

## Hare, Belinda

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**From:** Bland, Don  
**Sent:** Friday, July 2, 2021 9:35 AM  
**To:** Tiemann, Donna; Garza, Jason  
**Cc:** Kitchen, Ann; Lopez, Jason; Neuhaus, Palmer - BC; Nazor, Craig - BC; Clinton, Ryan - BC; Brinsmade, Louisa; Hayden-Howard, Stephanie; Hare, Belinda  
**Subject:** RE: Question, please  
**Attachments:** Copy of MayMonthlyReport.xlsx

Ms. Tiemann,

Please understand that the Animal Services Office (ASO) staff have been working very hard on space issues for the past years. Please also understand that no one at Animal Services wants to euthanize any animal – it is difficult even for those animals that are suffering or that present a public health risk. In the past few years, ASO staff have taken measures beyond the No Kill directives and ordinances in our attempts to provide positive animal outcomes.

The Austin Animal Center houses behaviorally risky animals that have been declined by APA! due to the nature of the animal's bite history and past behaviors. Some of these animals have been at the animal center more than 600 days despite pleas to rescues, fosters and adopters. ASO does not have a behavior program. APA! has a full behavior modification program but has declined to help in these cases. These animals continue to fill up the shelter, some for years while ASO staff try to find positive outcomes for them.

We have continually and daily asked for fosters and pleaded with all our rescue partners for help. To increase our adoption traffic, the Austin Animal Center was the only shelter in the area to fully open our doors to the public while the City is still in COVID Stage 2. We send out a daily plea to all rescue partners. ASO staff have reached out directly to other key staff at our rescue organizations, and I personally have sent Dr. Ellen Jefferson (APA!) and Dr. Katie Luke (Austin Humane Society) direct emails asking for assistance, with my last one going out June 24, 2021.

Staff have made technological and innovative efforts to promote foster and adoption and what can be done to keep pets in homes and out of the shelter. A few of these efforts are below:

**ASO is the first city department to have a “Chatbot” to answer questions for the public.**

- This cut down our customer services' 1000 plus emails to an average of 20 emails a day, allowing staff to focus on adoptions and positive outcomes.

**Incorporated the Pet Harbor “Lost Report”:**

- Allows citizens to post a lost pet so that it can be seen by the public and Animal Protection Officers.

**Created a Reunification Guide:**

- Provides guidelines on how citizens can help keep loose pets out of the shelter and in their neighborhoods where the chances for reunification with their families is greatest.

**Created the text back program with the LostATX and FoundATX:**

- Helps reunite lost pets with the owners via tips and the reunification guide.

**When citizens find stray dogs, staff call the finders to serve them faster and share information about how they can help us find the dogs' owners:**

- 50 percent of the finders no longer need us to pick up the dogs after three days because they have identified the owner or another live outcome.

**AAC has sponsored free, drive-through microchip outreach clinics at the shelter.**

**AAC's Foster Program has been increased:**

- We currently have 456 animals in foster. Since March 16, 2020, staff have placed 3,696 animals into foster with 62 percent having been adopted.

**Created a Telemedicine Program for fosters:**

- This started during COVID when staff could not have face-to-face communications with fosters. The system benefits foster families as well as ASO staff. Telemedicine will continue for the foreseeable future.

**Created the Cactus Cats program.**

- This successful program highlights hard-to-adopt cats.

**Community cat trapping never stopped during the pandemic.**

**Drive through adoptions and fosters as well as "Virtual Adoptions and Fosters" were launched during Spring 2020.**

**Neighborhood Level Program focused on helping those pet owners experiencing homelessness and provided intake deferments for behavior dogs.**

- More than 150 dogs, to date, deferred from the shelter.

**Created a Hornsby Bend neighborhood group to assist with mitigating intake of dogs and lowering the number loose dogs in the area.**

- This is completely volunteer lead and managed with assigned patrol times and coordinated response from the community.

**Adoption fees have been waved since March 16, 2020, in an effort to get animals out.**

**Adoption and Foster processes has been streamlined:**

- ASO started using AD-O-Pets and "Wait While" to streamline the processes and improve customer service.

**Pet Resource Center (PRC) initiated telephone consults with all Owner Surrenders.**

**A microchip scanning station was set up outside the PRC so the public can easily scan found pets.**

**AAC added a neonatal kitten nursery and assigned permanent staffing.**

- This was needed because of a lack of partner support and to minimize in shelter deaths of neonatal kittens.

**An assigned area was established for exotic pets:**

- This will help keep them safe and better managed by staff.

This was all accomplished while ASO was short staffed due to a City-wide hiring freeze during the pandemic that was not lifted until September 2020.

**Here are a few newer innovations:**

- A staff person to work solely on out-of-area transports of dogs.
- Home to Home pet listing service for people needing to rehome their pets.
- A staff person dedicated to a behavior foster program to help minimize long-stay dogs.

