack of staff, animal buildings are often left unattended, adoption opportunities are missed, and animals are not receiving optimal care. Increased staffing would allow for: 1) increased adoptions and matchmaking, 2) cleaner cages and kennels which are more inviting to customers, 3) help providing enrichment, which

would create calmer and more adoptable animals, and 4) increased customer safety and a reduction in animal theft.

Note: The Dallas municipal animal shelter has nearly double the animal care staff of Austin for approximately the same number of animals. There are 19.5 full-time animal care employees at AAC, and 500-800 animals in care every day. In comparison, the Dallas shelter has 35 animal care employees and 450-700 animals in care daily.

Hospitality Staff – add two part-time positions

Due to current lack of staff, there are long customer wait times on busy weekends. The wait is often 3 hours long, and sometimes customers give up and leave. Adding two positions would: 1) Reduce customer wait times and increase adoptions, 2) Help animal care with matchmaking, and 3) Speed up the adoption process.

Overall cost for revised recommendation - \$275,040.48

It's important to note the 2017 University of Denver study (1), which found that Austin has received a significant economic benefit from being a No Kill City. Overall, it was found that the total economic impact realized between 2010-2016 as a result of passing the No Kill ordinance was \$157,452,503.

In comparison to what Austin has gained from going No Kill, this recommendation is a very small amount to spend and invest in improving AAC. This investment will not only help alleviate overcrowding, but it will ultimately pay off by reducing staff burnout and costly staff turnover, as well as reduce the need for more building construction. And perhaps most importantly, it will create a healthier and happier environment for AAC staff, volunteers, and animals.

References

1. Hawes, Sloane; Ikizler, Devrim; Loughney, Katy; Tedeschi, Philip; and Morris, Kevin. (2017). "Legislating Components of a Humane City: The Economic Impacts of the Austin, Texas "No Kill" Resolution (City of Austin Resolution 20091105-040)". *Animal Law and Legislation Collection*. 1.