FINAL REPORT

AUSTIN ANIMAL CENTER

ANIMAL SHELTER EVALUTION

DRAFT

National Center for
Animal Shelter Evaluations

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National Center for Animal Shelter Evaluations

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OVERVIEW

Austin Animal Center ("AAC") is the municipal shelter for the City of Austin and unincorporated Travis County, providing shelter to thousands of animals annually as well as providing animal protection and pet resource services. AAC accepts stray and owned animals regardless of age, health, species, or breed. The goal is to place all adoptable animals in forever homes through adoption, foster care, or rescue partner groups.

Animal Services has numerous programs and partnerships designed to help pets in the shelter, in the community, and in their homes.

Mission Statement

To provide public service and a safety net for lost and homeless animals in the community by providing necessary food, water, shelter, and standard municipal veterinary care for animals in need.

To provide placement services that will assist lost, homeless or sheltered animals to their homes or find new homes, when necessary, to provide live outcomes for at least 95% of sheltered animals.

To enforce animal regulations and assist the public with animal-related concerns, including impoundment, quarantine, and other rabies control services in order to protect citizens and animals in our community.

To provide animal services to the public in order to educate and prevent animal homelessness and promote humane, compassionate treatment of animals and responsible pet ownership.

The day-to-day operations of AAC fall under the leadership of Don Bland who is the Chief Animal Services Officer who reports directly to Assistant City Manager, Stephanie Hayden-Howard. City Administration is responsible for the hiring, evaluating, and terminating of this position. The Chief Animal Services Officer oversees a staff of more than 150 FTEs and temporary employees. The work of the AAC staff is supplemented by a volunteer program that has approximately 1,000 registered volunteers, of which only 30 are logging volunteer hours on a regular basis.

In 2022, AAC took in 6,425 dogs, 4,680 cats, 312 small animals and 405 wild animals, and had a live release rate of 97.3%.

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AAC leadership collaborates with an Animal Advisory Commission whose purpose and duties are to:

1) advise the City Council and the Travis County Commissioners Court on compliance with Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 823 (Animal Shelters);
2) advise the city council on animal welfare policies and on budget priorities identified by the Commission and the community, except on issues related to the administration of the Animal Services Department.
3) advise the Travis County Commissioners Court on animal welfare policies.
4) promote collaboration between the City and members of the public, institutions, and agencies interested in or conducting activities relating to animal welfare in the city;
5) identify proactive, creative approaches to engage and facilitate communication within the animal welfare community; and
6) foster and assist the development of animal welfare programs in the community.

The Animal Advisory Commission is an advisory only board and does not have any input in shelter operations, or the hiring, review, and termination of the director.

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This evaluation was conducted by the National Center for Animal Shelter Evaluations (NCASE). NCASE conducted the on-site portion of its evaluation over a four-day period from July 9-12, 2023, which consisted of observing, documenting, and interviewing shelter staff, volunteers, and visitors about the various aspects of shelter operations including (but not limited to) these six areas:

1. **Facility (Exterior & Interior)**
2. **Operations**
3. **Animals**
4. **Animal Veterinary Medicine**
5. **Marketing, Public & Community Relations**
6. **Volunteers**

Often the most helpful insights are obtained through casual, but **confidential**, conversations with staff, volunteers, and visitors. These conversations allow the evaluator(s) an opportunity to gauge internal and external attitudes and perceptions regarding the organization's operations, management, animal care, and governance. Opinions coupled with observations frequently reveal strengths and weaknesses that have an impact on the operations and reputation of the entire organization.

This final report is made up of six-(6) different parts (see page 2). A summary of the evaluation, observations, and findings are documented in each part along with recommendations. We encourage organizational leadership to read and view this report as a tool for positive change.

Some of the recommendations in this report may be easy to implement, while others may require a systemic change that may take many months, professional assistance, and even changes in personnel to successfully effect change. We recognize that change is never easy and may be met with resistance. Sometimes, however, change is necessary to improve the operational health and sustainability of an organization.

If you have any questions regarding the final report or the contents within, please feel free to contact us. Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to work with the City of Austin's Auditor's Office and the Austin Animal Center.

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The typical process for an NCASE evaluation begins with submission of a *Request for Information* (RFI) from the entity requesting the evaluation. The RFI asks the shelter to submit all documents related to shelter operations from Standard Operating Procedures to Financials to Staffing to Programs and Services, to name but a few. Once this material has been submitted to NCASE, it is then reviewed over a period of three-to-four weeks before scheduling the on-site visit. This allows NCASE evaluator(s) an opportunity to familiarize themselves with shelter operations, local laws and codes, and shelter statistical information. However, due to an expedited request from the City of Austin Auditor's Office, this evaluation was conducted without the benefit of the evaluator receiving and reviewing any information prior to the on-site evaluation. Much of the information requested as part of this evaluation came in piecemeal and was either received during or after the on-site evaluation. This amended process may have compromised some of the information and/or analysis offered in this report

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PART I. FACILITY

Exterior of Shelter

The Austin Animal Center ("AAC") is comprised of nine separate buildings totaling approximately 41,000 square-feet. (AAC leadership was unable to provide s.f. of each individual building). AAC is located on Levander Loops (a four-lane arterial) approximately four miles east of downtown Austin. The front of the shelter faces north, opposite green space, while the rear of the building faces south towards Levander Loop. West of the building is the main entrance into the complex containing Austin Animal Center and the Department of Public Health, while to the east of the campus faces Gardner Road. (There is a secondary way to the campus via Gardner Road.) The AAC has four parking areas. Two parking areas (contiguous to one another), one to the west of the campus, while one parking area is on the southern end of the campus facing Levander Loop.

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The following campus diagram is provided to AAC visitors entering the building.
As the diagram illustrates, Austin Animal Center has its main building which contains cats, small dogs, and critters (i.e. small mammals such as guinea pigs, rabbits and other). The main building also has veterinary-medical, which is not shown on the diagram. There are six, separate stand-alone buildings for dogs, known as building 000s, 100s, 200s, 300s, 400s, and the 500s. The 500s are used to house dogs with URI, or that are designated SBI (Severe Bodily Injury).

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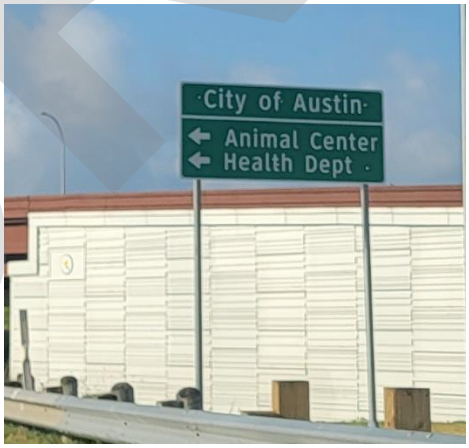
Signage (On-site)

A large identification sign located at the entrance to the campus is visible from the main arterial road (Levander Loop). In addition, there are several directional signs on the property directing visitors to the main entrance of the Austin Animal Center.

Directional Signage

There are several directional signs within ¼-mile distance from the Animal Center, such as the one shown below:



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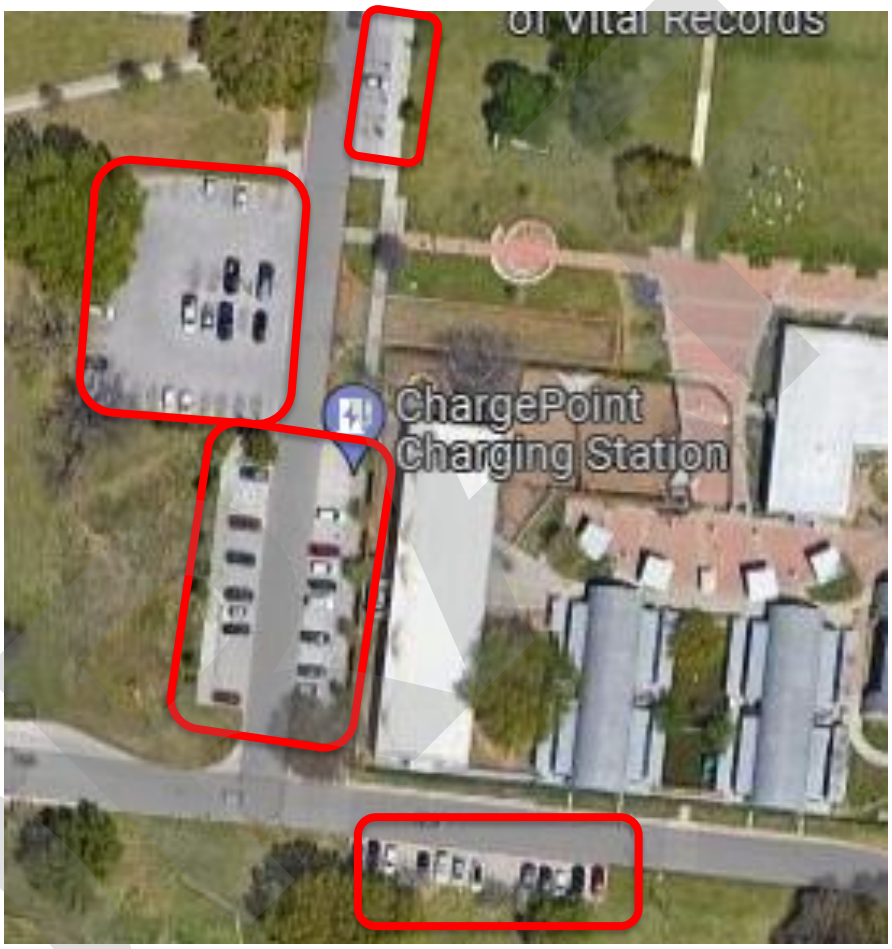
Parking

There are four parking areas for the Austin Animal Center. One parking area on the southern side offers 15 parking stalls; a second area to the southwest of the main building has 25 stalls including one accessible parking space and four-(4) electric charging stations, while a third area exists in a "U"-shape with 38 parking stalls; and lastly a fourth area exists, closest to the main entrance (and likely shared with the City of Austin – Office of Vital Records) that offers eight-(8) parking stalls, of which three are accessible parking stalls. The evaluator observed 90% of parking stalls occupied during certain times of the day.



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Entryways

The Austin Animal Center has three primary means of entrance:

- "Public" door (adoptions) facing north (to the east of the parking area) (top left)
- Employee access door on the western side of the main building (top right)
- "Public" door (Pet Resource Center) facing north – further east than the adoptions building) (bottom)

There are other means of entry into the various buildings on the campus, some require access through gates, but these are the three primary accessways.

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Security Systems and Cameras

The facility does have a building alarm system, with fire and heat sensors, through Johnson Controls. The security system activates at midnight and turns off at 6 AM and is only tied into door access, not windows. A key code can override the alarm. All employees and volunteers are provided badges to the building with programming that grants/restricts access to certain doors/areas.

Austin Animal Center also has a digital security camera system provided by Salient Security that, according to AAC director, provides 34 cameras (four-(4) interior focused cameras: adoption lobby, intake lobby, the sally port, and the pharmacy) and 30-exterior focused cameras). The security camera system is stored on a server (remotely) and stores video for 30 days on the cloud.

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Grounds

The entire building grounds were unkept and disorganized with many items strewn about that either made the facility look less than desirable and/or posed a threat of injury (risk and liability to the Center and the City of Austin).

Ground maintenance is lacking and the building exterior shows poorly. It should be noted that on the fourth day of the evaluation, ground maintenance did address some, but not all, of the issues throughout this report.

These dirty garbage cans, and this used glove, remained in the same place at the front of the building for the evaluator's entire 4-day visit, including on Tuesday, July 11 when the Mayor made a visit to Austin Animal Center.

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Outdoor Play Yards

The Austin Animal Center offers numerous outdoor play yards for dogs to exercise and gain social time with other dogs (as part of play groups). Some of these play yards had piles of organic debris (leaves, branches, etc) and one had numerous piles of dried and hardened feces. Although decomposed leaves are essential for recycling on natural grass, these piles were not aesthetically pleasing to view. Also, the large fallen branches on the ground are a tripping hazard for people.

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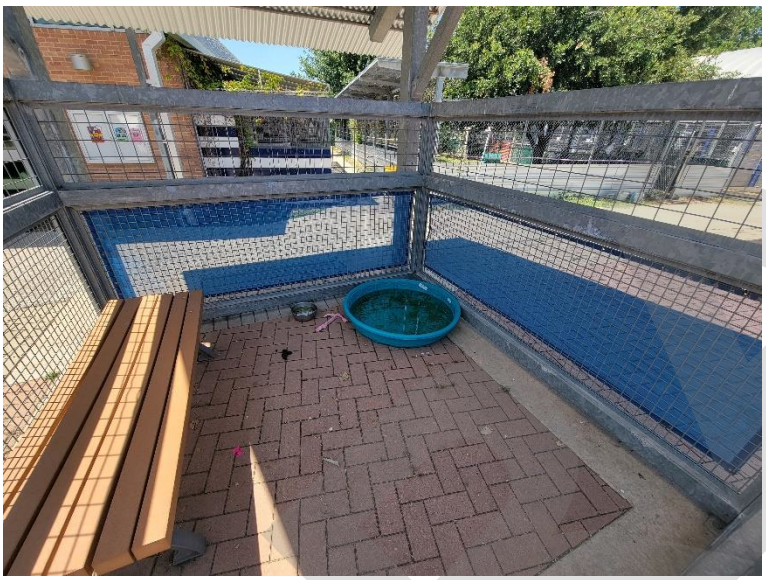
Outdoor Play Pens

In addition to the play yards, there are a handful of outdoor fenced-in, square, shaded play pens that offer bench seating. The evaluator noticed that the kiddie play pools, as well as water bowls, contained algae in the water. Algae in water is not aesthetically pleasing to look at and presents veterinary-medical issues such as gastrointestinal issues, and skin irritation, and in some cases, can lead to poisoning. Algae is an aquatic plant that grows in damp environments and is particularly common during humid conditions when water does not evaporate as quickly. It is also an indication that the kiddie pool and the water bowls are not being properly cleaned and sanitized. This condition remained for the evaluator's entire four-day visit. Somewhat ironically, on the organization's website, under Resources>Pet Health is a link to an article, *Harmful algae in Austin*.



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Courtyard

Nestled between the rear of the Adoption Center and the front of the cat and rabbit adoption building is a Courtyard with a fenced-in doggie play area surrounding a large, shade-offering tree. Around the perimeter of this fenced area are concrete slabs for benches. While the tree offers excellent shading for the doggie play yard and parts of the surrounding courtyard, many of the tree branches sweep low to the ground (measuring as low as four feet off the ground). This is a risk and liability for the AAC and City as individuals could walk into a branch and poke their eye. "According to City Ordinance 14-9, residents are required to keep the right of way clear of cars, dockless vehicles, waste carts, and other obstacles that inhibit safe pedestrian use of streets and sidewalks.

Use the following guidelines to help keep your right of way clear:

- Sidewalks: Limbs and vegetation must be trimmed back from the edge of and at least eight feet above."

In the northwest corner, next to the administrative wing of the building, large weeds and overgrowth were observed, engulfing the perimeter of the brick walkway and even sprouting up between bricks. This gives the property a rundown and neglected appearance.

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The rear exit door from the Adoption Center is flanked by two, very large polyethylene blue tarps tied to the back of viewing kennels A2 & A3. Both tarps are deteriorating from exposure to the elements and give a less than desired look for the facility.

Examining the eaves to the entry to both the rear of the adoption lobby and front of the cat and rabbit center, you will view a lot of straw. These are presumed to be bird nests. This gives an unkept appearance and droppings from birds are a human and animal health hazard. Furthermore, this poses a fire hazard for the building.

Bird droppings put dogs at risk for histoplasmosis. Dogs eating bird droppings can also expose them to caustic substances like uric acid and bacteria like salmonella, resulting in vomiting, diarrhea, and other health problems.

