

**Health & Human Services / Animal Services**  
**Response to Shelter Assessment and Recommendations**  
**by Brent Toellner, Best Friends Animal Society, June 2017**

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Prioritization by HHS/AS	Recommendation	Response / Steps
<p><b>1 - Transparency</b></p>	<p><b>Fort Bend County Animal Services should be transparent with its shelter intake and outcome reports.</b> In the absence of transparent data, it is human nature to assume the worst and that the shelter is “hiding something.” By posting its data at least quarterly, Fort Bend County Animal Services would be able to overcome many of the misperceptions of what may be happening at the shelter, which will help garner more public support. It is recommended that Fort Bend County Animal Services post its quarterly data on a designated page on its website and via social media in an Asilomar (or similar) format. When publishing the data, it is always best practice to interpret the data for readers. When publishing the data, highlight areas that have seen improvement and things staff is proud to have accomplished such as “we increased adoptions by 23% vs the year prior”. But also feel comfortable highlighting areas that still need to be improved and tell the public how they can help be a part of your success (eg: “Our live release rate for cats is up to 80%, but there is more work to be done and we could really use more fosters for our young kittens”).</p>	<p>Agreed - Decision made to use the <i>No More Homeless Pets</i> data report structure (used by Best Friends) and move the monthly reporting to an animal-based rather than fee-based report</p> <p>Meeting and discussions held with IT data personnel</p> <p>Aim for January 2018 data report to be in new format and on the website</p>
<p><b>2 - Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) / Shelter-Neuter-Release (SNR)</b></p>	<p><b>Change the law to exempt “ear tipped cats” from the county’s leash law.</b> Current county law requires cats to be on leash. However, many cats currently live in the community without true owners. These cats are usually fed and cared for by members of the community - -but are not social enough to be indoor cats. The current “solution” is that the cats are brought into the shelter, and, lacking the ability to release the cats into the community, the cats are euthanized. In 2016, 540 of the 874 (62%) of the animals euthanized at the shelter were community cats that were otherwise healthy animals, but killed due to lack of options for releasing them back into the community.</p> <p>Best practice is to allow for TNR, which is the trapping of community cats, neutering them, vaccinating them, providing and ear tip (so they can be identified as having been helped) and then releasing them back to where they came from – or into an existing managed colony. Changing the law to exempt these vaccinated &amp; neutered ear-tipped cats from the county’s leash law is strongly recommended.</p> <p>The county would not necessarily, at least right away, have to adopt a full scale TNR program. If the practice is legal, a not-for-profit may emerge that can help facilitate TNR practices. However, it will allow for the successful placement of community cats that are currently being killed at the shelter to be released back into the community as healthy, vaccinated cats.</p> <p>It is important to note that given the current data, it will be impossible for the Fort Bend County Animal Shelter to reach a 90% save rate without implementing a program to allow community cats that enter the shelter to be released back into the community.</p> <p>Best Friends has amazing resources for helping communities create laws that provide protections for Community Cats in communities.</p> <p><a href="https://bestfriends.org/resources/community-cat-programs-handbook-stray-and-feral-cats-resource">https://bestfriends.org/resources/community-cat-programs-handbook-stray-and-feral-cats-resource</a></p>	<p>Agreed in concept</p> <p>Steps that would need to be taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Work with County and City elected officials to change leash laws to exempt "ear-tipped" cats"</li> <li>•Animal Services receives trapped cats from citizens who do not want cats released back into their neighborhoods - an education program targeted at HOAs and neighborhoods is needed</li> <li>•Determine where unofficial TNR/Community Cat programs are operating</li> <li>•Start with pilot, high-impact areas and engage local champions to begin TNR / SNR activities</li> <li>•Keep data on calls / turn-ins before and after targeted activities</li> </ul>

<p><b>3 - "Friends of.." Group</b></p>	<p><b>Develop a functional and sustainable "Friends of" group.</b> The Animal Services budget is currently approximately \$1.3 million and covers both shelter and field services. While it is often a challenge for government shelters to fundraise, a "Friends of" group, established as a 501c3 not-for-profit, would have more abilities to solicit donations and in-kind donations for needed programs and support for the shelter. The County should maintain some structure with the not-for-profit by establishing a board structure that must include the Animal Services Director and one (or more) Commissioners or Commissioner-appointed positions on the board, in addition to community leaders who wish to serve in this capacity. This structure would ensure that the organization always stays on mission to support Fort Bend County Animal Services.</p> <p>Harris County has a similar "Friends of County Pets" that could be used as a model for the establishment of a Friends of group for Fort Bend County.</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>County Judge and Commissioner interested in establishing a fundraising support group for the shelter</p> <p>Meetings held with the library to gain their expertise and insight and with Commissioner Pct 1</p> <p>Next steps to research similar organizations and select the best features to move forward</p>
