

## **Recommendation #1:**

**The Animal Advisory Commission recommends that the City of Austin amend its contract with Emancipet to include a fifth day of free service to Austin and Travis County residents.**

Demand for free spay neuter service at Emancipet's mobile events far outstrips current capacity. The Spay/Neuter Working Group recommends to the Animal Advisory Commission that the Commission recommend that the City of Austin expand its contract with Emancipet to include a fifth day of the week for mobile free sterilization and wellness services.

Emancipet currently operates 2 mobile surgical sterilization units in Central Texas. One mobile unit services Austin and Travis County while the other unit services regional communities. At full, 4-day per week service, each unit averages 30 sterilization surgeries per day. The surgery schedule is filled on a first-come, first-served basis with patients presenting to clinics at various locations throughout Austin and Travis County. The location of the Austin and Travis County clinics is determined in coordination with City of Austin Animal Center staff.

The Emancipet contract, at the height of its pre-pandemic service levels, sterilized approximately 7000 animals annually through a combination of surgeries on the mobile unit and surgeries in their brick and mortar facilities obtained via the voucher program. In the same year, approximately 13,000 wellness visits were performed at City of Austin sponsored free day events. The total dollar value of services billed to the City of Austin for this peak service year of 2018 was \$982,327.77.

The authorized amount for this five-year contract, from March 14, 2020 to March 13, 2025, is \$5,600,000 or approximately \$1.1 million per year.

As of January 31, 2023, the amount expended in the first four months of fiscal year 2023 and budget projections for the second quarter of 2023 would accommodate adding a fifth day starting in the third quarter of this fiscal year.

## **Recommendation #2:**

**The Animal Advisory Commission recommends that the City of Austin amend its contract with Emancipet to include the FVRCP and DHPP vaccination for cats and dogs, regardless of age, owned by Austin and Travis County residents that present for mobile free day services.**

An outbreak of contagious viral disease in a shelter often results in complete shutdown of the shelter to intake and quarantining at-risk populations in the shelter for upwards of two weeks depending on the contagion. The cost of prevention for distemper and parvo virus in dogs and panleukopenia virus in cats is far less for an individual animal than diagnostics, treatment and housing of that animal were it to enter the shelter system with one of these diseases. Housing a dog for one day at Austin Animal Center costs \$55/day. This vaccine costs \$15/dose. These

highly contagious diseases cause immense suffering and are largely preventable with routine vaccination.

### **Recommendation #3:**

**The Animal Advisory Commission recommends that the City of Austin pursue an additional vendor for spay and neuter services.**

Historically, spay/neuter services for community dogs and cats in Austin and Travis County have been divided between two vendors: Austin Humane Society (AHS) and Emancipet.

Austin Humane Society has been tasked with providing spay/neuter, microchipping and vaccination services to unowned cats in Austin and Travis County. Currently, the COA has a five-year contract with AHS for a total of \$662,500. The current contract will expire on August 2, 2025 and provides for approximately 1,800 community cat surgeries annually.

Emancipet provides free sterilization surgery, microchips and rabies vaccines at mobile surgical locations throughout Austin and Travis County. In addition to surgery, Emancipet provides free rabies vaccinations and microchips to animals presenting to their mobile clinics for preventative care. Dogs under four months of age can also receive free distemper/parvo viral vaccination. The contract with Emancipet is for \$5.6 million for five years, from March 14, 2020, to March 13, 2025.

As can be seen in the attached supporting document, there has been massive disruption to the spay/neuter veterinary space throughout the COVID pandemic in the United States. Research out of the University of Florida suggests there is a backlog of 3 million pets awaiting spay/neuter surgery. Locally, we're seeing this with our residents' wait time for surgery appointments. Emancipet is currently booking large, female dog appointments 9-10 months out. Under these circumstances, one female dog would have the opportunity to have two litters of puppies prior to her spay appointment.

