

Policy Number and Title:	507.03 Responsible Euthanasia Policy
Policy Section and Chapter:	Animal Services - Euthanasia
Policy Owner & Contact:	Animal Services Director
Policy or Directive:	Policy
Last Revision Date:	06/17/2025

POLICY PURPOSE STATEMENT

Denton Animal Services (DAS) is responsible for providing public safety in relation to animals in the community as a whole, while also addressing the welfare of animals in its care at the Linda McNatt Animal Care and Control Center.

It is the policy of the City that it will maximize resources to prevent, reduce, and treat physical, behavioral, or physiological problems of animals in its care. Recognizing, however, that sometimes euthanasia of the animal is the humane course of action for them or for other animals in the City's care.

DAS has established euthanasia criteria to ensure an animal's life is not ended except on the grounds of health, behavior, public health and safety, or unavoidable inhumane death once other practical options have been exhausted.

Euthanasia decisions will be applied consistently and provide the best service to the community and animals in the City's care.

POLICY

I. Limiting Euthanasia

- A. No stray animal will be euthanized prior to expiration of its stray-hold period unless deemed necessary by the Review and Assessment process outlined in this policy.
- B. No stray animal will be euthanized on a day that the shelter is not open to the public unless deemed necessary under the Review and Assessment process outlined in this policy.
- C. Animal Services will not euthanize animals who do not meet the criteria set out by this policy.
- D. No animal shall be euthanized solely because the Shelter is at capacity.
- E. Euthanasia will be done in accordance with Texas Administrative Code, Subchapter D, Standards for Allowable Methods of Euthanasia for Animals in the Custody of an Animal Shelter.
- F. The Animal Services Director (or their designee) shall approve all animal euthanasia recommendations.

- G. Any animal that has been approved for euthanasia through the Review and Assessment process outlined in this policy, shall be euthanized within 48 hours of approval to prevent prolonged or unnecessary suffering.

II. Euthanasia Categories and Criteria

Euthanasia decisions will be considered based on the following categories: Medical, Behavioral, Legal, Owner Requests, Wildlife, Prohibited Animals, and Neonates and Unweaned Animals. Each category will have a set of criteria for when a euthanasia decision should be made.

A. Medical

1. Animal Medical Professionals will outline the care necessary to treat medical conditions causing suffering or presenting a danger to other animals or people. In cases where care requirements exceed the ability of the shelter or its partners to provide, such as:
 - a. An animal that is suffering from an acute or chronic disease, illness, condition, or pain that cannot be alleviated to a satisfactory degree, given the practical and financial resources available, or
 - b. An animal that poses a health risk to other animals or people.

B. Behavioral

1. Behavioral information will be gathered through surrender forms and detailed observations from staff and volunteers in various settings (e.g., playgroups, vet exams, walks, foster care). Animal Services will, to the extent possible, attempt to remediate behavioral issues or concerns to allow for safe adoption or placement of the animal through training, treatment, medication, and other resources. In cases where behavior modification is not possible, such as an animal with a behavioral problem that results in suffering, risk to itself, other animals, people, or the environment that cannot be mitigated.

C. Legal

1. A final order by a court of legal authority to euthanize an animal.
2. An animal that must be euthanized pursuant to Chapter 6-Animals of the Code of Ordinances City of Denton, Texas, Texas Health and Safety Code, or Texas Penal Code.

D. Owner Requested Euthanasia

1. Animals who are surrendered for euthanasia will be subject to the Review and Assessment Process in accordance with this policy.

E. Wildlife

1. Wildlife suffering from an injury that cannot be alleviated to a satisfactory degree.
2. Wildlife or high-risk rabies vectors who are at higher risk to transmit the virus to other animals or people. These include bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes.
3. Neonates or unweaned wildlife without a mother who cannot be provided appropriate care given the practical resources available.

F. Prohibited Animal

1. An animal that is considered unlawful to possess within the City limits as defined by Chapter 6, Sec. 6-2.- Definitions, of the Code of Ordinances City of Denton, Texas. and cannot be placed in a timely manner with a rescue or other animal welfare entity.

G. Neonate or Unweaned Animals

1. Neonates or unweaned (unable to eat on its own) animals without a mother who cannot be given appropriate care.

III. Review Team

- A. The Review Team will thoroughly evaluate all information related to the animal before making a euthanasia decision. This team brings diverse perspectives and expertise, considers the animal's history, and explores all available options to ensure the best possible outcome.
- B. The Review Team will consist of the following:
 1. Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DMV)
 2. Member of Shelter Management
 3. Shelter staff member who has a history of working with the animal (when applicable)
 4. Animal Services Officer who has a history of working with the animal (when applicable)
 5. Shelter Behaviorist

IV. Review and Assessment Process

- A. The purpose of the Review and Assessment Process is to systematically evaluate and analyze all information pertaining to a particular animal to inform and facilitate the best possible outcome decision.
- B. When staff become concerned about the welfare of an animal and the shelter's ability to provide adequate care, the Review Team will meet to discuss the best course of action for the animal.
- C. The Review Team will physically view the animal, pull the animal's profile report, discuss the notes and experience working with the animal, work through the Welfare Assessment Tool, and note all steps that have been taken to provide for the best welfare of the animal.
- D. The Review Team will submit all documentation, including the completed assessment, to the Animal Services Director (or their designee) for review.
- E. The Animal Services Director (or their designee) will review all case notes and the findings of the Review Team for form and consistency before authorizing the euthanasia of the animal.
- F. Court ordered or legally required euthanasia do not require a Review and Assessment Process.