<p><b>4 - Communication with Shelter Volunteers</b></p>	<p><b>Communication with Volunteers.</b> One area that staff identified as a need was to get more and better communication between staff and volunteers. One option that has worked well for many shelters has been the use of a closed volunteer Facebook group to help in communication. Volunteers would have to ask to be a part of the group, and would only be accepted by the page manager (who would be employed by the shelter) and only would be approved if they were a known volunteer or upon completion of the volunteer orientation. The purpose of the group would be to share out time-sensitive opportunities for help, ways to be involved at the shelter, and as a forum to otherwise share information with volunteers and supporters. A group like this allows a forum for the sharing of information, and clearing up questions or misinformation that may exist. It also can provide an opportunity for more senior volunteers to provide answers to questions that otherwise would have to be answered by staff – which frees up staff time for other activities.</p> <p>This page would be in addition to regular emails to volunteers – because not every volunteer will be on Facebook. But it would enhance the volunteer engagement for those on the page.</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Researching possibilities. One local shelter uses a system that might work. Will be looking at a demonstration</p> <p>Group would be limited to those who actually volunteer at the shelter or assist in other tangible ways.</p> <p>Current and future volunteers will need to attend a revised orientation and policy and procedure sign off.</p>

<p><b>5 - Infection Control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Puppies</li> <li>- Cleaning</li> </ul>	<p><b>Create safer housing for puppies.</b> At the time of the visit, most puppies are being kept in the large kennels in the main canine area of the shelter. Due to the construct of this area, these areas can create a challenge for housing puppies. Puppies are very susceptible to disease, particularly parvo, and special care and attention should be made to ensure that puppies are living in the most sterile environment possible. Given the concrete nature of the kennels, and that as “walk in” kennels staff may unknowingly track in viruses on their shoes or boots. Additionally, as kennels are cleaned, water sometimes seeps under guillotine doors from one kennel into the kennel behind it. Because all of these factors, puppies at Fort Bend County Animal Services are at a high risk for contracting diseases such as parvo.</p> <p>It is recommended that puppies under four months be housed in stainless steel kennels (that can be properly sanitized) in an area separate from the main kennel area. Currently, the most viable space appears to be the small room behind the adoption counselor’s area.</p> <p>By keeping the puppies off the floor, the shelter can be better assured that the puppies are being kept free from disease so they can be adopted quickly from the shelter.</p> <p>The Fort Bend Animal Shelter staff should work closely with their veterinary team to ensure that puppies are kept in the most sterile environments possible and fast-tracked out of the shelter either through adoption or transfer.</p> <p><b>Properly dry kennels during morning cleaning process.</b> Due to the high volume of animals at the shelter at the time of the visit, most kennels were “doubled down” with dogs on each side of the guillotines. The morning cleaning process involved removing dogs from row one of the kennel, washing row one, then moving the dogs from row two into the row one kennels. Then, row two is cleaned, and the dogs from row one were moved into row two. This method of cleaning is fine – and doesn’t need to be changed. This process is efficient, and has a practical value in moving indoor dogs to outdoors and vice versa each day. However, it does open the shelter up for potential disease cross-contamination because dogs are changing kennels daily. It is really important that the shelter staff remain diligent in maintaining proper contact time for cleaners and cleaning protocols to ensure proper sanitization. It is also a reason for increase concern for leaving puppies in this main kennel area (see point #2)</p> <p>The one area of concern is that kennels didn’t appear to be properly dried before dogs were moved into clean kennels. Many dogs were witnessed in kennels that were still very wet, sometimes even with small pools of water on the floor. Most bacterial pathogens prefer a moist environment, so the combination of the wet kennel, and Houston’s humid environment, create a substantial risk of pathogens residing in the kennels. Ensuring that kennels are properly dried before dogs are moved into the kennels can help keep dogs healthy for adoption.