

## **AAC Space Working Group Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

This Animal Advisory Commission Working Group was formed in response to Chief Don Bland's memo citing a space crisis at Austin Animal Center which may lead to the euthanasia of animals. This workgroup is seeking Council support to enact the below recommendations in response to Austin Animal Center's space crisis statement. These are initial recommendations we ask be implemented immediately while we continue to analyze data. Additional recommendations may follow.

### **Surgical delays prevent animals from leaving the shelter at earliest opportunity**

Spay/Neuter surgery appears to be the single greatest source of bottleneck at AAC with up to 65% of available in-shelter dogs not sterilized when they are available for adoption. This means the adopted pet cannot leave immediately; the adopter must go back and forth to the shelter; and ASO staff must interface with the same adopter multiple times. This is highly inefficient and leads to significant length of stay and space issues.

AAC reports medical staffing shortages prevent this; however, data (below) conclusively shows that AAC presently has 83% of the maximum veterinarians and 90% of the maximum vet techs it has ever had, despite only taking in 36% of its traditional intake. Simply put, AAC has nearly full maximum medical personnel but one-third its normal intake. The backlog of surgeries is an operational problem, not a staff shortage. The below recommendations do not increase the number of surgeries needed at AAC, but are an operational change to increase efficiency and alleviate space challenges.

### **Recommendation: Rapid medical make-ready**

- Within 48 hours of ownership transferring to AAC, the eligible animal (of appropriate age and health) will be sterilized.
- If AAC is behind in sterilizing AAC owned animals, they will be given 48 additional hours to catch-up and bring all eligible AAC-owned animals to sterilized status, or an adopted animal is to be released to the adopter with a spay/neuter voucher.
  - During the additional 48 hours no animal may be euthanized for space.
- If medically unable to be sterilized, and the animal is 8 weeks of age or older, a memo should be entered in Chameleon to explain the delay and give an estimated date of surgery clearance.
- AAC vets should be trained on high volume spay/neuter techniques, if not already, to increase efficiency.
- Current backlogged surgeries should be caught up within one month through the use of available partners and high volume spay/neuter.

## **Community resources and services limited or closed to the public**

Currently, the Pet Resource Center (PRC) is closed on weekends, leaving residents without access to pet food, supplies, advice, microchip scanning, lost/found animal tools, and other resources designed to mitigate preventable pet surrender and assist reuniting lost animals with their owners. Eliminating or reducing access to these tools and services contributes to space crises and does not meet citizen's expectations of promised services.

The PRC also serves as the public intake department for residents to bring in pets (owned or found) they are not able to keep, dangerous, or injured animals. Residents who cannot access their shelter during the week are currently unable to use their Pet Resource Center for any purpose. This has led to widespread complaints from residents.

Animal Protection Officer coverage should be consistent seven days per week. AAC is proud of their in-field Return-To-Owner statistics, in which pets are reunited with families without shelter impound. This can only occur when officers are in the field. When they are not, it contributes to space challenges.

### **Recommendation: All community resources and services be open and operating seven days per week, with AAC's normal hours of operation**

- The Pet Resource Center (PRC) should be open 7 days per week. Shelter signage and website need to be updated to reflect hours.
- The PRC should provide drive thru resources with microchip scanning; pet resources such as food, leashes, and supplies; lost/found advice, etc.
- Animal Protection Officers (APOs) should be working seven days per week, at equal or greater staffing, on the weekends.
- Staff shortages should be mitigated with robust volunteer integration wherever appropriate. AAC should be actively and aggressively soliciting volunteer help during this time, including for PRC positions.
- Designate AAC as an essential service allowed to keep staff and volunteers on-site at capacity levels needed to maintain services expected by citizens and to provide expected humane care of animals.

## **AAC Transport Program is taking up kennel space with unavailable animals during space shortage**

The new out-of-state dog transport program appears to only be adding to the space problems with its current operating procedures. When a dog is selected for transport, it is being marked as "unavailable" eliminating its chances of immediately leaving the shelter through local adoption or rescue transfer. These dogs are often highly adoptable breeds that are ready-to-go (sterilized and have no medical or behavioral concerns) and could leave AAC immediately if given the chance. Sending them elsewhere and making them unavailable to residents reduces adopter variety and encourages Austin residents to visit other shelters with more variety versus their own city shelter.

*Of the 20 dogs marked as transport candidates at AAC on July 28th, nearly all are sterilized, none are heartworm positive, none are bully-breeds, none appear to have any significant adoption barriers. Only two are long-stay dogs. These very desirable dogs are taking up 14 large dog kennels when they could be adopted locally or made available to local transfer partners to immediately make space instead of holding easy dogs indefinitely to send to out of state rescues. We have been told they are working to lower the hold time but have not yet seen supporting data or SOP. (See data below.)*

On most days, the kennels taken up by these dogs would eliminate any perceived space crisis.