We have not seen an increase in returns associated with the end of the pandemic, but we have seen more individuals picking up loose dogs in neighborhoods and bringing them to the shelter. Here is an example: A couple of weeks ago, a citizen drove through a neighborhood and saw a dog in a front yard. The citizen stopped, picked up the dog and brought it to the Animal Center without calling us first or knocking on any doors in that neighborhood. Thank goodness the animal was microchipped. ASO staff were able to call the owner who told us that the dog was picked up in its own front yard while the owner was home. We see this happening more and more. Despite years of educational efforts, many citizens still feel they should immediately bring a loose dog to the shelter without trying first to locate its home. Cities like Reno, Nevada, and Port Lucie, Florida, have been successful at educating their citizens that the best thing to do is try to locate a loose pet's home. Loose dogs are typically picked up within 1,000 feet from where they live, and that the shelter is seen as the last resort rather than the first option. ASO data provided by Animal Protection Officers shows that 80 percent of the animals that they encounter are within 50 feet of their home and of the 80 percent, 42 percent of the animals considered "lost" are found in their own yards. ASO also is working to increase microchipping of pets. Cities that have mandatory microchipping programs have a 33-34 percent return rate from the animals brought into their shelters compared to our high of 14 percent.

Also, there is no evidence that shelter intake spikes after July 4<sup>th</sup> holidays. National organizations completed extensive studies of shelter data and proved that this is not the case. Our own data shows that we do not have an influx after any holiday where fireworks are involved. This may be because of all the information distributed prior on how to keep your pets safe, especially those that are afraid of loud noise.

Animal Services staff have not strayed from any policy and has worked exceptionally hard over the past year and a half to keep animals in their homes and find placement for those that are in the shelter. The loss of our rescue partners and their limited ability to pull from AAC for the past many months has compounded our increased intake from the public.

As you can see from the information above, ASO staff have utilized all past methods and tried many new ones to solve our space issues. ASO staff have worked closely with the City's Office of Performance Management to improve our adoption process and the efficiency of the Pet Resource Center. We have addressed space issues with our Animal Advisory Commission on multiple occasions and made them aware of our new programs, software, methods, and events to help with our space issues. Commissioners also have been made aware that our rescue partners have not been pulling animals as they have in the past. The commission has had working groups and/or addressed revisions to the bull hook ordinance, off leash dogs, microchipping, cat declawing, Spay/neuter/return (SNR), and dog walking – nothing on space issues.

As you are aware, we are in negotiations with APA! on the current license agreement. APA! has asked to cut in half the number of animals they pull from AAC. AAC does not feel that lowering the required number of pulled animals is a good move for us. As a municipal shelter, we are never closed to intake, whereas non-profits can completely close their intake when they get into a space crisis. Municipal shelters must rely on rescue partners as part of the No Kill equation.

We have attached the data points that you requested and available to us.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions.

Regards,  
Don

**From:** Tiemann, Donna <Donna.Tiemann@austintexas.gov>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 30, 2021 12:53 PM

**To:** Bland, Don <Don.Bland@austintexas.gov>; Garza, Jason <jason.garza@austintexas.gov>  
**Cc:** Kitchen, Ann <Ann.Kitchen@austintexas.gov>; Lopez, Jason <Jason.Lopez@austintexas.gov>; Neuhaus, Palmer - BC <bc-Palmer.Neuhaus@austintexas.gov>; Nazor, Craig - BC <bc-Craig.Nazor@austintexas.gov>; Clinton, Ryan - BC <BC-Ryan.Clinton@austintexas.gov>; Brinsmade, Louisa <Louisa.Brinsmade@austintexas.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Question, please

Director Bland and Jason,

I want to circle back as I continue to be concerned with the memo suggesting euthanasia as the strategy to relieve overcrowding. This is an old way of handling overcrowding we should work to avoid. It sounds like the steps you and staff are taking are good first steps but anticipate with more conversations additional solutions can be identified. I had really hoped we would have evolved beyond this option as even a consideration for relieving overcrowding.

As an initial backstop, I want to make sure the department will reach out to all their partners for assistance before euthanizing any animal. I expect the department is but want to be certain. This is required by ordinance and would seem to be able to address some of the challenge. I understand the department is having partner conversations to get commitment numbers that can be mutually agreed to. But regardless of number set, the protocol to plead to partners is in place and if they have capacity to save, they will. So, should the department place animals on the euthanasia list, we want to make sure proper No Kill protocols will be followed until this issue can receive more attention by commission and/or council. Too, the No Kill Policy shouldn't be so easily waived by memo without better understanding all steps that have been taken and being confident that all other options have been exhausted. There is considerable community support for the policy and I am concerned it will, rightly so, raise a huge firestorm if the strategy is pursued.

We will want to understand what the department has been doing to prepare for influxes. There has been lots of conversations about the potential of a wave of returns related to Covid subsidence and the fourth of July reliably spooks animals and increases intake. Can you provide some outline of what steps the department has implemented this past year in anticipation?

My understanding is the D5 Animal Services Commissioner (Palmer) is requesting a special called meeting of the advisory board so I hope they can meet and some problem solving can happen there.

I'm also in need of some context/data. It will help me better understand this crisis point in context of previous typical years. The commission may ask for this and other data as well.