The health risks of bird droppings are not the only concerns, either. Birds and bird droppings can actually cause extensive damage property due to the fact that bird droppings contain uric acid, which has a pH level of around 3.5 to 4. Uric acid can eat through a number of building materials including tar-based roofing, stone, metal, and siding.

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Furthermore, the simple act of cleaning-up bird droppings can cause many contaminates to become airborne. Exposure to these diseases occurs when the spores are inhaled. Therefore, it is extremely important that staff who clean heavily contaminated areas with droppings wear proper PPE (including a respirator mask) to avoid exposure.

Also, the eastern side of the courtyard has a few items scattered around the wall that reflect poorly on the condition of the grounds but also serve as a tripping hazard and a liability.

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And lastly, there are four shade umbrellas placed between the courtyard and the western-most dog kennel (000). Two of the shade umbrellas were not fully opened nor closed. (The shade umbrella in front of building 200 has broken support ribs that hang as low as 3'6"). Both of these umbrellas could cause injury to a person. This is a risk and liability for the Center and the City.

Other Exterior Findings

In addition to the observations made in the preceding pages, these are other issues that were identified as part of the evaluation:

As the photo below shows, there are a myriad of items (blankets, pools, containers, tarps) just randomly placed/left around the exterior of the building. As stated previously in this report, these are tripping hazards, and give a rundown and neglected appearance.

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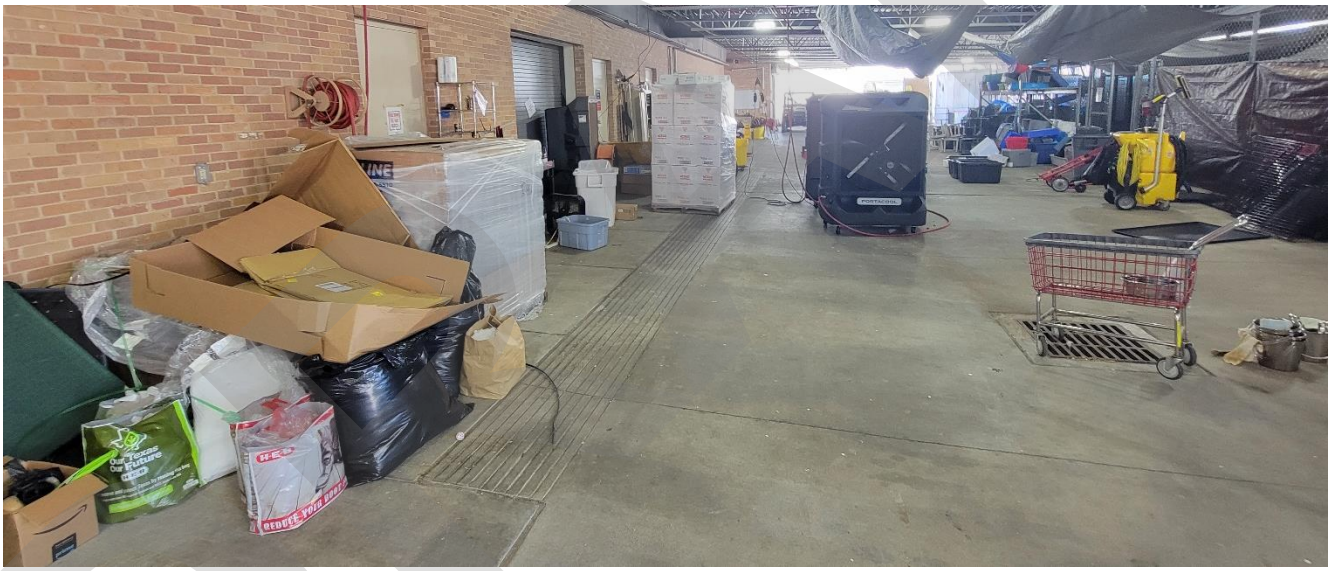
The Sally-Port appears to be a catch-all area for just about anything and everything. It is disorganized, cluttered, and many items in storage are dirty, unsanitary, and even have bird droppings or mouse droppings on, or in them.



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Many of the walkways and areas next to buildings have high grass growth, weeds, dog feces and other random items found lying around.

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The walkways that run along the exterior portion of the dog kennel buildings are nothing more than an above-ground cesspool containing dog feces, urine, hair and fur. Since the walkway lacks a proper drainage system, staff and volunteers use the hose to squirt organic material from the outside portion of the dog kennels to the far side of the sidewalk, where it has been accumulating for months. The grassy area next to the sidewalk harbors a myriad of pathogens, and the foul odor is overwhelming. (Given the heat and humidity at the time of the evaluator's visit, this would appear to be a problem for at least a quarter of the year when the average daily high in Austin is above 90'F from June through September.)

It is highly likely that the grassy area contains harmful pathogens that could lead to an outbreak in the shelter.

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Analysis and Recommendation(s)

The appearance of the building exterior (buildings and grounds) suffers from poor upkeep and conveys an unkept appearance. For an organization that views itself as a *national and international model*, the first appearance does not meet the expectations of the organization's reputation. Though common sense, "the ideal appearance of the outside look of a business space can create a built environment that affects the mood, health, and overall attitude of those who are around and in it." (Excerpt from the online article, Business Space: Why the Outside Looks Matter.)

The following recommendations are made:

1. AAC's mission is to *promote humane, compassionate treatment of animals and responsible pet ownership* as well *to enforce animal regulations*. Judging by the maintenance of the buildings and grounds, there is a disconnect between AAC's mission and how it conducts itself.
2. The entire building grounds need to be de-cluttered and organized. Certain areas need to be cleaned and sanitized. Furthermore, landscaping should be done on a regular basis to prevent building grounds from having overgrowth. This means AAC leadership should develop a system of accountability and responsibility so the deficiencies with the grounds (identified in this section) are immediately rectified. A system needs to be developed and introduced to proactively address any building and grounds issues. Department supervisors should conduct a daily walk around the exterior grounds, and outdoor play yards to inspect conditions. All deficiencies, especially tripping hazards, and piles of dog feces (which aside from making for a poor appearance, can have an impact on pet health and safety), are **immediately** addressed.
3. Outdoor play yards must always be cleaned and sanitized after each dog is removed.
4. Birds and their droppings can truly create unsafe work environments. First, the droppings can be slippery, and employees or customers could fall. The droppings do not just create a messy and dirty environment; they can be a real hazard. In a worst-case scenario, a fall at your property could create a lawsuit and a subsequent expensive settlement. The health hazards of bird droppings previously discussed can also cause a significant issue for commercial properties. For instance, a teacher in Florida won a $1.2 million settlement when he contracted a disease from bird droppings when working at a school.
5. Bird droppings are linked to over 60 different diseases and potentially serious health risks, along with causing substantial property damage. Preventing them from causing damage at AAC is imperative.

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Interior of Shelter

Austin Animal Center

The interior of the Austin Animal Center consists of 78 separate and distinct rooms (as seen in the table below). A list of the identified rooms is provided below:

The 78 rooms are:

Room #	Room description
102	Volunteer & rescue/foster coordinators
103	volunteer office
104	Customer Service Program Manager and Supervisors
109	multipurpose room
110	storage
111	kitchen
115	small dogs (area B)
116	cat URI isolation
117	small dogs (area D)
118	cats
119	exotic animals
119	ringworm ward
121	cat building
126	cat resource room/nursery
127	cat room
128	cat room
134	cat isolation
135	cat ICU
136	cat quarantine area
137	cat isolation
138	healthy kittens/SNR
140	mechanical room/boiler
142	cat holding
143	oxygen mechanical room
144	VS Supervisor
146	central pharmacy
147	exam room 3
148	exam room 2

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149	exam room 1
150	storage
152	surgery prep
153	pre/post op room
154	large dog ICU
155	vet office
156	small dog ICU
157	dog holding
158	dog evaluation
160	medical area
161	storage
162	vet services storage
164	x-ray
164	Animal Care supervisors
165	food prep/dishwasher
168	custodial
169	shower
170	head vet office
171	grooming/employee locker room
172	laundry
174	mechanical
200	central admin/cubicles
201	small conference room
202	Animal Protection Office
207	Austin Police Cruelty Division
208	Admin Office and Operations Program Manager
210	storage closet outreach program
211	storage closet volunteer program
214	Storage and mailroom
215	telecommunication room
216	Human Resource office
217	Dept. Executive Assistant Office
218	Deputy Chief office
219	Mechanical room
220	Chief Office
221	Enrichment Team office

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300	100&200 kennel suites
306	300 kennel run
309	400 kennel run
312	500 kennel run
315	dog quarantine facility
000	000 kennel run
110-A	mechanical
110-B	telecommunication room 2
118-B	mechanical room
122-125	cat rooms
126-B	mechanical
131-133	PRC offices
145-C	mechanical room
A1-A4	lobby kennels

Due to the identification of systemic issues ("themes") with the physical facility, we have amended our typical reporting structure for this specific report. Since many of the same issues exist in many of the 78 rooms, this section of the report will – more broadly – address the thematic issues and use photos to give examples of each of the themes.

The five-(5) themes for the facility are as follows:

1. Disorganized, cluttered, and unsanitary work environment for people (staff, volunteers)
   1a. Inadequate ventilation system
2. Dirty and unsanitary spots within animal housing areas
3. Dirty and unsanitary equipment and supplies in animal housing areas
4. Animal comfort and safety is not maintained.
5. Inadequate primary enclosures.

All five themes are the direct result of ineffective leadership at AAC. Many of these issues are the result of many months, if not years, of neglect. It is unthinkable that the Chief of this department can walk into, and around the building, day after day, and not see these issues and have them addressed by staff.

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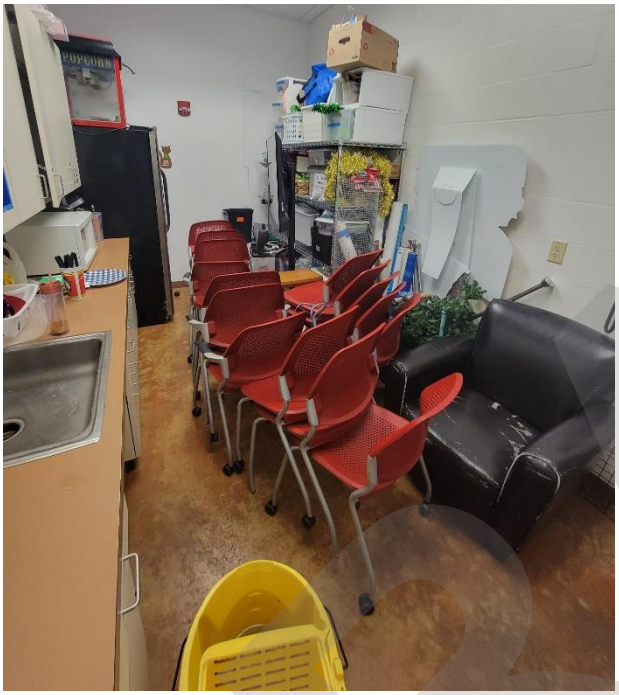
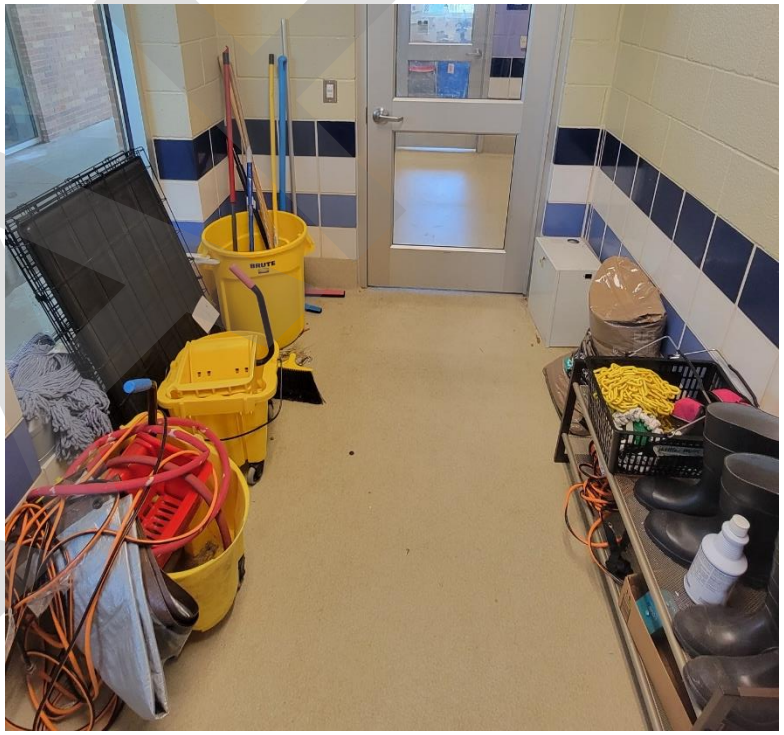
1. Disorganized, cluttered, and unsanitary environment for people

As mentioned previously in this report, the Sally-Port is a disorganized and cluttered area with many storage items that are dirty and unsanitary. Not only were bird and small rodent droppings found, but several piles of smeared feces were found on the ground throughout the sally-port. Most of the feces remained for the entire four-day period.

The following photos illustrate other areas that are disorganized and cluttered containing dirty and unsanitary equipment (including PPE) as well as other items.





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1. The food-prep areas in the dog kennel buildings and cat areas were often found with open containers of food, some with gnats flying around. In one instance, food that had dropped on the floor had attracted ants. The bottom right photo shows one cat food container without a lid and the other with the lid left open. Not only does this attract insects and rodents, but it can leave the food stale, or moldy. **Humane, safe and effective solutions for rodents and insects must be applied.**

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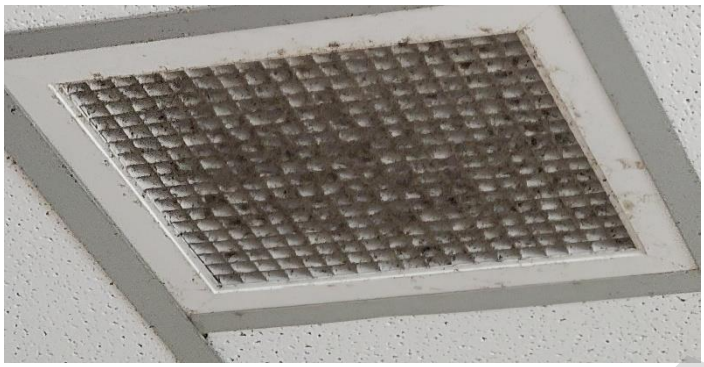
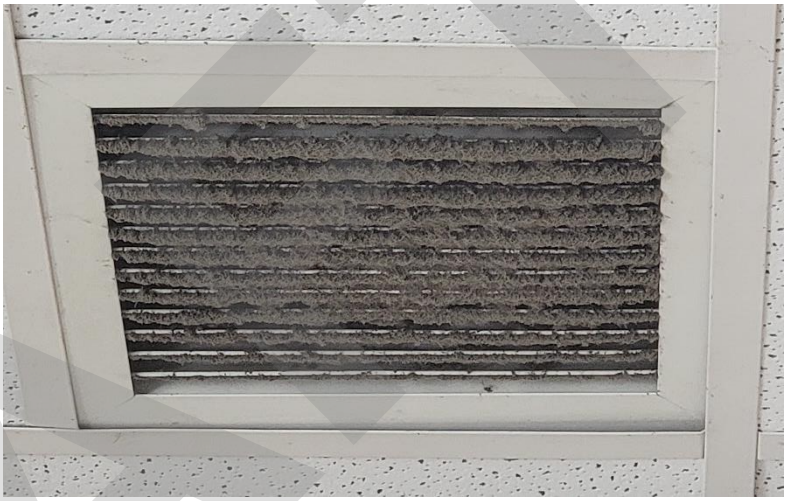
1a. Inadequate ventilation system.