**Recommendation: Limit “unavailable holds” on shelter-housed dogs and cats awaiting transport or rescue.**

Dogs and cats identified for transport and or rescue who are housed at AAC may only be marked as unavailable for a total of 24 hours. If they do not exit the shelter for foster, transport or rescue during the 24-hour hold, the hold must be removed and the animal made available, and able to be adopted or pulled by rescue partners

- If housed at the shelter and available, dog must be marked as available online and not have any “adopted” or “unavailable” language or signage visible to the public

**Decrease in programming which reduces length of stay**

AAC’s most frequent space crises cite large dogs using large dog kennels as the chief problem population. The programs created to support and facilitate the movement of these dogs through the shelter have all seen a decrease over the past two years. The number of co-housed dogs has decreased. Large dog fosters have decreased. Enrichment support from volunteers has decreased. Behavior support from staff and volunteers has decreased. All of these programs reduce length of stay, make pets more adoptable, and help alleviate space crises, in addition to increasing quality of stay and care.

**Recommendation: Return program support to peak levels.**

- Foster, Enrichment, and Behavior services, both staff and volunteer driven, should be back to peak historic numbers or better. (eg, the same number, or more, large dogs should be in foster; the same or better enrichment activities should be provided; the same or greater behavior activities should be provided.)
- Dog foster homes should minimally increase to peak numbers for large dogs, separately and beyond the additional short-term dog fosters needed for the Transport Program.
- A goal should be set of increasing foster capacity each year by a measurable percent.
- Volunteers and volunteer-groups that provide behavior and enrichment support should be further engaged.

- Designate AAC as an essential service allowed to keep staff and volunteers on-site at capacity levels needed to maintain services expected by citizens and to provide expected humane care of animals.

### **Identification and oversight of space problems is difficult without reliable and transparent data**

Obtaining accurate data has been an ongoing struggle for well over a year with little to no progress made on even ordinance-required data sets. For the Commission to have a clear picture of the challenges the shelter is facing and to be able to provide recommendation or support, the Commission must receive complete data on a regular basis. With the knowledge that there are additional areas likely contributing to the space concerns, we ask that the following data be provided to the Commission at this time

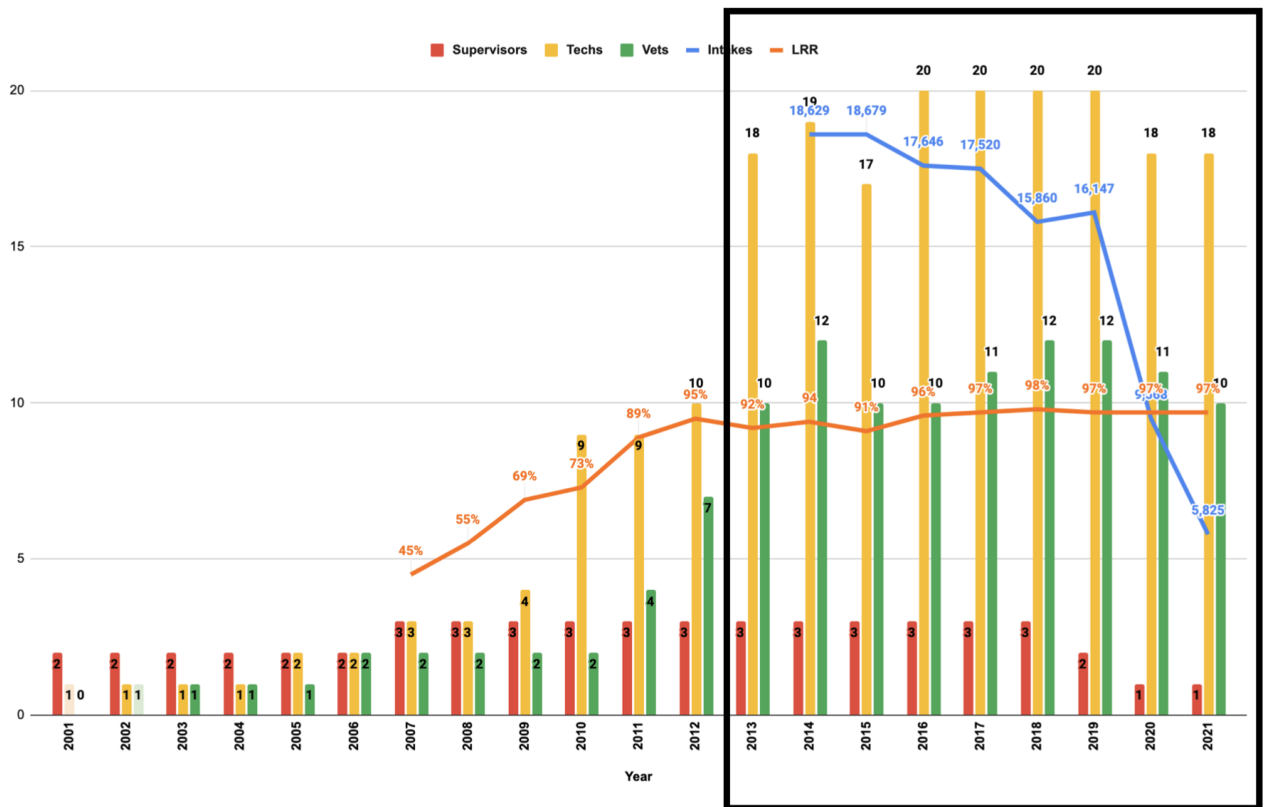
**Recommendation: The following Reports should be utilized by AAC staff, overseen by The Deputy Chief Animal Services Officer, and copies provided to the Animal Advisory Commission each week.**