The spay/neuter working group recommends pursuing an additional partner to coordinate and execute quarterly 3-to-4-day sterilization campaigns. These pop-up clinics would be hosted in various areas of Travis County with daily goals ranging from 250-400 sterilizations. The aim of these clinics would be high-volume, targeted sterilization directed at animals most at risk of entering the animal shelter system. Additional focus would be placed on accommodating pets owned by Austin and Travis County's unhoused population. In addition to sterilization, these animals would receive microchips, rabies and their FVRCP/DHPP vaccinations. We recommend these clinics are hosted until the average wait times for an appointment with Emancipet for large breed female dog surgery is less than two months.

#### **Recommendation #4:**

**The Animal Advisory Commission recommends that the position of Public Health Educator working with the Community Cat program at Austin Animal Center be made a full-time, permanent position.**

This position was created and first filled in September of 2022. It is currently funded as a temporary position. The person employed in this role is the touch point for residents calling in with questions and concerns regarding unowned cats in Austin and Travis County. Prior to this position being created, there were 400 open requests regarding community cats dating back to 2020. Since this position was created in September of 2022, the number of open requests has been decreased to 150. As the trend in animal welfare works shifts to solving animal welfare concerns in the field versus in the shelter setting, this position will be critical for intake diversion as well as safe and humane management of our community cats.

#### **Recommendation #5:**

**The Animal Advisory Commission recommends that the Animal Sterilization and Wellness Services Contract between the City of Austin and Austin Humane Society be amended to increase funding for the annual number of surgeries to 3,000 community cats annually and to include the FVRCP vaccination for cats going through the program. (The current contract funds approximately 1,800 sterilizations annually)**

At its peak efficiency in 2017, Austin Humane Society altered 5,500 unowned community cats in a year for Travis and the surrounding counties of Central Texas. At that time, 54% of those cats were altered for groups outside of Travis County. AHS hosts community cat surgeries 4-days per week in their shelter's surgical suite, averaging 20-40 community cats per day in addition to their in-house surgical case load.

During the pandemic, the surgery program was paused. There was a large amount of staff turn-over which contributed to the decrease in surgery capacity. From July 2020-June 2021, 1386, cats were altered for Austin and Travis County, largely due to the program being shut down on/off during that period. For the same period from 2021-2022, 2073 cats were altered, more than allocated in the contract. For the 2022-2023 period, AHS is again pacing to pass its currently funded annual goal of approximately 1,800 Travis County community cat sterilizations.

Consulting with AHS and AAC staff working with the Community Cat program, it was determined that the program can accomplish 3,000 community cat sterilizations annually with a few minimal programmatic adjustments within an already established and highly regarded program.

Another recommended addition to the community cat program budget is the FVRCP vaccination for all community cats. This vaccination is routinely administered to all shelter cats

and is recommended for community cats undergoing sterilization by the major of shelter medicine programs across the country. A single dose of this vaccination in an adult cat is highly protective against panleukopenia, a highly contagious infectious disease of cats with a high mortality rate in kittens. Panleukopenia is the number one cause of sudden death of kittens in a shelter environment.

**Recommendation #6:**

**The Animal Advisory Commission recommends that the Austin City Council supports an annual target of 7,200 spay/neuter surgeries at Austin Animal Center.**

As the Spay/Neuter Working Group met with each of the organizations that currently provide spay/neuter services to the dogs and cats of our community, a recurring theme was adjusting to the post pandemic landscape. These organizations find themselves hiring in a different market while also needing to rebuild capacity to meet an increased demand resulting from the limitations to providing services during a pandemic. Each of these organizations is excited and eager to meet these new challenges.

Austin City Council should support Austin Animal Center in rebuilding and expanding spay/neuter capacity. This could include Austin Animal Center being able to provide a competitive compensation for the 1-1.5 currently open full-time veterinarian positions. A lofty goal for a well-resourced animal shelter committed to providing high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter services would be an average of 30 spay/neuter surgeries per surgery day. As a national leader in animal sheltering practices, the City of Austin should commit to supporting Austin Animal Center as an animal shelter capable of sustaining high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter services, ensure they have the right resources to do so, and establish an outcome measure of being able to perform 7,200 spay/neuters at the shelter per year.