These photos are but a small sampling of the **filth and unsanitary conditions** of the ceiling air vents. This is an accumulation of pet hair, fur, dander, pollens, pathogens and perhaps even mold which is a human and pet health concern. These filthy and unsanitary vents (in both the animal and people areas) are how airborne viral particles spread between people and animals. It is also likely that ventilated air in the building is of poor quality. These vents are the result of not having been cleaned or sanitized for years. This is uncceptable.





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2. Dirty and unsanitary spots within animal housing areas

The photos below illustrate the dirty and unsanitary conditions that exist in many of the animal housing areas. These photos are from area "B". The top left photo shows the baseboard beneath the cages is damaged and there is garbage and other debris underneath the cages. Also, you can see smeared feces on the ground. This photo was taken **after** the area was cleaned and sanitized. The photo on the top right and bottom left shows (two different areas) an accumulation of hair, fur and feces along the baseboard, which is broken. The bottom right shows dirty and unsanitary baseboards, an accumulation of hair, fur, feces, dried urine, and a randomly placed dirty mop wringer. Poor cleaning and sanitation practices such as these is how outbreaks occur in an animal shelter. This is unacceptable.

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3. Dirty and unsanitary equipment and supplies in animal housing areas

As these three photos demonstrate, cleaning supplies are dirty and unsanitary. The top left photo shows a scooper that has numerous areas of fecal matter, including on the handle. The dustpan on the top right also has an accumulation of dirt and other debris. Neither of these two have been properly cleaned or sanitized. The bottom photo shows a broom with frayed bristles beyond being functionally useful, and whose bristles have not been cleaned from pet fur and hair. Contaminated equipment is unacceptable.

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As the photo below shows, the wall-mounted speaker has a lot of bird droppings on it.

The four photos below (extending to the next page) show various fans throughout the shelter, whose protective grill has accumulated animal fur, hair, dust, allergens, perhaps even mold, as well as other pathogens and is circulating contaminated air into the environment. The shelter is contributing to poor air quality in its own environment.

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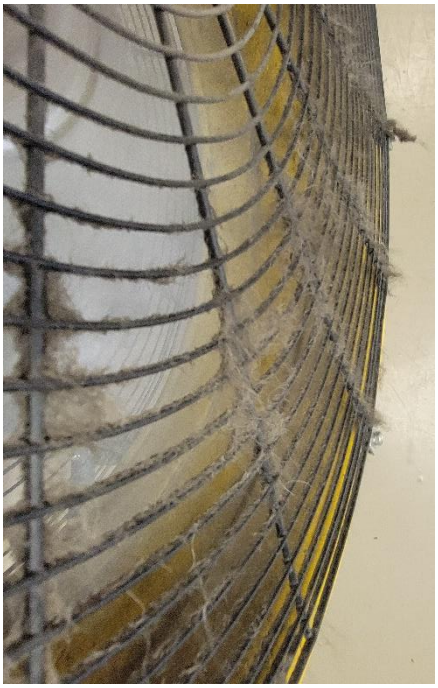

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4. Animal Comfort and Safety is not maintained

The following chart provides ambient room temperature, humidity level (as a percentage) as well as surface temperature ("ST")* readings for various rooms on the campus:

000 Dog Kennel

Interior walkway: 45% humidity, 84 degrees Fahrenheit

Kennel #	Inside ST	Outside ST
018	94'F	106'F
023	93'F	101'F

ST of artificial lawn in Play Yard Outside Kennel 000 was measured at 176'F at two different days and times.

100 Dog Kennel

Interior walkway: 41% humidity, 86 degrees Fahrenheit

Kennel #	Inside ST	Outside ST
118	89'F	105'F
115	81'F	94'F

200 dog kennels

Interior walkway: 57% humidity, 86 degrees Fahrenheit

Kennel #	Inside ST	Outside ST
206	106'F	94'F
213	101'F	93'F

* Surface Temperature readings were taken on the kennel floor where the dog rests.

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300 dog kennels

Interior walkway: 42% humidity, 86 degrees Fahrenheit

Kennel #	Inside ST	Outside ST
312	81’F	94’F
323	84’F	92’F

400 dog kennels

Interior walkway: 50% humidity, 86 degrees Fahrenheit

Kennel #	Inside ST	Outside ST
401	87’F	92’F
430	88’F	96’F

500 dog kennels

Interior walkway: 47% humidity, 84 degrees Fahrenheit

Kennel #	Inside ST	Outside ST
515	81’F	90’F
526	79’F	88’F

Cat & Rabbit

Interior room: 40% humidity, 78 degrees Fahrenheit

Cage #	Inside ST
H18	80’F
H24	76’F
H35	77’F

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Room	Room Name	Humidity	Ambient Room Temp
156	Dog iso	44	73
154	Dog iso	47	73
153	Pre post op	45	73
157	Dog holding	51	73
142	Cat holding	63	73
138	Pre post op	48	73
135	Cat icu	69	73
137	Cat iso	51	72
134	Cat iso	64	73
116	Stray cats	61	73
118	Stray cats	60	73
B1-21	Adoptable Cat Hallway	60	75
D1-16	Adoptable Cat Hallway	60	73
F1-14	Adoptable Cat Hallway	58	75
121	Cat & rabbit adopt	45	77
109	Multi-purpose	56	79

This evaluation took place over a four-day period from Sunday, July 9, 2023, thru Wednesday, July 12, 2023.

Temperature data for Austin-Bergstrom Airport Area, TX for this time frame

Date	High	Low	Avg
2023-07-09	100	77	88.5
2023-07-10	101	77	89.0
2023-07-11	101	77	89.0
2023-07-12	105	79	92.0

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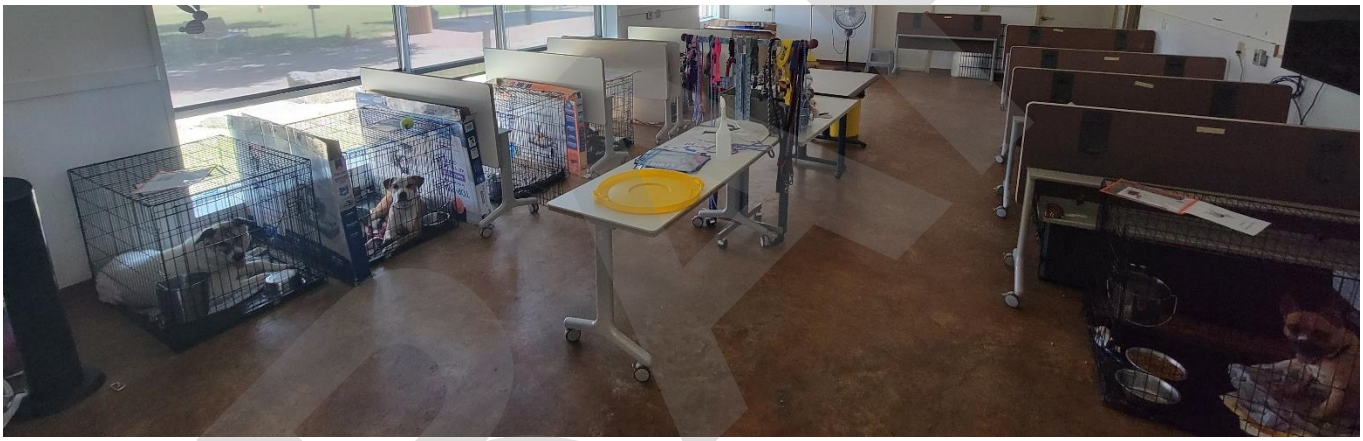
5. Inadequate primary enclosures

The multi-purpose room is currently used to house dogs using temporary crates as primary enclosures. This space is being utilized this way because the AAC currently does not have enough space to house its entire dog population and to maintain a live outcome for at least 95% of sheltered animals, leadership has elected to use this type of housing.

As the photo below demonstrates, there are more than a dozen temporary crates set-up as the primary enclosure for dogs. Most of the dogs housed in these crates are medium-to-large sized breeds and take up a disproportionate amount of room in the cages. The photo at the top of the next page, shows a dog "Kratos" (A882045), who could not stand in his crate because his height is taller than the height of the crate. Furthermore, the body length of Kratos took up the entire crate and did not provide any space for him to move around or turn freely. Kratos certainly did not have a separate space to sit, sleep and eat away from where he could defecate or urinate. Sadly, Kratos was just one of many other dogs who were being housed in conditions that are not acceptable by Association of Shelter Veterinarians standards.



The primary enclosures for animals in the multi-purpose room are not sufficient to meet the physical and behavioral needs of animals. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) states that the primary enclosure "provides sufficient space to allow each animal, regardless of species, to make normal posture adjustments (e.g., turn freely, easily stand, sit, stretch and move head without touching top of enclosure). Animals can lie in a comfortable position with limbs extended, move about and assume a comfortable posture for feeding, drinking, urinating and defecating", "Animals can sit, sleep and eat away from areas of their enclosures where they defecate and urinate." Furthermore, the following is explicitly stated as an **unacceptable practice,** "Cages or crates intended for short-term temporary confinement or travel are used as primary enclosures."

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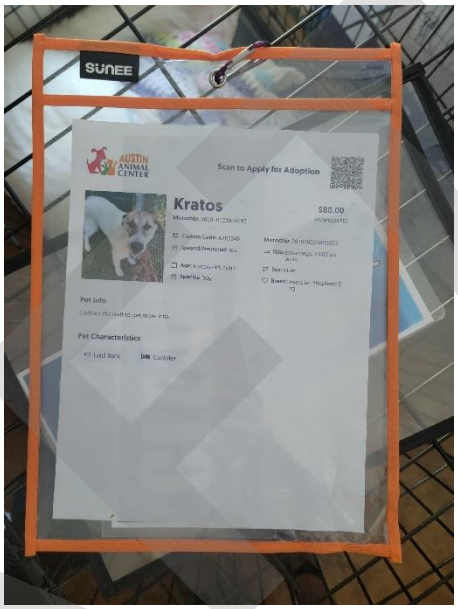
Furthermore, this type of housing creates more work for staff as the time it takes to clean and sanitize a temporary crate is longer than that of a kennel; plus, the veterinary team has concern that dogs suffer psychologically in these conditions and have more stress, which leads to more veterinary-medical care to treat.



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Analysis and Recommendation(s):

Unfortunately, the building's interior shows worse than the exterior. Some animals are housed in conditions that are substandard, while staff and volunteers work in unsanitary conditions. This makes for a building that looks poorly and compromises the health and well-being of the animals the organization cares for, and the people that care for the animals. Substandard cleaning and sanitation practices, combined with inadequate animal housing, are not *national and international models for No Kill animal sheltering*.

Both the exterior and interior condition of the facility is the result of poor and ineffective leadership. Leadership is not being held accountable for the conditions of the facility, which has taken many months, if not years, to devolve to this state. Furthermore, leadership has not made its supervisory staff responsible for ensuring that the building and grounds are clean and sanitary and free of hazards that pose a risk to animals in its care, AAC staff and volunteers, as well as visitors to the facility. Under current AAC leadership, the health and well-being of animals and people is jeopardized.

The City should consider this question: is maintaining the 95% live release rate resulting in decisions/actions that compromise animal care in order to meet that standard? (Furthermore, can these two mutually exclusive concepts (95% live release rate and humane animal care and housing) exist simultaneously? Or does attempting to maintain one standard result in compromising aspects of the other?)

The greatest concern, and recurring theme throughout this report, are the cleaning and sanitation practices. Cleaning and sanitation must be addressed – immediately. Exercising proper cleaning and sanitation techniques in the shelter will reduce risk of disease transmission, and therefore a disease outbreak; ensures clean air is provided to all areas of the shelter; helps animals to maintain appropriate body temperatures; and conveys a clean and sanitized facility to the public.

The practice of housing dogs in crates intended for short-term temporary confinement must be halted. Animals must be housed in primary enclosures that provide sufficient space to allow each animal to make normal posture adjustments. Animals must also have space to sit, sleep and eat away from areas where they defecate or urinate.

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Additional recommendations:

1. AAC should have a ventilation professional conduct a thorough examination of all building ventilation to include testing vents, ductwork and air handler for mold, mildew, mold spores, fungi, fungi spores, bacteria, viruses, and other harmful pathogens. Furthermore, indoor air quality should also be checked. Air filters replaced. Once checked and tested, a thorough deep cleaning and sanitation of all vents and ductwork should be performed.
2. All equipment and items throughout all buildings should be deep cleaned and properly sanitized. If the fan grills cannot be deep cleaned and sanitized, then the fans should be replaced with new ones.
3. A separate deep cleaning protocol for equipment must be developed and implemented. A deep cleaning of each building should occur at least on a quarterly basis.
4. All work areas in the building need to be decluttered and organized.
5. All food is to be kept in sealed bins or containers that are impervious to rodents and insects. All container lids are to be kept closed and sealed, while any food that falls onto the ground is immediately picked up and properly disposed.
6. The AVMA recommends that the ambient temperature for dog and cat animal housing be above 60 degrees Fahrenheit and below 80 degrees Fahrenheit, with the relative humidity between 30-70%. As the temperature charts above demonstrate, AAC is housing animals in temperatures that fall outside the acceptable range for animal housing according to the AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association). AAC should consult with building maintenance and HVAC specialists to explore innovative ways (i.e. use of high thermal mass building materials, tinted/glazed windows, more trees and greenery to provide shade, and hybrid and phase change materials) to provide animal housing areas that keep temperatures and humidity levels within acceptable standards.
7. Areas of accumulated feces and dried urine (see page 30) represent spots that could lead to a disease or viral outbreak in the shelter. AAC staff must begin cleaning all parts of an animal housing areas, not just the crates, kennels and floors.

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PART II. OPERATIONS

Operations

The evaluator examines two areas that determine how the City of Austin's animal shelter must operate. The first area is to examine any local laws, codes or regulations that define an animal shelter and its purpose. Specifically, this can be accessed under the Code of Ordinances, The City of Austin, Texas, TITLE 3. Animal Regulation:

> *§ 3-1-1 - DEFINITIONS.*
>
> *ANIMAL SHELTER means an impound facility owned, operated, leased or contracted for by the City.*
>
> *§ 3-1-11 - HEALTH AUTHORITY.*
> *Except as otherwise specifically provided, the health authority shall enforce this title.*
>
> *ARTICLE 3. ANIMAL SHELTER*
>
> *§ 3-1-21 - IMPOUND FACILITIES.*
>
> *The city manager shall establish one or more animal shelters.*
>
> *The city manager, through the animal control supervisor, is the designated caretaker of every impounded animal on the date of impoundment.*
>
> *Immediately upon intake, as the designated caretaker, the city manager, through the chief animal services officer, is authorized to and must provide each appropriate aged impounded animal with core immunizations as defined by the Association of Shelter Veterinarian guidelines, by a licensed veterinarian employed by the city or by a person under the veterinarian's supervision, who is familiar with the common infectious diseases affecting dogs and cats of Travis County, along with any other necessary treatment the veterinarian determines is appropriate for the animal.*

Although animal shelter is defined by local code, its specific purpose is not. Therefore, we look to the second area to determine the purpose of the shelter – its mission statement.

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Austin Animal Center Mission Statement:
To provide public service and a safety net for lost and homeless animals in the community by providing necessary food, water, shelter, and standard municipal veterinary care for animals in need.

To provide placement services that will assist lost, homeless or sheltered animals to their homes or find new homes, when necessary, to provide live outcomes for at least 95% of sheltered animals.

To enforce animal regulations and assist the public with animal-related concerns, including impoundment, quarantine, and other rabies control services in order to protect citizens and animals in our community.

To provide animal services to the public in order to educate and prevent animal homelessness and promote humane, compassionate treatment of animals and responsible pet ownership.