Please send me the data that matches the following data points separated for June 2018, 2019 and 2021. If you cannot pull June, please pull May for 2018, 2019 and 2021.

(don't need 2020 as that year was such an anomaly):

1. number of dogs and cats impounded
2. number of dogs and cats euthanized / died in care
3. the live release rate for dogs and cats (as calculated by dividing the number of dogs and cats released alive by the number of dogs and cats with final dispositions in that same month)
4. the number of dogs and cats adopted
5. the number of dogs and cats returned to their owner after impoundment into the physical shelter
6. the number of dogs and cats returned to their owner before impoundment into the physical shelter
7. the number of dogs and cats placed into AAC foster program during the month
8. the number of large breed, adult (over 8 months of age) dogs that were in a foster home on the 1st of the month
9. the number of dogs and cats transferred to a rescue partner
10. the number of dogs and cats released under the AAC shelter-neuter-return program

Appreciate the strain and challenge of the work but concerned we may not be meeting our policy goals as we have in the past. Austin is exceptional in its ability to be leading edge on so many municipal fronts and the Animal Services Department staff and Commission have done no less. They have stepped up these past several years to distinguish and progress these services and the city's reputation as a leader. It would be terrible for Austin to lose that distinction and have the policy stumble. We are all really depending on you as Director to blaze the best path forward to meet the demands and continue to progress the policy to success. The Commission has been and can be a great resource to the department and this work. I too am challenging and relying on our commissioners to concretely identify alternate options/recommendations.

Challenges bring opportunity and I am hoping and confident, as a community, we can identify alternate strategies and do better. I truly hope we are not at this last resort juncture and hope we position the work so as never to be here again.

Highest regards to you all,  
-d

**Donna Tiemann**

*Office of Council Member Ann Kitchen, District 5  
Chief of Staff*

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**From:** Hare, Belinda <[Belinda.Hare@austintexas.gov](mailto:Belinda.Hare@austintexas.gov)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 29, 2021 1:27 PM  
**To:** Olohan, Jennifer <[Jennifer.Olohan@austintexas.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Olohan@austintexas.gov)>; Tiemann, Donna <[Donna.Tiemann@austintexas.gov](mailto:Donna.Tiemann@austintexas.gov)>  
**Cc:** Bland, Don <[Don.Bland@austintexas.gov](mailto:Don.Bland@austintexas.gov)>; Garza, Jason <[jason.garza@austintexas.gov](mailto:jason.garza@austintexas.gov)>  
**Subject:** RE: Question, please

Thanks, Donna, for doing this.

Let us know if you need anything else.

Belinda

**From:** Olohan, Jennifer <[Jennifer.Olohan@austintexas.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Olohan@austintexas.gov)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 29, 2021 11:52 AM  
**To:** Hare, Belinda <[Belinda.Hare@austintexas.gov](mailto:Belinda.Hare@austintexas.gov)>; Tiemann, Donna <[Donna.Tiemann@austintexas.gov](mailto:Donna.Tiemann@austintexas.gov)>  
**Cc:** Bland, Don <[Don.Bland@austintexas.gov](mailto:Don.Bland@austintexas.gov)>; Garza, Jason <[jason.garza@austintexas.gov](mailto:jason.garza@austintexas.gov)>  
**Subject:** RE: Question, please

Hi Donna,

I think it would be best if y'all could share directly from the AAC page. Here is a link to the post Belinda copied below:  
<https://www.facebook.com/AustinAnimalCenter/photos/a.117111228695/10161185370353696>

Please let me know if you need anything additional.  
Thanks!

Jennifer

**From:** Hare, Belinda <Belinda.Hare@austintexas.gov>

**Sent:** Tuesday, June 29, 2021 11:43 AM

**To:** Tiemann, Donna <Donna.Tiemann@austintexas.gov>

**Cc:** Bland, Don <Don.Bland@austintexas.gov>; Garza, Jason <jason.garza@austintexas.gov>; Olohan, Jennifer <Jennifer.Olohan@austintexas.gov>

**Subject:** RE: Question, please

Yes, Donna. Stand by, please. I'll ask our media/communications manager to sent you information on ways the public can help. Example: here's a Facebook post from today:

We had a very busy weekend and so appreciate the support from our community!


Our amazing staff sent 80 animals to new families over the weekend, but unfortunately 120 more animals came through our doors.

We have more big dogs going home over the next few days (after they have spay/neuter surgery) which will help our space crisis a bit, but we can't let off the gas. We still need you.

We need you to help us keep animals out of the shelter. Animals like Billie (pictured) who got lost and we haven't been able to find her family. Billie is a sweet, easy, dog social and gorgeous 2 year old girl who has been sitting, and waiting, at our shelter for more than 30 days.

 Microchip your pets-- we'll do it for FREE!

 If they get lost, look for them here: <https://bit.ly/2TjCbJ4>

 If you find a lost pet, look for their family BEFORE bringing them to the shelter. Follow these proven tips:

<https://bit.ly/362b6Nv>

The shelter does not have unlimited space. We need your help more than ever to make sure we have kennels available for the animals who have run out of options, who truly need us.