

Proposed Changes Related to the Austin Animal Services Office

City of Austin Council Work Session
January 30, 2024

Austin Animal Center Key Priorities



- Quality of Care:
 - The quality of care for animals in the shelter is impacted by overpopulation.
- Open Intake:
 - Ability to take in all pets that owners surrender, all strays, all loose dangerous dogs posing danger on the streets, etc.
- Live Outcome Mandate:
 - The current mandated live outcome rate is 95%. The AAC has exceeded 90% since Fiscal Year 2011, and has exceeded 95% since Fiscal Year 2016.
 - I want to make clear the City of Austin is ALL IN on no kill, staff is NOT recommending the City change it's 95% live outcome ratio.

Historical Overview

- COA has had its own municipal animal shelter since the early 1990s.
- The Austin Animal Center (AAC) was formerly located at what was known as the Town Lake Animal Center (TLAC).
- Through the 2006 Bond election, voters approved a measure to fund a new animal shelter.
- **After** the plans for the new AAC's configuration were completed, COA voted to become a "no-kill" municipality for its animal center.

Historical Overview

- Since construction on the new facility began before Council voted to become a “no-kill” shelter, no-kill friendly construction plans were not considered in the shelter design –
 - AAC currently lacks a sufficient medical area
 - AAC houses small dogs in cat areas to maximize space for med/large dogs
 - AAC lacks adequate medical recovery kennels for medium to large dogs
 - The current facility was designed with LESS kennel space than the old facility had, while the population of Austin has greatly increased.

AAC Key Priorities Review

Open Intake Review

Intake versus Outcomes at AAC

Intake by fiscal year (cats and dogs)	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
	17,747	16,842	16,648	15,846	18,428	11,018	10,327	11,992	10,707	129,555
All Outcomes by fiscal year (cats and dogs)	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
	17,560	16,798	16,611	15,835	18,087	11,279	10,214	12,064	10,389	128,837
Difference of outcomes - intakes	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
	-187	-44	-37	-11	-341	261	-113	72	-318	-718

AAC Open Intake Misconceptions

- *AAC intake is closed and will not serve the community*
 - Intake has been *restricted* for type of animal where it has no space (med to large dogs)
 - As of January 4, 123 medium to large dogs have been at AAC for over 60 days, with 76 having been here over 100 days.
 - Intake is open for types of animal where there is space (small dogs, cats, exotics)
 - Intake is restricted to emergency situations and sick and injured animals, cases of cruelty and those that pose a risk to the community.
 - For FY23, AAC impounded an average of 30 animals a day (15 each for dogs and cats), even with restricted intake
 - For FY 23, AAC had an average of 29 animals a day that would exit AAC (14 for dogs & 15 for cats)

Responsive Changes - Operations

- The AAC has instituted quite a few changes in the operations of the shelter since the Auditors came in the Spring/Summer of 2023
- Significantly increased the number of volunteers at the Shelter, also significantly increased the number of fosters, each over 50% increases
- AAC worked with Building Services on facility concerns
- AAC is in the process of hiring a full time IT person (approved in most recent budget)
- RFP process underway for new case management system

Proposed Solutions/Recommendations

The proposed changes on the following slides require amending Title 3 of City Code.

Staff's proposed changes intend to ultimately facilitate a smoother process for animals going in and out of AAC.

City is all in on "No Kill" - Staff IS NOT recommending changing the 95% live outcome ratio mandate.

Public Safety Issues

- Public Safety Issue: Unfortunately, AAC has experienced several instances where a dog with a known significant bite history has caused severe injury to members of the public after the dog was released from the AAC.
- Many of these dogs stay at AAC for an extended time and become progressively more aggressive as time goes on, also shelter stress causes some previously unaggressive dogs to become aggressive.
- Current ordinances require City to make most of these dogs available for the public.
 - This leads to a safety risk for the public.

Placement of Dogs with Bite History 2019-2023(Q2)

Fiscal Year	Animal Outcome	Bite History Category	
		Moderate	Severe
2019	Adopted	47	12
	Transferred	26	3
2020	Adopted	51	7
	Transferred	17	1
2021	Adopted	65	4
	Transferred	27	0
2022	Adopted	54	10
	Transferred	20	6
2023, Quarters 1 and 2	Adopted	102	22
	Transferred	3	2
Five-Year Totals		412	67