Operating Costs

The 2023 budget for AAC is $ 17,985,315. The department employs 153 people. In 2022, AAC had animal intake exceeding 11,000 animals, with more than 1,800 people assisted through its Pet Resource Center; and Animal Protection receiving more than 32,000 calls; and Veterinary Services performing more than 11,000 examinations and responding to more than 1,100 emergency cases, and volunteers providing 50,000+ volunteer hours.

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Hours of Operation

The following tables illustrate operating hours for various services provided by AAC.

AAC *Adoption & Reclaim* is open seven days a week for a total of 48 hours.

	OPEN	CLOSE
Monday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Tuesday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Wednesday	3:00 PM	7:00 PM
Thursday	3:00 PM	7:00 PM
Friday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Saturday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Sunday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM

AAC *Meet My Match Adoption (by Appointment)* is open two days a week for a total of 8 hours.

	OPEN	CLOSE
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday	11:00 AM	3:00 PM
Thursday	11:00 AM	3:00 PM
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

AAC *Pet Resource Center* is open seven days a week for a total of 56 hours.

	OPEN	CLOSE
Monday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Tuesday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Wednesday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Thursday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Friday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Saturday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM
Sunday	11:00 AM	7:00 PM

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Compared to five other municipal animal shelters with a population like Austin's (1.0M), AAC is open for adoption above the average and is tied for third most hours of operation. All comparable shelters provide adoption hours seven days a week.

Municipal Shelter	City	Population	Days Open	Total Hours Open
Dallas Animal Services	Dallas, TX	1.3M	7	39.0
Austin Animal Center	Austin, TX	1.0M	7	48.0
Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services	Jacksonville, FL	1.0M	7	51.0
San Jose Animal Care Center	San Jose, CA	1.0M	7	50.0
Ft. Worth Animal Care & Control	Forth Worth, TX	1.0M	7	42.0
Franklin County Dog Shelter & Adoption Center*	Columbus, OH	907K	7	48.0
AVERAGE			**7**	**46.3**

* *Dog adoptions only*

Adoption Fees

At the time of the evaluation, adoption fees were waived.

Feline	Fee
Kitten	0
Cat	0

Canine	Fee
Puppies	0
Dogs	0

We do not account for adoption fees of other animals since the majority of animals (usually 90%+) in animal shelters are dogs and cats.

Nationally, there has been a trend for animal shelters, both municipal and non-shelter, to waive adoption fees due to many shelters being at, or over capacity.

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Staffing

There are a total of 153 employees at Austin Animal Center; 110 of whom are regular employment type and 43 who are temporary employees. AAC groups employees into one of five divisions, see chart below:

Division	Number of Employees
Animal Care	42
Animal Services Administration	20
Customer Service	25
Field Services	26
Vet Services	31
*Other (MuniProg, Paraprofessional)	9

**employee roster has nine-(9) emoloyees listed as muniprog, parafprofessional*

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Employee Handbook

An employee handbook, City of Austin, Personnel Policies was reviewed https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/HR/Municipal_Civil_Service/personnelpolicies.pdf

Standard Operating Procedures

The evaluator received a 138-page manual (containing 25 sections) from the City Auditor's Office marked as Standard Operating Procedures (see below) at the conclusion of the on-site evaluation. However, AAC leadership indicated this is not the complete SOP. The evaluator received some, but not all of policies in the SOP at the time of this writing.

1	Adopets Adoption Detailed Guide
2	Dress Code Uniform Standards
3	Shelter Staff Pet Adoptions
4	Cleaning, Feeding and Space Management for Dogs in Temporary Alternative Spaces
5	Dot Color Designation for Dogs
6	Playgroups
7	Dog Fight Protocol
8	Euthanasia Decision Making Process for Dogs with Demonstrated Behavior Challenges
9	Dot Color Designation for Dogs
10	Playgroup Training
11	Meet and Greets
12	Behavior Attention
13	Pet Resource Center Operational Overview
14	Pet Resource Specialists – Daily Operations
15	Stray Deferral
16	Holding
17	Shelter-Neuter-Return
18	Underage Animals
19	Managed Intake
20	Lead Duties
21	Pets in the Workplace
22	Euthanasia of Animals Procedure
23	Housing Animals in Rabies Quarantine
24	Adoption Process Overview
25	Cleaning and Feeding Protocol

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Workplace Safety

There are two SDS binders resting in a wall pocket outside Room 153 (Pre/Post Op). However, when questioned by the evaluator, every employee, and staff at AAC, did not know:

1. What a SDS was, or
2. Why SDS was important to them, or
3. Where the SDS could be found in the building.

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Employee Uniforms
This is addressed under *Dress Code Uniform Standards* under Standard Operating Procedures on the previous page.

Programs and Services
AAC offers the following programs and services:

- Pet Adoptions
- Lost & Found Pets
- Meet My Match Adoption
- Pet Resource Center
- Responsible Pet Ownership Classes
- Fostering
- Free Pet ID tag engraving
- Free microchipping
- Mobile adoptions
- Rabies vaccination Clinics
- Spay and Neuter Clinics
- Trap-Neuter-Return
- Shelter-Neuter-Return
- Animal Protection (Enforcement)
- Online Resource Library (website)
- Community Cat Medical Voucher Program
- Fencing and Dog Housing Program
- Classes
- Event participation

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Adoption Process

AAC has two policies related to the Adoption of Pets from AAC:
ASO-807 (Meet and greets) and a slideshow presentation titled, *Adoption Process Overview*. The evaluator found the process to be smooth and staff following the bullet point steps outlined in the Adoption Process Overview. There were busier times in the adoption lobby that resulted in a wait time for visitors, although no visitor seemed to be bothered by the wait.

The evaluator did observe that the amount of information provided to customers as well as how that information was conveyed (upbeat and happy verse dry and matter of fact) varied among customer service staff. This inconsistency among customer service staff can impact the information a visitor receives, as well as how someone perceives their experience at AAC, which can be reflected in online reviews or posts.

The evaluator would like to bring attention to the **excellent customer service that Amanda Hall provided** to visitors. Amanda was enthusiastic, friendly, patient, and helpful in every interaction she had with a person. She exemplifies how to provide excellent customer service.

The evaluator observed in two separate instances that older visitors did have a little bit of a challenge with understanding the scanning of QR codes and knowing how to e-sign their adoption packet via email.

Intake

AAC has one policy titled, Managed Intake, ACO PRC#211. This policy references two other, related policies – ASO PRC #203 (Impounds) & ASO PRC #205 (Owner Retention), which were not provided to the evaluator. At the time of the evaluation, public intake was closed.

According to ASO Director, AAC began restricting intake in September 2022 (limited number of owner surrender appointments, only animals that were sick, injured, danger to the public, people being displaced from homes) when all of the kennels were full, and the shelter had utilized all of their available space for crates. At that time, AAC had 130 more animals than the shelter had available housing. Because animals were housed in crates at AAC's open air truck port, restrictions were implemented in June 2023 due to heat concerns (Please reference temperature readings in Part I. Facility).

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This restriction will remain in place until kennel space is available in the shelter or AAC is given direction from City Administration/City Hall to euthanize for space.

The Pet Resource Center continues to offer programs, services, and counseling to the public to help them care for their own animals and have added rehoming assistance to the AAC website, along with their other resources, such as a pet reunification guide, among others.

Lost & Found Process

AAC handles Lost & Found pets via their website at https://www.austintexas.gov/lost-found-pets.
On this page, an end-user can view pets reported lost, file a Found Report, view pets reported found, file a lost report, and even offers a *Pet Reunification Guide* in English and Spanish. This Guide provides tips on Lost & Found pets including using Facebook, Nextdoor and Craigslist to post or look for a pet.

AAC Lost & Found pets reflect best practices.

Customer Service

Upon entry to the shelter, visitors are greeted by a host (in a security uniform) positioned behind a "Welcome" station in the lobby. This is the first in-person contact a visitor will have at the shelter. The host directs visitors to their areas of interest (dogs, cats, small animals) and offers that, when a visitor has interest in an animal, they should look for a staff or volunteer. However, the evaluator observed several visitors seeking a staff member to inquire/meet a pet and were unable to do so without heading back to the lobby.

The AAC website utilizes a chatbot to (ARF) answer questions and provide help with AAC shelter services.

Calls to the shelter use Austin's 3-1-1 system. 3-1-1 was not always able to direct calls to an employee since some names and numbers were not in the system.

Software and Record Keeping

AAC uses *Chameleon and Adopets* to manage its animal inventory. Chameleon/CMS is an integrated Shelter Case Management System helping shelters with all activities at their facility, including shelter management, licensing, field operations, cashiering, and veterinary record-keeping. Chameleon interfaces with Adopets, a cloud-pets pet adoption system. Staff appear to navigate and use the software appropriately.

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Capacity for Care

Every animal shelter has what is referred to as a *maximum capacity for care*. The animal population in a shelter must not exceed that level. Factors that determine capacity for care include:

- the number of appropriate animal housing units;
- staffing for programs or services;
- staff training;
- average length of stay;
- total number of reclaims, adoptions, transfers, release, or other outcomes.

As one can see from the list above, many factors can impact the capacity for care.

The National Animal Control Association (NACA) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS 2010) recommend **a minimum of 15 minutes of care time per day for feeding and cleaning each animal housed in the shelter** (9 minutes for cleaning and 6 minutes for feeding).

The following chart is a breakdown of the number of animals at AAC over three-days of the evaluation (7/10-7/13) of this evaluation period:

	Mon 7/10	Tue 7/11	Wed 7/12
All Cats	233	230	223
All Dogs	367	367	375
Total	600	597	598

** foster pets do not count towards total as they are not in the building*

Total amount of time needed at AAC:

	Mon 7/10	Tue 7/11	Wed 7/12
Total Dog & Cat	600	597	598
x 15 minute/pet	9,000m	8,955m	8,970m
Equivalent hours	150 hrs	150 hrs*	150 hrs*

* *rounded up*

With 600 dogs and cats in the shelter, **a minimum of 150 hours of care is needed.**

On Monday, July 10, 15 animal care workers were assigned to animal care. With 150 hours needed to provide feeding and cleaning for all the animals housed at AAC, this works out to average of 10.0 hours needed, per animal care worker ("acw") to complete these duties.

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On Tuesday, July 11 and Wednesday, July 12, 16 animal care workers were assigned to animal care. With 150 hours needed to provide feeding and cleaning for all the animals housed at AAC, this works out to average of 9.375 hours needed, per acw to complete these duties.

Based on the aforementioned formula, each animal care worker would need to work between 9.375-10.0 hours to complete basic cleaning and feeding duties.

Tenure of AAC Director

Name & Title	Employment Period	Length of Time
Interim, Bruce Mills ***(APD Asst. Chief)***	2010-2011	No more than 24 months
Interim, Felipe Gecic ***(Austin Public Health)***	2011	No more than 12 months
Abigail Smith	March 2011-December 2014	46 months
Interim, Chris Nobles ***(ASO Manager)***	2014-2015	No more than 24 months
Tawny Hammond	2016-2017	No more than 24 months
Lee Ann Shenefiel ***Interim***	2017-2018	No more than 24 months
Interim, Kimberly McNeely **(*PARD Director)***	01/2019-10/2019	10 months
Don Bland	August 2019 - present	48 months* *as of July 31, 2023*

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Organizational Chart

The evaluator reviewed 12 different organizational charts.

Job Descriptions

Job descriptions for positions at AAC were accessed at:
https://services.austintexas.gov/hr/jobdesc/job_title_pay.cfmne provided.
AAC job descriptions reflect best practices according to Society for Human Resources Management.

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Analysis and Recommendation(s):

The operations of any animal shelter are the infrastructure of the organization. Operations guide how you do what you do. And what you do is guided by the organization's mission statement.

As mentioned in the Overview, due to an expedited request from the City of Austin Auditor's Office, the evaluator performed the on-site portion of the evaluation without having received or reviewed operational documents beforehand.

What appears to challenge AAC leadership and even City officials is AAC's challenge to maintain a 95% live release rate without compromising humane treatment of animals. This is defined in the organization's mission statement: bullet point #4 of the AAC mission reads *to promote humane, compassionate treatment of animals* which may at times challenge or conflict with the second bullet point, *to provide live outcomes for at least 95% of sheltered animals*. (Please reference analysis and recommendatiosn on page 39).

We recommend City Council consider ratifying the local code to define the purpose of the animal shelter. A starting place is to research other local governments' codes (in Texas, as well as Cities of similar population or geographic size) to see what language they have adopted.

Having written *Policies & Procedures (P&P)* in an animal shelter is one of the most critical documents for an animal shelter to have in place since they detail every aspect of how, why, and what to do. It is the basis for which employees get trained and is a reference tool for management. However, the evaluator was unable to make a complete assessment of the organization's Standard Operating Procedures because policies and procedures were provided piecemeal and not part of a complete set. It is unclear whether AAC leadership provided the complete SOPs. What was missing from any P & P documents was a reference or information about Safety Data Sheets (SDS) * It is imperative that AAC leadership address SDS in the SOPs and hold a safety briefing with staff and volunteers about SDS as soon as possible.

* *SDS are documents that contain information on the potential hazards (health, fire, reactivity and environmental) of chemical products used in the shelter. These sheets are an important piece of information that must be shared with staff and volunteers to protect them as well as provide some level of protection to the organization against risk and liability. SDS is critical to health and safety in an animal shelter.*

Since staff was inconsistent in wearing staff uniform, it is incumbent upon departmental supervisors to enforce this policy to ensure compliance.

AAC Programs and Services reflect best practices, especially as it relates to achieving and maintaining "no kill" status.

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Within the animal sheltering community, there are 12 commonly accepted programs and services that animal shelters should implement in some form or another to help them achieve "no kill" status. These programs and services, in broad terms, are:

1. Building community partnerships with other shelters and rescue groups
2. Comprehensive adoption programs (off-site, satellite centers, mobile)
3. Expanding the volunteer base
4. Creating a spay and neuter program (free, low cost, TNR)
5. Offering veterinary care and vaccination clinics (free, low cost, subsidized)
6. Wide-ranging lost and found program
7. Growing and expanding a foster program
8. Training and behavior programs
9. Preventative and thorough veterinary-medicine practices
10. Transport and transfer programs
11. Pet retention programs
12. Programs/services aimed at keeping animals out of the shelter.

The number of programs and services offered by AAC, at this time, appropriately address the recommendations made by City of Austin Animal Advisory Commission in their February 16, 2010, No Kill Implementation Plan (in response to Resolution 20091105-040 "Resolution"). The plan has three primary aspects, with aspects #2 and #3 ("decrease shelter intake and increase live outcomes") that provide specificity of programs, that are found in section # II Increasing Live Outcomes, A-E, and III. Decrease Shelter Intake A-C (p.2-9).

It is highly recommended that the oversight and execution of these programs and services be strengthened to improve their overall efficacy in achieving resolutions set by the City of Austin administration and the Animal Advisory Commission. Offering these 12 programs must also be balanced with the organization's mission statement *to promote humane, compassionate treatment of animals.*

An important consideration for Austin City Council and the Animal Advisory Commission to deliberate on is the impact a 95% live release rate has on the transportation program. The perception of the need to transfer animals from AAC may be viewed less than other transferring organizations because those organizations have a lower live release rate. Shelters and rescue groups accepting animals from a transport program may make decisions to accept animals from shelters with a lower live release rate because there is more of a perceived need to save animals. Therefore, AAC's ability to transport pets may be reduced due to its own success.

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Overall, the process to adopt an animal at AAC reflects best practices, with two exceptions:

1. The customer service provided by staff members varies. AAC would benefit by providing customer service training to develop uniformity in how staff interact with customers. More importantly, emphasis should be placed on hiring individuals into these positions who possess these characteristics: friendly, positive attitude, empathetic, patient, good verbal communication skills, strong active listening skills, and a good problem solver.
2. The "back end" of the adoption process is weak. The evaluator observed several adoptions taking place and found very little counseling or information was provided to adopters about what they should do/expect after the pet was adopted and at home. Providing this type of counseling can reduce adoption returns, increase customer satisfaction, and most importantly, help pets acclimate to a new environment.