- **Unsterilized Dog Report:** Create a report that captures all dogs not spayed or neutered, in shelter and in foster. Report should at least contain their ID number, length of AAC ownership, age, sex, description, location and any exception memos with date memo expires.
- **Unsterilized Cat Report:** Create a report that captures all cats not spayed or neutered, in shelter and in foster. Report should at least contain their ID number, length of AAC ownership, age, sex, description, location and any exception memos with date memo expires.
- **Complete Space Count Dog Report:** accurately captures true space count, including all public and non-public kennels and co-housing kennels.
- **Complete Space Count Cat Report** accurately captures true space count, including all public and non-public kennels and co-housing kennels.
- **All Holds and Unavailable Dog Report:** Report that shows all dogs housed at AAC that are “unavailable” and/or have a hold of any type. Report should identify what type of hold and/or why they are listed as “unavailable”. This report should include at least: ID number, description, location, Intake date, Length of AAC-Ownership, whether spayed or neutered and the date the hold was placed and/or the date the animal was made unavailable. This report should include, but is not limited to, all hold types such as: Reclaim, Adoption, Transport, ATTN, Rescue, Tag, APD or agency, Quarantine, Foster, Cruelty, Behavior evaluation.
- **All Holds and Unavailable Cat Report:** Report that shows all cats housed at AAC that are “unavailable” and/or have a hold of any type. Report should identify what type of hold and/or why they are listed as “unavailable”. This report should include at least: ID number, description, location, Intake date, Length of AAC-Ownership, whether spayed or neutered and the date the hold was placed and/or the date the animal was made unavailable. This report should include, but is not limited to, all hold types such as:

Reclaim, Adoption, Transport, ATTN, Rescue, Tag, APD or agency, Quarantine, Foster, Cruelty, Behavior evaluation.

- **AAC owned Dogs Housed in Non Public Kennels** Report for all dogs that are owned by AAC and are housed in non-public large dog kennels. Report should at least include ID number, description, length of stay, reason housed in non public kennel, and number of days in non public kennel.
- **Dog Foster Report:** All dogs currently in AAC foster homes. Report should capture each dog's ID number, breed, age, sex, number of days in foster and whether or not foster is for short-term transfer candidate
- **Cat Foster Report:** All cats currently in AAC foster homes. Report should capture each cat's ID number, breed, age, sex, number of days in foster and whether or not foster is for short-term transfer candidate
- **Dog Inventory:** Includes all dogs at AAC and in foster. Report is currently being provided
- **Cat inventory:** Includes all cats at AAC and in foster
- **Public Services Wait Time:** Report showing updated daily estimated service times for the following: stray animal intake (healthy and ill/injured), owner surrender intake (healthy and ill/injured), adoption appointments and include number of residents waiting in the queue for each category. Updated estimated wait times should be posted to the AAC website daily. The posted estimated wait time should be the same as what is communicated to the public each day.

### **AAC Medical Staff Data Illustration**



### Medical Personnel

Relatively the same number of veterinarians and technicians between 2013-2021.  
 Max staffing = 2019 with 20 techs and 12 vets; with 16,147 intakes and a 97% LRR.  
 Current staffing = 18 techs and 10 vets; with 5,825 intakes and a 97% LRR.

**AAC currently has 90% of the maximum number of techs ever, despite 36% of max intake.**  
**AAC currently has 83% of the maximum number of vets ever, despite 36% of max intake.**

**2019 veterinarian per pet: 1 DVM: 1,345 pets**  
**2021 veterinarian per pet: 1 DVM: 582 pets**

\*The information provided has been obtained from Austin Animal Center and every attempt has been made to make it as complete as possible. Nevertheless, its accuracy is not guaranteed and independent verification of its content is recommended.

### Transport Program Data Illustration

	<b>7/26/2021</b>	<b>7/27/2021</b>	<b>7/28/2021</b>
<b>Transport Dogs</b>	17	19	20
<b># In Foster</b>	2	2	3
<b># Not S/N</b>	4	1	1
<b># Heartworm positive</b>	0	0	0
<b># Longstays</b>	2	2	2
<b># Large Kennels Used</b>	11	14	14