



City of Denton

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AGENDA INFORMATION SHEET

DEPARTMENT: Animal Services

ACM: Frank Dixon, Assistant City Manager

DATE: January 7, 2025

SUBJECT

Receive a report, hold a discussion, and give staff direction regarding recent department reviews, facility and operational enhancements, procedure updates, and current and future department initiatives for Animal Services.

BACKGROUND

Denton Animal Services promotes and protects the health, safety, and welfare of both animals and people in the community through compassionate care, education, and enforcement. Department functions are divided into two areas, field services and shelter operations.

This report provides a summary overview of recent audits, reviews, and initiatives undertaken by Animal Services to enhance operational efficiency, improve service delivery, ensure animal welfare, and positive outcomes.

Summary of Previous Reviews

In 2018, a review conducted by Animal Shelter Services, LLC. highlighted several areas needing improvement, including the absence of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and best practices, improper cleaning and sanitation practices, and the need for volunteer program development. The review also pointed out issues related to contracted veterinary services, department management, staffing levels, and capacity for care.

The 2023 City Auditor's Canine Care Practices Investigation identified a lack of staff training, inadequate documentation, and insufficient health monitoring as critical areas of concern.

The September 2024 review conducted by Shelter Savvy recognized strengths such as an open adoption policy, dedicated staff, and a strong foster program. Identified as areas in need of improvement were internal communications, staffing, and behavioral management of animals.

An additional review was conducted in November and December of 2024 by an industry expert consultant. Key findings and recommendations from this review included the need to enhance Pathway Planning, address shelter function gaps with SOPs and clear roles, analyze euthanasia cases and long-stay animals for early intervention opportunities and behavioral support, and set clear goals for fostering including developing performance metrics.

The findings of the 2024 City Auditor's Operational Review emphasized similar areas needing attention, enhance and strengthen SOPs and documentation processes, establish additional formal processes to align with current practices, address staffing needs.

Operational Enhancements, Recent Improvements and Response to Findings

DAS has made significant progress in identifying and addressing critical aspects and areas of animal welfare and care including SOP development and implementation, staff training and development, and records and documentation enhancement. Completed, ongoing, and future efforts are outlined below.

SOP development and implementation, prioritizing those needed in critical animal care areas including Feeding, Weight Management, Intake Exams, and Animal Housing Area Cleaning were all developed and then implemented during staff training on February 21, 2024. Staff continues to develop and review department SOPs to establish written procedures for all standard department processes. To ensure SOPs are reviewed and updated regularly, an SOP has been developed which establishes the regular review of existing department SOPs.

Staff training has been enhanced with dedicated in-house sessions covering the developed SOPs and additional topics such as disease control and mitigation, medication administration, animal handling, and CPR for pets. Alongside inhouse trainings, staff has participated in external learning opportunities and conferences including the Bringing Home Excellence Program through Best Friends, SPARK through City of Denton Human Resources, and Advanced Animal Control Officer certification and Local Rabies Control Authority certification through TACTICAL. Management continues to seek out way to develop staff and progress the department.

In September 2024, the department implemented the use of a formal euthanasia decision making process. Previously, the department had no formal structured process or mechanism for making end of life decisions as noted in the 2024 Shelter Savvy review. In developing the current tool, staff reviewed a number of best practices and policies from a variety of sources, sought feedback on the proposed process from industry experts and the Animal Services Advisory Committee. The aim of the formal decision-making tool is to ensure limited, consistent, and humane practices are in place. The tool is currently being used by the department and will undergo formal review by the City's Policy Review Committee and Legal Department before being presented to Council for adoption.

The need for better documentation of animal care and wellness identified by the 2018 review and 2023 audit have been addressed by the implementation of the Daily Health and Wellness Monitoring System. This fully digital barcode and record system ensure a high level, proactive approach to animal care by tracking daily animal food and water intake, enrichment, cleaning, health and behavior observations, early identification of concerns, streamlined communication between staff regarding animal care, and promotion of positive outcomes. Through use of the system, the department has also been able to more easily track length of stay and the mental and physical wellbeing of each animal in its care and has used these metrics to create an Urgent

Placement List. This list, which has been made available to partners, shares information and pictures of animals who for various reasons, are declining in the shelter and are priority for placement either through rescue, foster, transfer, or adoption.

Limited staffing including the need for a behaviorist were identified and addressed through the budget process. In September 2024, Council approved the FY25 budget which included two additional Animal Care Technicians positions (2FTEs) and a Behavior, Enrichment, and Placement Coordinator (1FTE). Addition of the new positions will ensure DAS is operating within its capacity for care and providing a high level of care to all housed animals. Additionally, reclassification of one Lead Customer Service Representative to three part-time roles is currently underway to better meet service demands.

Program improvements in the area of Community Outreach have also been made through targeted vaccination and microchip clinics and educational opportunities. In May and October 2024, the department partnered with, Denton Animal Support Foundation, Our Daily Bread, Serve Denton, and Giving Grace to offer a free vaccination and microchip clinic targeting unhoused pets and their owners. Following the adoption of mandatory microchipping, the department offered free microchipping to the public on June 29 and August 24, 2024. The department has also participated in a number of school career days and provided tours and information sessions to a number of scout groups, community groups, and school classes including UNT's Career Wise Program.

To improve transparency with the public the department, along with Strategic Services, launched the Animal Services' Performance Scorecard on the City's Strategic Plan Dashboard in April 2024. This public facing dashboard shares metric like response to community calls, live release rate, and facilitated placement.

In May of 2024, the department launched a new volunteer management software along with a new training and orientation program for volunteers. According to the 2018 review, volunteers were provided very little training and direction, no communication, and little to no oversight. The new improvements provide updated information and formalized training on the proper handling of animals, on-demand learning materials that can be accessed at any time by volunteers, real-time communication with staff, easier shift scheduling, and an expedited sign-up process. Since June 2024, volunteers have provided 2,000 hours of work to the department.

In an effort to address the health and welfare of long stay animals, the department has developed an Urgent Placements dashboard which has been shared with its partners including Denton Animal Support Foundation. This dashboard provides information, photos, and descriptions of each animal to assist in their promotion and placement. DAS plans to make this dashboard available on its website to help bolster the foster program and facilitate quicker placements. In December, the department piloted a Home for the Holidays foster program to temporarily place animals in foster homes over the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Twenty (20) animals were fostered with nine (9) resulting in permanent adoptions.

In advance of the upcoming renovation and expansion, management has collaborated with Facilities to prioritize immediate needs identified by staff and stakeholders. To bolster security and enhance control over sensitive shelter areas, traditional physical keys are being replaced with

advanced badge readers, providing improved access management and tracking capabilities. Additionally, management is investing in new dog runs for the North yard, which will facilitate easier cleaning and allow for expanded programming while awaiting the full renovation. These runs are designed to be easily movable, allowing for their relocation and utilization during the renovation to support continued operations during construction. Moreover, lighting has been prioritized in the North yard to ensure that employees can work safely and efficiently at all hours.

While substantial progress has been made over the last year to improve department operations, DAS acknowledges much work remains to be done. The management responses to the 2024 Shelter Savvy (**Exhibit 3**) and 2024 City Auditor's Office Report (**Exhibit 4**) outline actions and deadlines for meeting review recommendations which the department is currently working towards completing.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

PRIOR ACTION/REVIEW (Council, Boards, Commissions)

N/A

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1-Agenda Information Sheet

Exhibit 2-Presentation

Exhibit 3-2024 Shelter Savvy Management Response

Exhibit 4-2024 City Auditor's Office Report Management Response

Respectfully submitted:
Nikki Sassenus, Animal Services Director