Customer service at AAC is good, and can be improved upon. While chatbots are an effective way of diverting questions that would otherwise take up staff time and energy to answer, chatbots are only as good as their programming. They provide answers based on what they have been trained to respond to and often time cannot handle more complex questions or issues. While customer service response may be faster using AI-chatbots, it may come at the cost of frustrating customers. In a February 2023 article titled, "Do customers like AI-based chatbots?",

> *data from a recent Ipsos poll, close to seven in 10 (68%) surveyed U.S. consumers have utilized customer service chatbots. However, of those respondents, close to eight in 10 (77%) prefer interacting with a human for customer service needs.*
>
> *In addition, 77% of respondents who have used chatbots report that customer service chatbots are frustrating, and 88% would rather speak to a person. A little more than one in three (35%) say that chatbots can solve their problem effectively most of the time.*

The decision to close intake is justified to meet the organization's mission *to provide live outcomes for at least 95% of sheltered animals* though the organization is challenged by simultaneously trying *to promote humane, compassionate treatment of animals* in their care.

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Housing more animals than the shelter has capacity for is not sustainable or humane for a myriad of reasons:

- Excessive population density has a profound negative impact on the physical and behavioral health of shelter animals, and is almost certainly the most common risk factor for many shelter diseases (Dr. Cynthia Karsten, Shelter Medicine, University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Veterinary Medicine)
- Overcrowding in animal populations can lead to a breakdown of normal social behavior, with increased aggression and violence, along with abnormal states of activity, aggregation, or social withdrawal. (Charles Southwick, Professor of Pathobiology), The Johns Hopkins University)
- Studies show shelter workers are at a higher risk for compassion fatigue* and burnout, AND also of suicide. (** Compassion fatigue is "emotional exhaustion, caused by the stress of caring for traumatized or suffering animals or people."*
- The amount of time, financial resources and personnel needed to manage an overcrowded animal shelter must increase to meet the demand.
- The Austin Animal Center opened in 2011 with the ability to house 309 dogs and 165 cats. At that time the city had a population of 828,569. Since then the city population has increased by 16%, while the County population has grown by 35%.

	2011 Population	2023 Population	Increase	% Increase
Austin	828,569	966,292	+ 137,723	+ 17%
Travis County	1,007,264	1,369,964	+ 362,700	+ 35%

- Animal shelter overcrowding increases the likelihood of animals spreading their illness faster because of the proximity of animal cages and kennels. This increases veterinary-medical team involvement and the financial burden as well as the staff time to care for these sick animals.
- Overcrowding at animal shelters reduces animal welfare. Overcrowding induces adverse stress when unfamiliar animals of the same species are mixed, increasing susceptibility to infection, as well as concentrating infectious particles and fomites, and increasing opportunities for transmission to naive or debilitated animals. This is particularly true for feline respiratory disease complex, which is rampant in many animal shelters. (Canadian Veterinary Medical Association)
- Management of contagious infectious diseases in dogs and cats continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing shelters. Every shelter is at inherent risk for introduction of contagious diseases into their facility with intake of animals from the community, many of which have acquired infections prior to entry. Disease outbreaks not only impact the life-saving capacity of shelters, but also destroy the shelter's reputation with adoption partners, local veterinarians, and the entire community, especially when such outbreaks are publicized by local and national media sources. Risk factors for disease outbreaks include crowding, which increases animal contact and stress and decreases care capacity; random co-mingling of animals in a run or cage; ineffective sanitation. (Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program).

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In March 2019, Austin City Council voted unanimously in favor of Resolution No. 20190328-034 to raise the minimum live release rate for the city to maintain No Kill status from 90 percent to 95 percent. If the City of Austin wants to maintain the 95% live release rate, Council Members and Animal Advisory Commission must decide whether they are in agreement with the impact of achieving these results, such as:

- If intake is opened, animals will be housed in temporary crates that are not in line with best practices. This increases staff workload (i.e. cleaning time for animal care staff, more time and volunteers needed to socialize and exercise animals, more time and financial resources needed by the veterinary services team); a greater likelihood of a disease outbreak in the shelter; increased stress in animals and people who care for them (compassion fatigue); more behavioral issues in animals (such as aggression and aggravation in animals). Operating this way runs counter to the organization's mission *to promote humane, compassionate treatment of animals.*

Several questions for the city to openly discuss:

1. Is the 95% live release rate a sustainable rate based on data or is it symbolic in nature to achieve?
2. Is the City interested in providing humane care that meets that needs of the animals and community they serve, or is the City more interested in maintaining the 95% live release rate for the prestige and accolades it receives? While the two are not mutually exclusive, AAC struggles to meet a 95% live release rate without compromising humane care of animals.
3. What is the trade-off, if any, the City of Austin is willing to accept with these two factors?

It is important to note, that there is not any governing body or entity that determines no-kill status. Even within the animal sheltering industry/animal welfare community, there exist variations on the definition of "no-kill". Published reports and statistics, including definitions and accounting methodology, vary from organization to organization. Therefore, the 90% live release rate that is so often cited, is simply the rate that has *stuck to the wall* and is deemed by many to be "the" standard accepted live release rate" to be considered as having achieved "no kill" status.

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One of the most important aspects for the city and AAC to address is the Capacity for Care. AAC is not sufficiently staffed to meet the Capacity for Care. This is further compounded by poor cleaning and sanitation practices at AAC. As this report has demonstrated, the shelter is compromising the very health of its animal population, as well as that of its staff, volunteers, and visitors.

Animal care staffing levels during the evaluation

	Mon 7/17	Tue 7/11	Wed 7/12
Supervisor	1	1	2
Specialist	2	3	6
Worker	15	16	16
Hrs per acw	10.0	9.375	9.375

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PART III. ANIMALS

In 2009, the Farm Animal Council established brief care guidelines for companion pets in the care of animal shelters and humane societies. The council established five freedoms for companion pets in an animal shelter/humane society and we rated Austin Animal Center on each of the five freedoms as follows:

Freedom:

From Hunger & Thirst	by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor	✔
From Discomfort	by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area	?
From Pain, Injury or Disease	by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment	✔
To Express Normal Behavior	by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind	?
From Fear and Distress	by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering	?

✔ = meets or exceeds standard
? = questionable
X = below standards

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Animal Housing

The breakdown of animal housing is as follows:
Building 000 (kennels 000) – 44 kennels
Building 300 (kennels for 100s)– 20 kennels
Building 303 (kennels for 200s) – 20 kennels
Building 306 (kennels for 300s) – 36 kennels
Building 309 (kennels for 400s) – 48 kennels
Building 312 (kennels for 500s) – 36 kennels
Building 315 (kennels for 600s) – 40 kennels
Room As - housing for dogs – 4 kennels (lobby kennels)
Room B – housing for dogs under 20 lbs. – 20 kennels (originally cat kennels)
Room C – housing for cats with URI – 21 kennels
Room D – housing for dogs under 20 lbs. – 17 kennels (originally cat kennels)
Room E – housing for mixed use cats – 22 kennels
Room F – housing exotics – 14 kennels
Room G – housing for cats with ringworm – 10 kennels
Room H (large cat room) – 44 kennels plus 6 group rooms
Room HP – cat overflow – 34 kennels
Room OH – juvenile cats – 24 kennels
Room NH – nursery – 18 kennels
Room I – housing for possible ringworm cats – 9 kennels (Vet services ISO)
Room J – housing for injured cats – 9 kennels (Vet services ISO)
Room K – housing for Rabies Observation cats – 9 kennels
Room L – nursery – 11 kennels (Vet services ISO)
Room M – housing for SCRP cats – 16 kennels (Vet Services area)
Room N – housing for newly arriving cats – 15 kennels (Vet Services area)
Room P – housing on the truck port for newly arriving dogs – 12 cages (Vet Services area)
Room Q – housing in the building for newly arriving dogs – 15 kennels (Vet Services area)
Room S – housing for surgery pre-post animals – 26 kennels (15 dog, 11 cat) (Vet Services area)
Room T – housing for injured large dogs – 8 kennels (Vet Services area)
Room U – housing for injured small dogs – 8 kennels (Vet Services area)
** Cat rooms have a maximum capacity of 7*

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Animal Statistics

Animal intake over a three-year period

	2020	2021	2022
Dog	6,770	5,765	6,903
Cat	4,248	4,562	5,091
Total	11,799	11,046	12,698

AAC has experienced a **7.6% increase** in dog and cat intake over a three-year period.

Animal adoption over a three-year period

	2020	2021	2022
Dog	3,574	3,222	3,624
Cat	2,350	2,827	3,472
Total	5,924	6,049	7,096

AAC has experienced a **19.7% increase** in dog and cat adoptions over this 3-year period.

Animals returned to owner over a three-year period

	2020	2021	2022
Dog	1,634	1,085	1,215
Cat	248	181	197
Total	1,882	1,266	1,412

AAC has experienced a **25% decrease** in dog and cat return to owners over this 3-year period.

Animals euthanized over a three-year period

	2020	2021	2022
Dog	87	87	99
Cat	136	154	306
Total	223	241	405

AAC has experienced a **81.6% increase** in dog and cat euthanasia over this 3-year period.

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Animal Handling

Many of the staff and volunteers observed handling animals over the four-day evaluation period did not know how to properly handle or restrain animals and lacked ability and skills to read and understand animal behavior. For example, staff did not know how to correctly open a cage and place a leash around a dog's head to avoid (or at least minimize) a dog from jumping, lunging, or biting; and staff did not know the proper way to pick-up, carry, and transport animal so as not to injure themselves or the animal (especially by dropping an animal while attempting to carry multiple animals). In fact, one staff member was observed grabbing a dog (AA884510) by its collar out of its cage. Another staff person shared that she was bitten by a dog soon after she started working for AAC.

Furthermore, on two separate occasions, volunteer dog walkers were observed having difficulty handling and restraining a dog that was excited/agitated by its surroundings. Either one of these situations could have resulted in the handler being injured.

Although AAC provides walkie talkies to staff members to help with communications, the supply is not sufficient for every animal care worker to receive. The distribution is done on a *first come, first served* basis resulting in some animal care workers not receiving the communication device. This could become problematic if a worker requires emergency assistance in the kennel and did not receive a walkie talkie.

Nutrition and Feeding

AAC has two policies related to nutrition and feeding:
ASO AC-303: *Cleaning, Feeding and Space Management for Dogs in Temporary Alternative Spaces* and a *Cleaning and Feeding Protocol*.
Feeding protocols are managed by the Veterinary Services Team.
Purina Pro Plan is the primary food source, although other dry and wet foods are used as needed to address dietary or gastro-intestinal needs of an animal.

The one area of concern with feeding is the propensity of volunteers to circumvent feeding protocols or advice of the veterinary services team by giving non authorized treats to shelter animals. This results in some animals having GI issues which requires more time to clean by the animal care worker team, and more time for treatment by the Veterinary services team. This typically results in a longer LOS for those animals and places a greater strain on shelter resources, which are already overwhelming to begin with.

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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The use of PPE is meant to reduce the risk to shelter employees from possible hazards including the contamination of personal clothing, exposure of skin and mucous membranes, and the transmission of pathogens between animals and employees. PPE consists of:

- Eye protection
- Ear protection (when using a loud high-pressure system)
- Gloves
- Boots
- Booties (shoe covers)
- Nose/mouth protection
- Pooper scooper and shovel
- Scrub brushes (handheld and telescoping)
- Squeegees
- Buckets

Unfortunately, during the on-site evaluation. staff and volunteers were inconsistent in wearing PPE. Furthermore, some of the PPE equipment (such as brooms, mops, squeegees) were in such poor condition that they are rendered virtually useless and compromise staff's ability to clean and sanitize effectively. Many times, the evaluator observed scoops and shovels sullied with waste, leaning against a wall. Additionally, close inspection of the boots in the grooming room showed many boots containing animal feces on their soles.

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Most of the staff wore gloves when cleaning animal cages, although on a few occasions, some staff were observed not wearing any gloves, or just one glove. In fact, one staff person used her bare hand to sweep out a small animal cage thus contaminating her hand in the process. She pushed waste and debris onto the floor, and herself. Often time, staff would continue wearing the same pair of gloves, even after cleaning a sullied cage and having organic waste on their gloves.

When staff were asked about the training they receive, most gave a similar answer that they essentially shadow someone for a few hours and then they are left to work under a mentor. One animal care worker quipped, “you are basically on your own here.” Furthermore, not one time during the entire evaluation period did the evaluator observe a manager check in on staff to ensure they were performing their duties, let alone check in on them to see how they were doing.

Based on observations and conversations with staff, both the cleaning and sanitation practices, as well as the management of animal care workers, are grossly inadequate at AAC.

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Cleaning & Disinfecting

AAC uses Rescue (Accel), an Accelerated Hydrogren Peroxide (AHP) cleaner which is a one-step Disinfectant Cleaner to removes dirt, grime, mold, mildew, blood, urine, fecal matter, and other common soils found in animal housing areas in an animal shelter. Rescue prevents outbreaks and kills a broad-spectrum of pathogens in 5 minutes and is gentle on users, animals, material, and the environment.

These are some of the flawed cleaning and disinfecting practices we observed:

- As mentioned on the previous page, staff were not consistent in wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – especially while cleaning with chemical products.
- Some cats were kept in their cages during the cleaning process.
- Staff were inconsistent in their application of Rescue. Rescue requires a 5-minute surface contact time to be effective, however, some staff were hosing down Rescue prior to the five-minute sit time required to be effective.
- At times, staff were simply spraying Rescue onto the animal housing surface, expecting the foam to do all of the work without any use of a brush to scrub away waste.
- Staff is unaware of Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) along with the warnings and cautions with each chemical cleaner.
- We observed staff step in animal feces and track the waste on their soles while they walked to other areas in the shelter.
- Staff were observed taking soiled blankets and towels out of an animals' cage/kennel then walking some distance to place it in a bin, only to drop waste on the ground in the transportation process.
- Staff were observed sweeping feces onto the ground on which they were standing. Furthermore, staff were observed placing equipment on top of areas with feces and urine.
- One staff member was observed scooping animal waste out of a cage and had visible waste on her glove only to handle a dog in another cage.
- Although staff indicated they do deep cleaning daily, the condition of the facility (as shown in photos in Part 1), demonstrates that the shelter has not undergone a deep cleaning in years. Deep cleaning involves cleaning with a soap/detergent which suspends dirt and grease but does not kill harmful microorganisms and does not necessarily remove dirt or grease; followed by the application of a degreaser, a more powerful soap/detergent that is specifically formulated to penetrate layers of dried on body oils and other greasy debris; and ending with chemical disinfectant which kills harmful microorganisms. This will involve staff manually removing organic matter by using scrub brushes and other cleaning tools.

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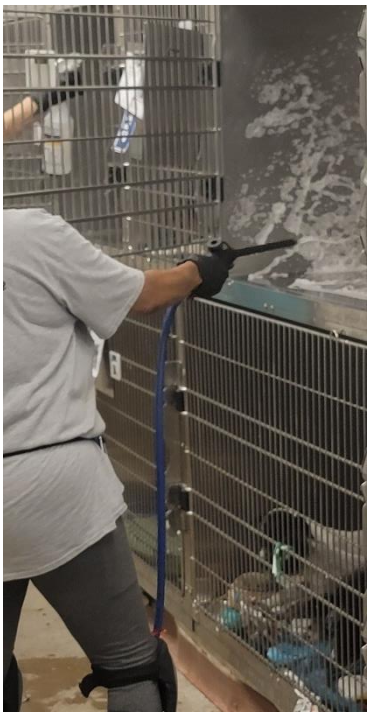
Staff left a sprayer container on the ground sitting in dog feces and urine.