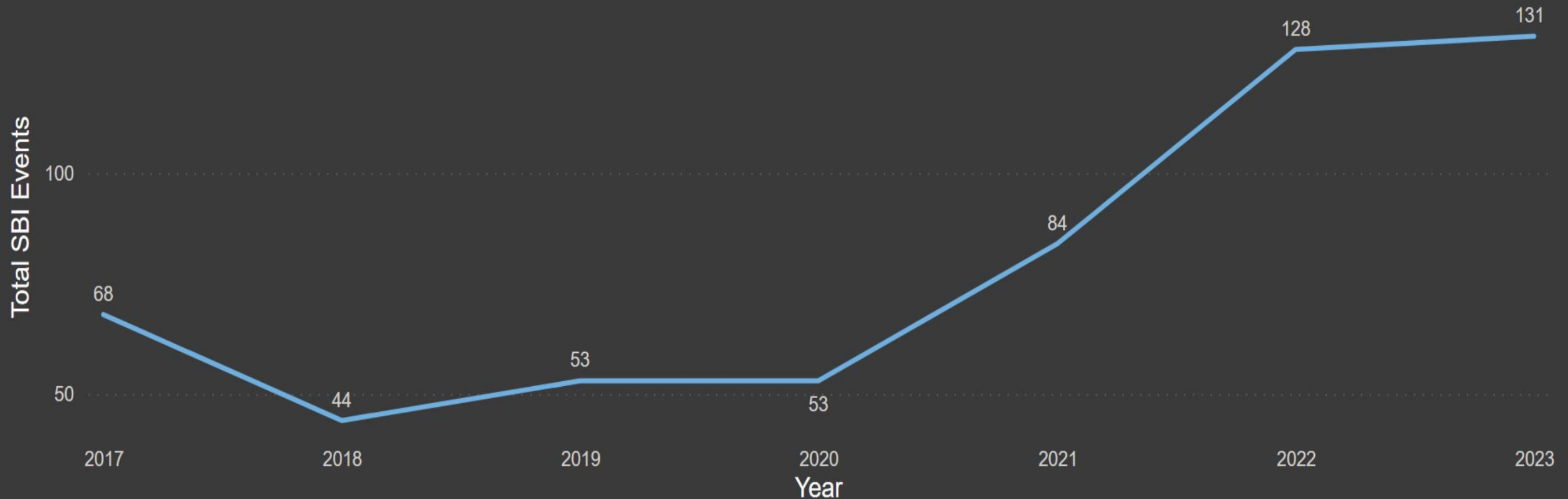
Source: Auditor analysis, May 2023

561

Total SBI Events

Severe Bite Event is a singular occurrence of an animal biting a person with the resulting injury meeting the expectations of a Severe Dog Bite as outlined by Texas Health and Safety Code 822. This differs from the number of investigations because some cases involve multiple dogs or victims, and we count each as an individual event.

Total SBI Events by Year



Recommendation: Classifying Severity of Bites

- Currently, the Code (and staff) use the term “Severe” to define one type of bite, and the staff additionally use “Minor” and “Moderate” to classify the severity of other bites.
- There is a more comprehensive, nationally accepted classification system called the “Dunbar Bite Scale” which has 6 levels of classification depending on various factors, with level 6 being the most severe (bite that causes death).
- Recommendation: Adopt the nationally recognized 6 level Dunbar bite scale to replace the current 3 level coding.

Recommendation: Public Safety

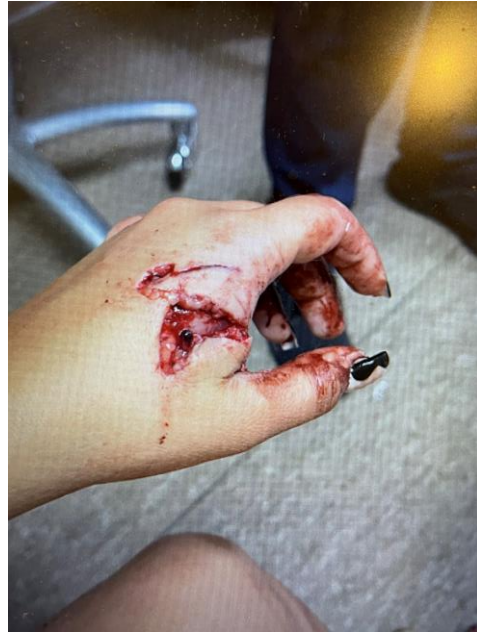
- This only applies to Dogs that are the property of the City of Austin, not dogs that are owned by our residents.
- Recommendation: Dogs that have a bite history of level 4 or higher on the Dunbar bite scale may be euthanized without making them available to the public / rescue organization.
- This recommendation is borne from a public safety perspective, namely the number of known bite dogs that have caused the public severe injuries after having been released from the AAC.
- Staff at the Center will examine on a case-by-case basis to determine next steps.

CONTENT WARNING

The next slide will contain photos of injuries from
Dog bites

Levels of Dunbar Bites

Level 4 and above



Level 3



What would NOT change?

- Staff will still provide a report detailing all euthanasias at the AAC and the rationale behind each. Staff will also make available all data we can publicly release that relate to what factors led to a dog's bite classification.
- Current process stays in place for bite dogs that are level 3 or less
- Finally, as a reminder, these changes apply only to dogs that are the property of the City Shelter.

Recommendation: Code Clean Up

- Currently the Code says the live outcome ratio is based on “all animals” at the AAC.
- However, there are some animals (ex: bats, coyotes) that are unlawful to allow the public to adopt.
- Recommendation: Clarify that the live outcome ratio applies to dogs, cats and exotics.

Recommendation: Code Clean Up

- Currently the Code states that the “impoundment” period is only triggered when the stray animal is in the AAC.
- Strays are held for 72 hours before we can let someone adopt them.
- However, we have some wonderful fosters in the community that willingly hold the stray from the day they are found.
- Currently, the time the animal spends at the foster finder’s home does not count towards the “impoundment” period.
- Recommendation: Expand the term “impoundment” to include animals that are fostered by a finder.

FYI: Quality of Care and Compliance

- Compliance Issue: AAC is currently utilizing kennels, cages and pop-up crates to house animals.
 - The Texas Administrative Code sets out the standards for primary enclosures, and pop-up crates do not comply with the requirement that a dog be able to turn and stand freely without touching the sides of the enclosure.
 - When the State has performed its Audits on the AAC, we are consistently told we are in violation of the law regarding primary enclosures.
 - The Audit points out that crates are not ideal even for 1 dog, and we have many instances of multiple dogs in the same crate.
- Staff will be complying with the Texas Administrative Code.

Next Steps

- There are many factors that caused us to be in the position we are in, and as such, there is not 1 single solution to this.
- The recommendations we made today are one piece of the solution.
- The operational changes we have made and will continue to make will be another piece.
- Possible Additional Locations

Questions