V. Emergency Euthanasia

- A. If convening the Review Team to conduct a Review and Assessment is not feasible due to a case of extreme need, the Animal Services Director or their designee may authorize an Emergency Euthanasia. Any Emergency Euthanasia will be reviewed by the Review Team for consistency with this policy and their findings will be documented in the shelter management system.

VI. The Emotional Impact of Euthanasia

- A. While certain staff are responsible for performing euthanasia, from time to time, employees may ask to be excused from performing the euthanasia of individual animals they may have worked with closely. City employees have access to an Employee Assistance Program that can provide help when coping with euthanasia.
- B. Any statements, opinions and questions about euthanasia decisions or performance that are made on City property or equipment or during the working hours of either the person speaking or the individuals who performed the euthanasia, must be made to a supervisor or manager of the individuals who performed the euthanasia, or to the Animal Services Director, and only members of the chain of command for the individuals who performed the euthanasia. Comments, statements, or questions should not be directed to those individuals that performed the euthanasia.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

I. Review Team (consisting of the DVM, Shelter Staff Member, Management Team Member, Shelter Behaviorist, and Animal Service Officer)

- a. Responsible for conducting timely and thorough meetings to review and discuss the best course of action for each animal reviewed.
- b. Responsible for ensuring the discussion consists of physically viewing the animal, review of the animal's records in the shelter management software, use of the Assessment Tool, and recording their findings.

II. Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM)

- a. Responsible for providing a medical opinion of what would be required to appropriately treat or appropriately provide for the animal's medical well-being.

III. Shelter Management Team Member

- a. Responsible for recording all notes and completing documents for the Review Team and submitting findings to the Animal Services Director.

IV. Animal Services Director (or their designee in their absence)

- a. Responsible for reviewing all recommendations for euthanasia to ensure all steps of the review and assessment process have been followed and documents have been entered into the shelter management software.
- b. Responsible for entering the final euthanasia approval in the shelter management software.

DEFINITIONS

- A. Humane Euthanasia- Ensuring the euthanasia process is as free from pain, fear, anxiety, and distress as possible. Requires proper technique and expertise, drugs, delivery methods, handling plans, and environmental conditions and conducted in accordance with Texas Administrative Code, Subchapter D, Standards for Allowable Methods of Euthanasia for Animals in the Custody of an Animal Shelter.
- B. Positive Outcomes- disposition of the animal in the best interest of the welfare for the animal with respect to the animal's individual needs and available resources.
- C. Neonates- refers to baby animals from birth to about 12 weeks of age in dogs and 8 weeks of age in cats who are unweaned or still dependent upon their mother for care.
- D. Review and Assessment Process – Refer to Policy, Section IV- **Review and Assessment Process of this policy**
- E. Satisfactory Degree- A satisfactory degree of pain relief in animals is achieved when pain management strategies effectively reduce discomfort, improve behavioral outcomes, and enhance the overall quality of life. It is a dynamic measure that requires ongoing assessment.
- F. Shelter Management – refers to the Animal Services Shelter Manager or Animal Services Supervisor for the purposes of this policy.
- G. Owner Surrender
- H. Welfare Assessment Tool
- I. Animal Services Director Designee- A member of Shelter Management (Shelter Manager or Animal Services Supervisor) for purposes of this Policy

REFERENCES

- Texas Administrative Code, Subchapter D, Standards for Allowable Methods of Euthanasia for Animals in the Custody of an Animal Shelter.
- Welfare Assessment Tool-Flow chart used by Review Team during the Review and Assessment Process to facilitate outcome discussion in a consistent and exhaustive manner.
- Euthanasia Decision Making- Review Team Assessment Form
- American Veterinary Medical Association, *Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals*: 2020 Edition
- *Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*: Second Edition- December 2022
- The Humane Society of the United States, *Euthanasia Reference Manual*: Second Edition- 2013
- Best Friends Animal Society
- Shelter Savvy LLC
- International Companion Animal Management Coalition, *The Welfare Basis for Euthanasia of Dogs and Cats and Policy Development*
- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, *Holistic Quality of Life Assessment*

REVISION HISTORY

Revision Date	Policy Owner	Summary
06/17/2025	N. Sassenus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initial Policy Adoption• Establish humane animal euthanasia decision making standards for animal services.