An animal care worker is kneeling on the ground with her knees resting on top of animal waste.



An animal care worker sprays Rescue into a kennel while an animal in the kennel beneath gets spray drippings.

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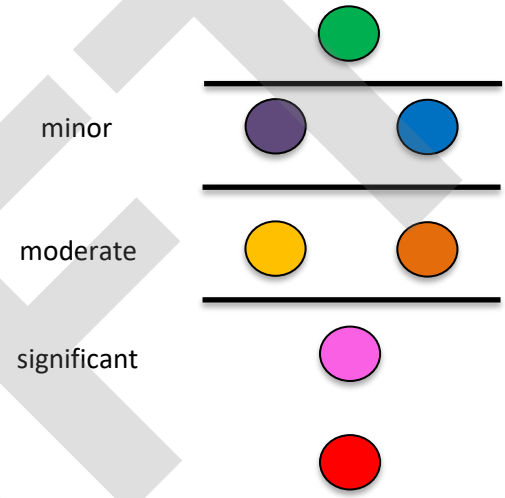
Animal Enrichment and Length of Stay

Most animals are provided with some form of enrichment, although the amount of enrichment or interaction is based on the animal's ease of handling. AAC utilizes a dot color designation (see below) for dogs. Each dog is assigned a dot color that indicates that dog's manageability. Although staff and volunteers share that their goal is to get each dog out at least twice a day, most dogs designated in red and pink are fortunate if they receive enrichment once a day.

AAC has 12 policies related to enrichment:

1. ASO 800 (2 versions)
2. ASO 801
3. ASO 802
4. ASO 803
5. ASO 804
6. ASO 805
7. ASO 806
8. ASO 807
9. ASO 808
10. Notifications



The average length of stay for animals at AAC over the past three fiscal years:

	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022
Adult Dogs	**30**	**35**	**32**
Puppy	**13**	**13**	**14**
Neonatal	**5**	**7**	**4**
Adult Cat	**32**	**38**	**26**
Kitten	**36**	**38**	**31**
Neonatal	**2**	**1**	**2**

It is critical to understand the host of problems that a longer LOS, or prolonged sheltering, can have on an animal's physical and mental well-being. For example, multiple studies have demonstrated that LOS is the single greatest risk factor for upper respiratory infection in shelter cats. (Dr. Cynthia Karsten, DVM); while prolonged sheltering for dogs can lead to housetraining regression and compulsive behaviors in the form of pacing, circling, and bouncing off walls. The evaluator observed 20 dogs at the shelter exhibiting those three compulsive behaviors.

Animal Monitoring and Daily Rounds

Staff were observed printing out an animal inventory report and conducting a walk through to confirm pets housed at AAC match the inventory report.

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Analysis and Recommendation(s)

The biggest weakness of the Austin Animal Center is the care of the animals* and the environment provided for them. This is ironic given that AAC is the City of Austin's *go to* resource for animals and even enforces animal regulations (see mission statement). Much emphasis has been placed on maintaining a 95% live release rate, with little, if any, mention, or importance placed on the humane care of the animals while at AAC. The language in the Resolutions (20091105-40 and 20190328-034) tout things like, "the substantial economic benefit to the Austin community" and that, "the City of Austin has become a national and international model for No-Kill sheltering", yet fail to make any mention of the *humane, compassionate treatment of animals*. Humane care of animals is a cornerstone piece of the organization's mission statement and a basic, and obvious, tenet of animal shelters and sheltering. * With the exception of the Veterinary-medical care of animals

This reinforces the questions that we invite the City to discuss (see page 59).
Based on this evaluation, and (1) the condition and environment of the entire facility, (2) inadequate animal housing, (3) poor shelter cleaning and sanitation practices (with animals as well as the entire physical facility),(4) poor animal handling skills, (5) lack of resources (staffing, training, and management), as well as (6) feedback from staff and volunteers, (among many, but not all of the issues), the evaluator concludes that the City appears to be more interested in the self-aggrandizing, and accolades, of being a national and international leader of No-Kill sheltering, rather than being a leader in the humane care and treatment of animals in its care.

These are the recommendations to improve animal care at AAC:
The AAC meets or exceeds standards in only two of the five freedoms. The AAC is rated questionable with ((1)Discomfort, (2) Express Normal Behavior, and (3) Fear and Distress):

1. Surface temperature readings and ambient room temperature readings in dog housing areas exceeded the accepted normal range for pets.
2. The physical facility does not have any sound buffering and the building design contributes to sound amplification. This can create fear and distress in pets. We took sound readings in all animal housing areas and had readings as high as 108 dB (decibels) in the dog kennels. For reference, a whisper is about 30 dB, normal conversation is about 60 dB, and a motorcycle engine running is about 95 dB. Noise **above 70 dB over a prolonged period may start to damage a person's hearing**. Loud noise above 120 dB can cause immediate harm to your ears. It should be noted that dogs have much more sensitive hearing than humans.
3. There is a myriad of factors within AAC that do not ensure conditions for animals to avoid mental suffering or express normal behavior, such as surface and ambient room temperature (mentioned above), air quality, cleanliness, plus housing animals in temporary crates that do not allow for normal posture adjustment or the room to sit, sleep and away from where they would defecate and urinate. The example of Kratos (p.37) is one of many examples of a dog in a crate too small for its body.

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We recommend AAC take these concurrent courses of action:

1. Investigate companies that offer sound baffles, sound curtains, or wall panels to help minimize the loud sound sin the dog kennels.
2. Consult with HVAC experts to determine how to best keep the ambient room temperature and surface temperatures.
3. Consult with animal sheltering architects to explore design options that can help reduce temperatures in dog kennel buildings.
4. Cease housing dogs in temporary crates that are too small for the animal.

Current housing for dogs and cats is acceptable **IF** non-animal housing rooms (such as the multi-purpose room) are not utilized to house animals with temporary crates and kennels. Additionally, the flow of animals into, around, and out of the building is not ideally suited for reducing the spread of diseases.

The shelter is 12 years old and was not designed to handle the volume of animals it is now receiving in 2023. The physical facilities alone will continue to provide challenges to shelter staff, and leadership to meet the 95% live release rate while also providing humane treatment to animals in their care.

Staff and volunteers were observed on numerous occasions struggling with being able to appropriately handle animals in their care. Poor handling and restraint techniques induce stress in shelter pets (who are generally already stressed to begin with) and may result in the handler's (and the pet's) injury. This can become a liability issue for AAC. It also could result in an otherwise adoptable animal being euthanized simply because it responded to an inappropriate and stressful restraint or handling.

AAC would greatly benefit by finding a standardized and professional animal handling and restraint course that is mandated for all current and future incoming staff (this same training should be provided to all volunteers who will handle animals as part of their volunteer duties). We highly recommend a hands-on course with classroom instruction that includes observation of a professional, followed by hands-on handling and restraint in which the professional observes and critiques staff as they handle and restrain animals. This type of instruction will be the best educational format for AAC staff. In the meantime, a good Paid resource is the ACT online training at sheltertraining.com while a decent (and free) resource can be found online at: http://bit.ly/ACTfreeaccount09 (or check out AnimalCareTV videos on YouTube).

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It is also recommended that AAC invest in more walkie-talkies that account for all staff persons on any given workday. This resource could prove beneficial in the event a staff person needs intervention from an animal attack or mauling while in a kennel building away from others.

The consistent use or absence of PPE highlights several important aspects of shelter operations where management has failed the staff and the animals it serves.

- Animal care workers are not always using PPE and staff has not taken notice of and corrected
- Some PPE in the facility is ineffective and useless, yet management has not disposed of and ordered new ones
- Staff and volunteers in animal care are inadequately trained, managed, and developed in their job duties
- Management does not actively manage the work performance of its team daily.

Most glaring at the shelter is that the entire cleaning and disinfecting process at AAC is flawed. As a result, the shelter is at high risk for infectious disease outbreaks.

1. Management of animal care workers is severely lacking and must be addressed immediately. Staff needs to be actively managed (i.e., being observed as they work; management demonstrating proper cleaning techniques; and making sure that PPE is used consistently). Staff and volunteers must be trained, guided, and mentored to ensure they are using shelter best practices for cleaning and sanitation.
2. AAC must examine and re-write its written policies and procedures for cleaning and disinfecting so that it is aligned with industry best practices. The evaluator did not receive a complete SOP as part of this evaluation, so a full analysis of AAC SOPs would not be entirely accurate.
3. All cleaning instruments (brooms, mops, squeegees) are to be cleaned and disinfected daily and not left in public view.
4. AAC needs to implement a deep cleaning day, once-a-quarter, to make sure that all animal housing areas (and staff work areas) are cleaned and disinfected to prevent any type of buildup of dust, dirt, debris or dead insects. The current conditions of the physical facility (see Part I) would not exist IF AAC had a true and proper deep cleaning process that it performed at least once a quarter.
5. The cleaning and sanitation examples cited earlier in this section, demonstrate how pathogens are spread and shelters get viral outbreaks. It is also how Zoonotic diseases are spread between animals and people. Since staff and volunteers went about their daily routine of cleaning cat and dog housing areas without consistently using PPE, and management was not observed checking in on staff performing their duties, we highly recommend that AAC conduct an entire training on the importance of PPE. Management can begin ensuring staff follow proper use of PPE by actively managing them. The bottom line is that more emphasis needs to be placed on PPE.

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There isn't an average length of stay that's right for every animal shelter or animal. Given the City's Resolution to maintain a 95% live release rate, an animal should stay just as long as needed to get the care, time, and attention needed to produce this outcome. Illness and medical treatment, enrichment, play, socialization and behavior modification, separation anxiety after abandonment, and even time on the adoption floor, and marketing on website or social media sites can play a role in an animal's LOS. However, some staff and volunteers expressed concern that some dogs with a longer LOS have declined while at the shelter. They describe dogs exhibiting undesirable and compulsive behaviors (pacing, circling, bouncing off walls) that make them difficult to adopt. They are concerned with aggressive dogs that may bite or attack other dogs or people. This concern was echoed by the Veterinary Services Team. These behaviors were also witnessed by the evaluator.

To address this problem, AAC needs:

1. To be able to manage its *capacity for care*
2. More human resources (staff and volunteers)
3. More and better training on animal behavior and animal handling
4. More and consistent enrichment for dogs
5. More time for dogs outside of the kennel (play and socialization)
6. More collaboration with shelters and rescue groups with a <u>demonstrated</u> ability and skillset to work with behavior-problem dogs
7. The City to discuss and address its tolerance for euthanasia of animals with behaviors that make them high risk for aggressive or violent behavior against people and animals (in the interest of public safety)
8. More positive support and encouragement from the public

Given the myriad of issues identified in this report with the dirty and disorganized building exterior and interior, inadequate animal housing conditions, substandard cleaning and sanitation practices, and unsafe animal handling, AAC leadership appears to have failed in its duty to provide an environment that is safe and healthy for the animals and people it serves.

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PART IV. ANIMAL VETERINARY MEDICINE

In 2022, the Veterinary Services Team of 31 people (12 of which are veterinarians), with a budget of $3,492,996, are credited with:

- **Performing** 11,339 exams
- **Sterilizing** 5,736 animals
- **Conducting** 380 specialty surgeries
- **Attending** to 1,132 emergency cases

All of that work in addition to the day-to-day tasks and duties at the shelter working with staff and volunteers to observe and treat animals, document animal records, conduct video conferencing calls with fosters, etc. The entire Veterinary Services Team should be commended for their ability to provide exemplary humane care and treatment of animals all while handling a heavy workload.

Veterinary Services has an extensive and thorough electronic Standard Operating Procedures containing 106 separate policies/procedures.

AAC also has an impressive offering of veterinary-medical programs to assist Austinites and Travis County residents with pet ownership such as

- **Community Spay and Neuter Programs** (see section below)
- **Free Rabies Vaccination Clinics**
- **Free Microchips and ID Tags**
- **Fencing and Dog House Program**

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Licensing

All veterinarian licensing was confirmed with the Texas Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners.

Name	Credential #	Status
Kelly Anderson	8509	Active
Deborah Elliott	7515	Active
Rachel Hays	9557	Active
Robert Rhyne	5665	Active
Amanda Bruce	13995	Active
Catherine Campbell	6790	Active
Sarah Crawford	10858	Active
Laura Helmueller	9132	Active
Lauren Henderson	14459	Active
Cristin McCamish	11592	Active
Paige Nilson	11491	Active
Stephanie Rivera	16684	Active
Jessie Yakesch	7819	Active

Animal monitoring and daily rounds

Animal monitoring is a multi-team process involving veterinarians, vet techs, animal care workers, and volunteers. The use of “pink slips" allows animal care and volunteers to report a sick animal and its symptoms to the veterinary medical team. The techs will evaluate the animal and decide if the animal needs evaluation by a veterinarian (DVM attention list) or by a lead vet tech (i.e., vet services attention list). Lead techs are authorized to treat some of the common cases such as URI or diarrhea based on the animal's history and symptoms. All examinations and treatments are entered directly into the animal’s medical record.

The Vet Services team also manages the animals in foster care through the utilization of telemedicine and through appointments scheduled by fosters.

Daily rounds are a list (medical attention list) that the veterinarians manage to evaluate intensive care animals as well as post-op cases.

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Equipment

AAC Vet Services has the following vet-medical equipment in their inventory:

anesthesia machine, matrix v
anesthesia machine, matrix v
autoclave tuttnauer manual 01
centrifuges, desk top and fr
microscopes, all types (for
vapor master/tlac
engraving machines for nameplates (animal services)
refrigerators and freezers
cleaning & washing eqp, steam,
vapor steam cleaner
anesthesia machine, tpr monitors, and vaporizer
table surgery hyndralic animal
capnograph surgivet
swift microscope
pharmaceuticals, veterinary, animal: drugs, vaccin
pharmaceuticals, veterinary, animal: drugs, vaccin
autoclave-sterilizor
generators, portable and stationary, including par
ultrasonic imaging sstms: echo
servers, file, microcomputer, environmentally certified
PC with IDEXX systems
Dryer

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Vaccinations and Parasite Control

Dogs: DHPP & Bordatella at intake (DHPP is boosted every 2 weeks)
Cats: FVRCP & CVR intranasal plus Leukemia test at intake (FVRCP is boostered every 2 weeks)
Rabies at intake – (minimum age of three months for both dogs an cats)
Dogs: Heartworm testing
Cats: FELV/FIV testing

Parasite Control

Flea control

- Revolution (topical flea treatment) dogs older than six weeks old; cats older than eight weeks old (upon intake & monthly)
- Capstar (fast acting oral tablet) if live fleas are present at intake
- Advantage/Vectra (flea & tick treatment) dogs receive on intake. Subsequent boosters monthly with Advantage multi

Internal Parasites

- Ivermectin (roundworms, threadworms, other parasites) upon intake
- Heartguard (heartworm & hookworms) for Collie breeds on intake
- Pyrantel (pinworm, roundworm, other worms) at intake if under three months; along with Ponzuril (roundworms, coccidia)
- Droncit (de-wormer and internal parasites) if live fleas are present

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Intake exams

Once an animal has been entered into the system and assigned an Animal ID #, it receives an intake examination by the Veterinary Services team consisting of a cursory examination, body temperature, weight, scan for microchip (one given if none), check for prior sterilization, blood withdrawal, parasite control and vaccinations provided, and a body scoring applied if the animal is old or appears under- or over-weight. A more extensive exam is given IF the animal shows any signs of abnormality in body temp or size.

According to Dr. Elliott, Lead Veterinary Services, there are several templates that techs complete at intake:

Wellness -- covers BCS, sex if spay/neutered/tattoo, scan for microchip, weight, temperature, estimate age of the animal, and a quick visual evaluation (they will pick up lameness, skin conditions, body scores, dehydration, eye, ear issues, etc)

** Based on the answers to the above exam determines if other processes are needed. For instance, if a vet needs to evaluate, establish the location of the pet if need (SNR cats, public assist, ICU, etc).*

Behavior Assessment - how the animal tolerates being handled for the above.

If Microchip is found - the animal is placed on reclaim

Required wellness: (please reference two previous sections titled *Vaccinations* and *Parasite Control*).

Lastly, all of these items are then cued for future treatments as needed.

The techs evaluate other memos based on how the animal arrived and address any concerns or need for a veterinarian evaluation, exam, treatment, etc.

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Spaying and Neutering

Spay and neuter is a core component of a no kill community and keeping Austin a No Kill City. AAC offers both free and low-cost services to make spay and neuter accessible to every pet owner in the City of Austin or Travis County. AAC funds free days for spay and neuter surgeries and vaccines for pets. In FY 2022 alone, AAC spent over $1.3M on pet sterilization programs.

Furthermore, AAC manages four other programs to help with sterilization of animals:

- **Spay and Neuter Outreach:** AAC leads outreach efforts in high-intake neighborhoods. They pick up and transport owned pets to Emancipet, where they are sterilized and vaccinated.
- **Shelter-Neuter-Return:** Through a partnership program with Austin Humane Society, some healthy stray cats brought to AAC are transferred to Austin Humane Society, where they are sterilized, vaccinated and returned to the place they were found.
- **Rabies Clinic Spay and Neuter:** In partnership with Emancipet, the AAC holds two rabies clinics each year. In addition to providing free vaccines, collar, tag and microchip, AAC funds up to 100 spay and neuter surgeries per event.
- **Community Cats TNR:** AAC funds feral cat sterilization and vaccines through a partnership with Austin Humane Society.

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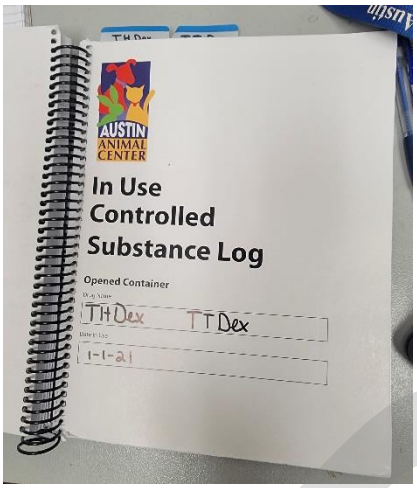
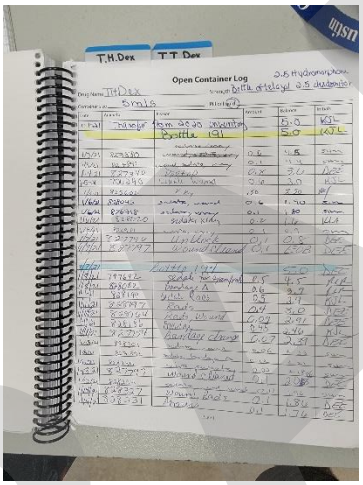
Controlled Substance Logs

AAC does an excellent job with documenting and managing all controlled substances in the building and in accordance with Schedule II of the Texas Controlled Substances Act (*26 Tex. Admin. Code § 748.2101)* and Sec. 1301.75 Physical security controls for practitioners under Title 21 – Food and Drugs, Chapter II- DEA DOJ, Part 1301.

- All record logs are maintained accordingly with drug name and strength, amount (i.e. size) date, animals ID #, amount used, balance of drug remaining in bottle and initialed by veterinarian.
- drug logs/records are maintained in accordance with federal and state regulations.
- All controlled drugs are kept secured in a manner consistent with state and federal regulation (behind a locked door in a locked cabinet with access limited to veterinarians)





Euthanasia procedures & practices

Euthanasia was not performed during the four-day on-site evaluation, so the evaluator cannot comment on observing the actual procedure. However, the evaluator did examine various aspects related to euthanasia as found below:

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Policy and Procedure

AAC provided two policies & procedures (P&P) related to Euthanasia:

- P&P (Reference No ASO BHT-803) titled, *Euthanasia Decision Making Process for Dogs with Demonstrated Behavior Challenges*. We find this policy to be in line with best practices for the animal sheltering industry and does a very good job of balancing the dog's right to live along with its quality of life, and risk to other people and animals, and community safety. The P&P is aligned with the Euthanasia of Animals Procedure Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 829
- P&P (Reference No ASO-501) titled, *Euthanasia of Animals*. This is a very thorough policy – perhaps the best policy we have encountered in all of our evaluations – and keeps with the instruction of both the AVMA* *Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals* (2020) and the HSUS^ *Euthanasia Reference Manual*.
  **American Veterinary Medical Association*
  ^Humane Society of the United States

Euthanasia numbers over the past three fiscal years:

FY	Dogs PTS	Dog Intake	As a %	Cat PTS	Cat Intake	As a %
2020	87	6,770	1.3%	136	4,248	3.2%
2021	87	5,765	1.5%	154	4,562	3.4%
2022	99	6,903	1.4%	152	5,091	3.0%

Body storage

Deceased animal bodies are stored in bags that are tagged on the outside and stored in a freezer located near the exit/entry to the truck port. The temperature of the freezer was measured between -2'F and 0'F.

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Selection criteria

The AAC team has a very thorough and extensive case management approach to the selection of dogs for euthanasia. The process at AAC involves numerous checks and balances, which we believe are industry-leading in approach Involved in the selection of dogs for euthanasia is a team-based approach involving several layers of review. Involved in the review process is the Enrichment Team, Leadership Team, Veterinary Medical Team, and usually involve input from both staff and/or volunteers. Furthermore, a myriad of factors about each individual dog is considered which includes advocating for the dog's right to live, quality of life, balanced with community safety and risk to people and other animals, along with other factors such as bite history and circumstances, past history, demonstrated acts of aggression, frequency of behavior, and even includes potential needs for managing the dog such as suffering and pain management to name but two. Notification of Euthanasia complies with City Ordinance 20191017-025.

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Analysis and Recommendation(s)

The smoothest running department within AAC is the Veterinary Service team. In addition to its ability to operate in an efficient manner, it is also the cleanest and best sanitized area within the facility. (As notated in Part 1 (Facility>Interior) of this Report, staff has difficulty maintaining a clean and sanitary environment for animals and people.) The Veterinary Services Department also appears to be a unified team that works collaboratively with one another. Overall, the evaluator was impressed with the Veterinary Services team who do an excellent job providing the necessary veterinary-medical care to animals under their care and providing humane treatment. This is in keeping with the first bullet point of AAC's mission statement, "**To provide**…. **standard municipal veterinary care for animals in need**." We find that AAC's veterinary care not only meets standard municipal care for animals in need, and often exceeds that standard.

Unfortunately, the Veterinary Services Team is challenged by volunteers and even some staff who circumvent veterinary best practices by taking actions, such as giving dogs unauthorized treats that aggravate an animal's gastrointestinal system causing diarrhea. This results in more veterinary intervention. (This is just one example to illustrate what the Vet Services Team deals with daily.) This has been, and is, an ongoing source of frustration for the Vet Services Team that some volunteers appear to be above reproach. The vet staff does not feel it receives support from the volunteers and continually feel as if their professional expertise on animal care and behavior is questioned. Furthermore, some vet staff expressed concern that some volunteers, or partners (i.e. rescue group staff) appear to have influence and/or direct contact with Animal Advisory Commission members and/or Austin City Council members. They feel this brings about inaccurate and unnecessary criticism of veterinary care at the shelter.

This outside pressure undermines the skills and ability of highly educated and skilled professionals who are dedicated to the mission of the organization and who do a very good job of providing humane care to all animals. The continuation of this social undermining and covert negative behavior designed to impede and challenge the Veterinary Services Team will damage relationships and reputations. The evaluator has concerns this may ultimately lead to quality talent leaving AAC because of this antagonistic behavior. This could damage the Austin Animal Center's reputation in the veterinarian medical community and with a national shortage of veterinarians and vet staff across the United States, it could take many months, if even a year or more, to find qualified replacements. It's also unfortunate that one of the best things about AAC is subject to this type of treatment.

It is highly recommended that the Volunteer Coordinators collaborate with the Veterinary Services Team to work on better managing those volunteers who are intent on evading veterinary best practices, such as feeding protocols. Until the Volunteer management team can better control volunteers, the staff-volunteer relationship will be strained with time and resources focused on unnecessary issues that take away from the origanization's mission.

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The only recommendations for storage of controlled substances is:

1. to ensure that the green, RCA refrigerator is secured to the floor or wall. Although the refrigerator does have a lock on it, its small size and lightweight, means this refrigerator could be lifted and moved out of this area. Federal law specifies that all controlled substances be stored in a "substantially constructed," securely locked cabinet designed to deter theft or misuse of drugs. Therefore, controlled substances should be stored in a cabinet that is either permanently constructed or attached to a building structure to prevent physical removal. (**Currently, the safe in the vet-med area is not compliant with this requirement**).
2. Install a ceiling-mounted security camera focused on the safe that stores controlled substances in all rooms storing controlled substances.

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PART V. MARKETING, PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

We assessed the department's marketing, public and community relations (MPCR) by examining ACC 's communication and public relations plans, activities, and relationships, as well as by establishing a Google Alert to track the department's news/media coverage.

At the time of the evaluation, responsibility for Marketing, Public & Community Relations is the responsibility of Kelsey Cler, Program Manager, Marketing & Communication. The Program Manager has one other staff person, a marketing representative, to help perform the duties associated with this area. The duties for these two positions are summarized as follows:

Manager duties:

- Respond to media inquiries
- Create and send press releases
- Manage social media (content gathering, crafting, posting, responding)
- Maintain/update website content
- Approve/create shelter signage
- Design graphics for promotions and social media
- Assemble monthly reports for the Animal Advisory Commission
- Create annual report
- Serve as city Public Information Officer for department
- Serve as member of shelter leadership team

Marketing representative duties:

- Plan and coordinate offsite events (bulk of her time)
- Solicit and nurture partnership opportunities
- Coordinate Pet of the Week spots through local stations
- Coordinate media/offsite volunteers
- Assist with social media

Budget

According to staff, the budget for marketing is a mere $5,000.

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Plan

Austin Animal Center does not have an official written plan, direction or vision for its MPCR and leadership has not provided guidance on the shelter's strategic vision. However, the Program Manager has developed her own goals for the program based on her skills, experience and interests. The self-created goals falls into four areas (each with two-to-four goals per category) as follows:

- **Social Media**
  - Engage in social listening
  - Tell our story in all aspects – 3-4 posts daily
  - Follow best practices
  - Maintain consistent voice
- **Traditional Media**
  - Maintain positive relationships with outlets
  - Put out at least one press release each month
  - Participate in Pet of the Week spots
- **Brand Management**
  - Improve brand equity
  - Ensure consistency
- **Community Partnerships**
  - Create and maintain positive relationships with partners in the community
  - Host/attend at least 2 events per month

Success is primarily measured through social media data, number of press releases sent out, number of Pet of the Week spots, number of offsite events.

Social Media

AAC does have a Social Media Policy, dated 11/16/2022, that addresses how to communicate important information and promote services to residents, stakeholders, and visitors. This policy supplements the City of Austin's Social Media Policy. The AAAC Social Media Policy was prepared in coordination with the City's Communications and Public Information Officer.

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Google Alerts

A Google alert was set up with the phrase “Austin Animal Center” for a 30-day period from June 12, 2023, through July 11, 2023. During this period, the alert yielded seven-(7) results, as shown below:

Date	Publication	Headline
6.13.23	KUT 90.5 website	*'Dogs coming out of our ears': Pandemic, no-kill policy worsen overcrowding at Austin Animal Center*
6.15.23	CBS Austin website	*Adoption fees waived at shelter as heat pushes overcapacity issue into crisis*
6.23.23	My San Antonio website	*Austin Animal Center waiving adoption fees indefinitely amid kennel shortage crisis* *Twenty-three dogs are currently without a kennel.*
6.29.23	Austin American-Stateman website	*Austin Animal Center in need of fosters, adopters after intake closed. Here's how you can help*
6.30.23	Austin Chronicle	*A Surge of Adoptions Alleviates the Animal Shelter Crisis – for Now*
7.4.23	Yahoo Lifestyle website	*Overcrowding at Austin Animal Center*
7.11.23	KVUE ABC website	*What's behind the Austin Animal Center's overcrowding problem?*

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We also conducted a basic search using the organization's name (Austin Animal Center) in the top three most widely used search engines: Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

Google Search using "Austin Animal Center"

Using the phrase "Austin Animal Center" in the Google search engine, yielded 165,000,000 results. According to findings from Chitika (online ad network), top listings in Google's organic search results receives 33 percent of the traffic, compared to 18 percent for the second position, 11 percent for the third position and continues to decrease until 2.4% at the tenth position (see chart below).

Rank	% of Traffic
1	33.0 %
2	18.0 %
3	11.0 %
10	2.4 %

It is also worth noting that most laptop and PC screen monitors display approximately 3-5 rankings (based on screen settings) before an end user must scroll to reveal more rankings. (Various white pages demonstrate a 50% abandonment rate when an end user must scroll for more information). For illustrative purposes, we've placed the first five visible results from the first page of the searches using the phrase "Austin Animal Center" here:

Google

Rank	Link
1	https://www.austintexas.gov/austin-animal-center
2	https://www.austintexas.gov/page/view-adoptable-pets
3	https:/twitter.com/austinanimals
4	https://www.austintexas.gov/department/austin-animal-center-0
5	https://www.facebook.com/AustinAnimalCenter/

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Bing and Yahoo

Using the phrase “Austin Animal Center” in the Bing and Yahoo search engines resulted in very similar results to the Google search.

Bing

Rank	Link
1	https://www.austintexas.gov/austin-animal-center
2	https://www.austintexas.gov/austin-animal-center
3	https://www.austintexas.gov/department/austin-animal-center-0
4	https://www.petfinder.com/member/us/tx/austin/austin-animal-center-tx514/
5	https://www.adoptapet.com/shelter/70072-austin-animal-center-austin-texas

Yahoo

Rank	Link
1	https://www.austintexas.gov/austin-animal-center
2	https://www.austintexas.gov/department/austin-animal-center-0
3	https://www.facebook.com/AustinAnimalCenter/
4	https://www.petfinder.com/member/us/tx/austin/austin-animal-center-tx514/
5	https://www.adoptapet.com/shelter/70072-austin-animal-center-austin-texas

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Using the same search phrase in the top three search engines, we classify each of the links from the first three pages into one of four categories:

	Informational	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Google	5	0	0	0
Bing	5	0	0	0
Yahoo	5	0	0	0
TOTALS	15	0	0	0
	100 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

YouTube

Using the search term “Austin Animal Center” on YouTube reveals that AAC does have an established account on YouTube - https://www.youtube.com/@austinpets2011 with 1.37K subscribers and 15,000 videos.

Google Reviews

2,564 reviews. The average rating is 4.5 / 5.0 stars. Reviews of Austin Animal Center are left on a regular basis (almost daily). People most often mention these words or phrases:

- No kill shelter (61X)
- Information (44X)
- Foster (32X)

Yelp

211 reviews. The average rating is 3.7 / 5.0 stars.

5 star 105 (50 %)
4 star 37 (18 %)
3 star 9 (4 %)
2 star 13 (6 %)
1 star 46 (22 %)

Yellowpages.com

Not listed.

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Petfinder

https://www.petfinder.com/member/us/tx/austin/austin-animal-center-tx514/
A hyperlink and URL to the Austin Animal Center website is provided on the Petfinder page. Photos of available pets are available, although aside from basic details such as animal name, number, and sex, most pets do not have any detailed information about them on the Petfinder site.

Official Website

(https://www.austintexas.gov/austin-animal-center) organization's website consists of 8 pages (including the home page) with 7 subpages:

Home	
Adopt	*A hyperlink takes visitors to adopets website to view available pets*
Get Involved	Foster Volunteer
About	About the Animal Center FAQ Reports Media Partners
Lost & Found	
Animal Protection	
Resources	
Donate	

The AAC website includes a Report section that offers such features as a Dashboard, Data Portal, Yearly Reports, Monthly Reports for Animal Advisory Commission, and Donation Reports. The level of information made available to the public is quite impressive and offers a level of transparency most City or County Animal Care/Control/Shelters do not offer.

Furthermore, most visitors to an animal shelter's website are to view adoptable pets and the website has done a good job of featuring multiple photos and good descriptions of animals available for adoption.

According to the website ryte, the Austin Animal Center website has a 76% rating, and scores as follows:

Content	71 %	5/7
SEO	100%	7/7
Performance	75 %	3/4
Mobile	57 %	4/7

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Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/AustinAnimalCenter)
1,073 reviews. The average rating is 4.5 / 5.0 stars. Facebook page created June 10, 2009. There are several ratings/reviews from spammers that are not legitimate and may have an impact on the organization's FB page rating.
The "Austin Animal Center" Facebook page has:
117,000 followers
And the FB page is following 249 other pages.
It appears the organization makes two or more FB posts per day.

Twitter (https:// twitter.com/austinanimals)
The "Austin Animal Center" Twitter page has been active since August 2010 and has 9,968 followers. The organization is tweeting two or more times per day – mirroring the same content on FB.

Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/austinanimalcenter
The "Austin Animal Center" Instagram page has 62,600 followers, and is following 534 other IG accounts, and has posted 6,435 times. Posts mirror the same content on FB.

Community Events
For a five-month period between January 28, 2023, through June 28, 2023, the Austin Animal Center was involved in 23 different, staff-led, community events; 15 of which featured adoptable pets.

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ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

According to the organizations' own website, Austin Animal Center "runs the largest no-kill animal shelter in the United States, providing shelter to more than 18,000 animals each year". Additionally, AAC is an open-intake facility where lost and surrendered animals from all of Travis County in need of shelter are accepted regardless of age, health, species, or breed. Yet only two people are responsible for managing the brand image of the nation's largest no kill animal shelter in the United States.

Social media is where customers, adopters, and the public are engaging. People are reaching out to one another for guidance, advice, information, resources and even to vent. The businesses and organizations with active social media accounts begin standing out as thought leaders and subject matter experts and these perspectives can sway decisions. In other words, social media is the most important form of communication for a brand and image. Yet, a department with a budget of nearly $18M has invested two staff people and a mere $5,000 (or .0003 %) of the overall budget to manage its overall brand and image.

This means two people manage four-(4) social media sites (FB, IG, Twitter, YouTube), administer and lead community events, gather animal and organizational stories to develop news stories to write news releases and pitch to media outlets, respond to media inquiries, maintain, and update the AAC website, and assemble monthly reports for the Animal Advisory Committee. They have done a remarkable job given that the organization maintains high average scores on Google (4.5 out of 5.0), Facebook (4.5 out of 5.0) and Yelp (3.7 out of 5.0).

As much good work as these two employees have done at managing the marketing and community relations efforts, they are at maximum bandwidth with work responsibilities and daily tasks. (And they do this without the guidance of a formalized marketing plan or direction from AAC leadership.) They are also responsible for handling the slew of constant and negative social media posts, and even vitriolic e-mails that are sometimes personal and threatening in nature. These outside forces from the public have created what some employees refer to as a hostile work environment.

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As is sometimes the case, allegations levied against an animal shelter or shelter director are based on partial truths. (Some previous allegations made against the organization were examined and while we found there was some small kernel of truth at the basis of these allegations, it appears the individual(s) making the allegations made considerable speculation about the situation and passed that speculation off as fact.) This is known as the illusory truth effect – the tendency to believe in false information after hearing it repeatedly. ("Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes truth.") Unfortunately, these allegations are taking large amounts of time, energy, and staff resources to address. These recurring attacks on AAC and its leadership are a drain on the department's resources, cause low morale, and create an atmosphere in which staff are wary of some City Council Members and Animal Advisory Commission members, and even the public.

The Program Manager and Marketing Representative would benefit from two things:

1. A larger budget
2. At least one additional FTE
3. Developing a marketing plan, with goals, objectives, and metrics. This is best developed in collaboration with AAC leadership. This document can help guide staff in the big picture as well as their day-to-day tasks.

Separately, and equally important, the entire department could benefit from feeling as if they have the support and backing of the City - particularly City Council Members and Animal Advisory Commission members. Animal sheltering is very challenging and heart-breaking work that is fraught with a myriad of challenges. It leaves most shelter employees – anywhere in the country – open to harsh criticism and finger-pointing. According to an article from Human Animal Support Services, *"In a recent poll of more than 150 shelter professionals, 75% reported they have been the victim of online bullying and harassment related to their work, 70% reported they've been on the receiving end of in-person threats or harassment, and 80% said this treatment was in response to an organizational policy that was not in their control."*

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PART VI. VOLUNTEERS

The volunteer program is managed by Mary Brown, Program Manager and supported by Emily Pittman, Volunteer Coordinator/Dog Programming and Sarah Luce, Volunteer Coordinator/Cat Programming. According to Mary Brown, there are more than 1,000 volunteers registered in the system (*Volgistics*) with approximately 30 who are logging hours on a regular and consistent basis.

Volunteer Management Software

AAC uses *Volgistics*, a web-based volunteer database/management software system that stores and tracks all information and activity on past and present volunteers. *Volgistics* has a 4.1 out of 5.0 rating from end users and is currently ranked the 17th easiest to use volunteer management software by G2.

Volunteer Opportunities

AAC offers 80 different volunteering opportunities in 11 different areas, although not all opportunities are currently being offered. The opportunities are as follows:

Behavior & Enrichment Support (11)
Cat Behavior & Enrichment
Cat Behavior Assistant
Cat Socialization - Cactus Cats & Spicy Kitten Unit
Green Dot Dog Walking
Large Dog Walking
MPR/TP Dog Walking
Night Shift Volunteer Lead
Outings/Overnights
Playgroup Dog Runner
Rabbit and Small Animal Enrichment
Small Dog Walking

Community Cats (2)
Community Cat Trappers
Community Cats Admin Volunteer

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Community Engagement (14)
CLEAN the Shelters!
Clear The Shelters 2022
Emergency Response
Friends of AAC
Microchip Clinic
Offsite Adoption Events
Outreach Events
Pet Detective
Pet I.D. Tag Engraving
Pet Resource Center Host
Rabies Clinic
RV Trailer Inventory Review
Special Events
Tag engraving with Austin's Mobile Fleet

Dog Enrichment (3)
At-Home Prep
Distribution
Enrichment Prep

Facilities/Grounds Maintenance (3)
At-home & Special Projects
Dish room and Laundry
Facility Maintenance

Foster Program (3)
Behavioral Foster
Foster Care Provider
Foster Program Assistant

Media & Marketing (8)
Cat Photo Team
Chameleon Club
Dog Photo Team
Marketing - Special Projects
Marketing Advocate
Media & Promotions
Photoshoot Handler
Social Media/Photography Orientation

One-time Groups (1)
Group Service

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Placement Support (9)
Adoption Follow-Up Support
Cat Adoption Ambassador
Champion Promotion
Greeter
Large Dog Ambassador
Rabbit/Small Animal Ambassador
Senior Dog - Candy Striper
Small Dog Ambassador
Transport Program Support

Vet Services Support (8)
AM/PM Treatments
Anesthetic Recovery
Cat Nebulization
Intensive Care Unit (ICU) Angels
Ringworm Treatment - Cats
Underage Kitten Monitor
URI Dog Enrichment
Veterinary tasks and duties as assigned

Volunteer Development (14)
Cat Mentor sign up
Dog Enrichment Training
Dog Safety & Handling Training
Experienced Large Dog Mentorship
Experienced Small Dog Mentorship
Large Dog Mentor Sign-up
Mentoring
New Volunteer Orientation
Pawsitive Skills and Training
Rabbit Mentor sign up
Shelter Basics Training for Cat Volunteers
Shelter Basics Training for Dog Volunteers
Small Dog Mentor sign up
Volunteer Meetings, Workshops, Trainings

Volunteer Services (4)
Animal Care
Court Ordered Community Service
Office Assistant
Volunteer Group Leads

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Volunteer Handbook

AAC does have a Volunteer Guide which is published on its website under the Get Involved>Volunteer tab of the website (https://www.austintexas.gov/department/volunteer-animal-center). This 25-page document has four different sections.

- Introduction (4 subsections)
- Program Overview (35 subsections)
- Center Programs (14 subsections)
- Appendix (10 subsections)

Volunteer Job Descriptions

AAC has job descriptions for 17 of the job opportunities:

1. Adoption Ambassador
2. AM PM Treatment Volunteer
3. Anesthetic Recovery Volunteer
4. Cat Behavior Assistant
5. Cat Behavior Volunteer
6. Cat Lead Volunteer
7. Cat Nebulization Volunteer
8. Cat Ringworm Treatment
9. Customer Service Greeter
10. Foster Program Assistant
11. ICU Angels Volunteer
12. Offsite and Outreach Volunteer Lead
13. One-time groups coordinator
14. Rabbit Enrichment Volunteer
15. Senior Dog Candy Striper
16. Underage Kitten Monitor & Weight
17. Volunteer Mentor

Job descriptions follow the same formatting of listing:

- Position type
- Position reports to
- Summary
- Specifications
- Qualifications
- Work Conditions
- Physical Demands
- Time commitment

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Volunteer Application
A volunteer application can be found online at:
https://www.volgistics.com/appform/1944617297
This application is hosted on the AAC website via the *volgistics* platform.

Volunteer Policies and Procedures
Although AAC does not have a formalized Policies & Procedures Manual, the Volunteer Guide does serve as the policies and procedures for its volunteers. It covers everything from Core Values, Workplace Culture Agreement, Volunteer Expectations, General Rules and has five-(5) pages of General Rules.

Volunteer Newsletter
AAC does **not** publish an informational newsletter for its volunteers.

Volunteer Recruitment & Hiring
Volunteers are primarily recruited through the organization's website and some while visiting the shelter. Any person interested in volunteering must complete the on-line volunteer application.

Volunteer Shifts
AAC volunteers schedule their shifts in *Volgistics* in advance based on coverage need openings indicated in the software. Each work area has different coverage needs.

Volunteer Review and Evaluation
Although page 16 of the Volunteer Guide has a "Performance Management" section, it does not address that the performance of a volunteer is reviewed or evaluated at regular intervals, such as after 30-days, 6-months or 1-year.

Volunteer Mentoring
According to page 9 of the Volunteer Guide, "You (volunteer) are required to shadow a mentor for your first two hours of volunteer service. Your mentor will be a point of contact for you while you get acquainted with the Center and your job area. As was observed by the evaluator, the mentoring system works well when and IF the mentor is appropriately knowledgeable about their job duties. Otherwise, bad habits are being demonstrated to new volunteers and a self-perpetuating system of poorly trained and functioning volunteers continues.

Volunteer Dress Code
Page 8 of the Volunteer Guide addresses volunteer "Appearance", when representing the shelter, Volunteers "must wear a volunteer t-shirt and your name tag." This further explains appearance and dress expectations and even PPE.

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Volunteer Orientation and Training

Volunteers receive a training consisting of four parts:

1. Large dog training
2. Small dog training
3. Cat training
4. Small animal training

Animal behavior training and animal handling is an area of concern for the volunteer program.

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ANAYLSIS AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

According to the 2018 Volunteering in America report, about 77 million people, with an estimated worth of $25.43 per hour each, volunteer across the United States. Having volunteers' complete tasks or work on projects saves thousands of dollars in labor costs for an organization. In the animal sheltering industry, volunteers are a critical component of any operation, and more so important to an organization such as Austin Animal Center that has a high standard of a 95% live release rate. This is because achieving and maintaining a no kill status relies upon volunteers to assist with lifesaving programs such as fostering, TNR (trap-neuter-return), transport programs, and various other programs like neonatal nurseries.

Volunteers provide support and service to AAC by offering their time, skills and expertise. They are critical to AAC's ability to fulfill its mission as well as to maintain a no kill status. While the volunteer program is a good asset to AAC it does present problems for the organization. As mentioned in Part IV, some volunteers, along with how volunteers are managed, are creating divisions with AAC staff and causing unnecessary drama and conflict. The volunteer program requires significant attention in order to make it an asset and not a liability to operations.

In addition, the volunteer program would greatly benefit from a "hands on" animal handling course. During the four-day on-site evaluation, the evaluator observed several different volunteers have difficulty handling a medium or large sized dog. In one instance, a volunteer dog walker had just started to take a dog for a walk when a squirrel ran past and up a tree. The dog reacted by wanting to chase the dog and nearly dragged the volunteer to the ground as she struggled with being able to control the dog's excitement and power. Another volunteer struggled to maintain control of a highly stimulated, high-energy dog. In both instances, the dog could have injured the volunteer dog handler.

In addition to an animal handling course, instruction on reading and recognizing dog and cat behavior can help volunteers recognize situations and animals that are challenging and respond accordingly. Development of an animal handling course along with instruction on recognizing dog and cat behaviors will go a long way to helping volunteers perform their duties and reduce the number of possible injuries to volunteers and of course the animals they are handling.

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The volunteer program appears to be trying to be all things to all people by having 80 different volunteer opportunities. Management of some 80-different opportunities is a management nightmare and excessive. The program would greatly benefit by consolidating volunteer opportunities into less categories. We recommend having opportunities as follows: dogs, cats, small animals, exotic animals, veterinary-medical, adoption/customer service, transportation and foster.

The volunteer program, and the volunteers, would benefit by having some type of formalized evaluation after a set period, such as after 30-days, and perhaps every six-months.

Also, the current mentoring program is only effective **IF** volunteers are thoroughly and consistently trained. Unfortunately, the evaluator observed a huge discrepancy in the knowledge and ability of volunteers. Overall, the evaluator does not believe the mentoring program is working to the benefit of AAC. It appears to be a liability for the organization and unless it is corrected, there is concern that it is only a matter of time until a volunteer injures him/herself and/or an animal.

Lastly, the Volunteer Guide should be amended to include Safety Data Sheets (SDS). An SDS is a detailed informational document prepared by the manufacturer or importer of a hazardous chemical. It describes the physical and chemical properties of the product. SDSs contain useful information such as toxicity, flash point, procedures for spills and leaks, storage guidelines, and exposure control. Employers are required by law to provide workers with access to SDS. However, the evaluator had conversations with several different volunteers while at AAC, and most every volunteer did not know what a Safety Data Sheet was, let alone its importance or where to locate them in the shelter. (Please reference Texas Health and Safety Code 502.006 – Safety Data Sheet).

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NOTE

During the on-site evaluation, the Chief of Animal Services shared his concern that he has been the subject of a tremendous amount of outside pressure and criticism, including personal threats of harm. The Chief even read several email threats (he received) to the evaluator. The chief was advised that personal threats of harm are serious and should be reported to City officials as well as the police, which the chief had not done. Copies of these threats were requested to verify their authenticity.

However, despite repeated requests over a one-month period, the Chief was unable or unwilling to provide any documentation of these threats. Furthermore, the Chief wanted to circumvent normal means of communication with the evaluator to prevent the public from performing a public information request. The evaluator maintained that communication was to be kept aboveboard.

When a final request was made to see such documentation, the chief advised he had been advised by his attorney not to make any comment because the matter was turned over to police, who later turned over this matter to the U.S. Postal Inspector, which is currently "an active investigation".

The evaluator has concerns with information discrepancy in this matter. There are several inconsistencies with details communicated to the evaluator by the chief and his executive assistant.

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