</p> <p>See more at the UC Davis Shelter Sanitation: <a href="http://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/resources/sanitation-in-animal-shelters#Drying">http://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/resources/sanitation-in-animal-shelters#Drying</a></p>	<p>Agree with the need for improved infection prevention for puppies</p> <p>Mr. Toellner has provided suggestions for off-ground cages - some would work for puppies only and one might work for litters with mothers</p> <p>Will consider budgeting / fundraising / donation options for these kennels</p> <p>Agree in concept with the cleaning suggestion.</p> <p>Not clear why this was a particular issue at the time of the assessment - perhaps higher humidity</p> <p>Shelter purchased new squeegees to assist with removing excess water from the runs during the cleaning process</p> <p>Shelter staff reviewing UC Davis information</p>
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<p><b>6 - Intake Process and Fees</b></p>	<p><b>Convert to a managed intake process.</b> In 2016, Fort Bend Animal Services took in 1,419 animals from the public, including 1,022 public stray drop-offs, 166 owner surrenders, and 106 returned adoptions. Staff noted that being “on-demand” for intakes was disruptive to their day as they often had to drop other projects in order to handle intakes. Scheduling appointments, or narrowing the hours in which surrenders are accepted, can help staff manage their time and still ensure animals are successful vaccinated on intake. Requiring appointments for owner-surrendered pets and public stray drop-offs when staff is expecting them also allows for more personal conversations with surrendering owners so that more pets can be helped kept in the home or diverted through other means (such as providing the owner or finder of the pet resources that would enable them to feel comfortable rehoming the pet themselves). Managing intake also allows the shelter to better manage the flow of pets coming into the shelter, which can better enable staff to plan for potential positive outcomes for incoming pets. Read more about the Oregon Humane Society’s managed intake process. Also attached (or at the link) is information regarding the Austin Pets Alive PASS Program that helps pets bypass the shelter and either stay in their home or be rehomed directly by their owner.</p> <p><b>Charge same fees for owner surrendered and public drop-offs.</b> Fort Bend County Animal Services currently charges \$50 for Owner Turn-Ins, and has <b>free</b> Citizen Turn-ins of stray pets. Based on this, it is not surprising that the shelter has 615% more “citizen” turn-ins (1022) than “owner” turn-ins (166). Often, when shelters have such a vast difference in fees between the two services, citizens will misrepresent their relationship with the pets and they will tell shelter staff they “found” the animal when they really own it. This provides a disservice to the shelter in several ways. First, it diverts fees the shelter could be collecting and second, causes the shelter to have to hold an animal on stray hold for longer than necessary because the animal was really owned and not stray. It is recommended to make these amounts similar and charge \$30 for both citizen turn-ins and owner turn-ins. It should have a cap of \$60 on surrenders of litters of puppies or kittens. This will increase revenue for the shelter, decrease the length of stay for surrendered pets, and also create a more honest dialogue between the public and the shelter staff. Shelter staff should retain the right to waive these fees if they fear the pet may be at risk or the \$30 fee would provide a financial hardship for the surrendering individual.</p>	<p>Agree with managed intake suggestion</p> <p>After determination of the best hours for intake, shelter will work with volunteers to engage assistance during selected hours for intake of OTI/CTI animals. They will also collect specific information on the animals and, where possible, offer alternatives to shelter surrender</p> <p>Agree with concept of equal fees for OTI/CTI turn-ins. The suggested fee is \$35 for either situation.</p> <p>With agreement of Commissioners Court, fee schedule will be altered to reflect this change in Spring 2018</p> <p>Information will be recorded regarding responses from citizens, and comparisons of numbers before and after the fee change will be analyzed</p>
<p><b>7 - Foster Program</b></p>	<p><b>Building out foster program.</b> While Fort Bend County Animal Services already has a foster program, staff agreed that there was opportunity to increase the size and capabilities of the foster program. Foster programs can be an amazing way to increase shelter capacity and to provide capacity for animals that might otherwise take longer before they are ready for adoption. Foster programs can be extremely beneficial for dogs that need a little more socialization before being adoptable, and for younger puppies and kittens that are not quite ready for adoption, but would be most at risk of disease in the shelter. At the link is a webinar produced by Maddie’s Fund that can help with ideas for building out the foster program:  <a href="http://www.maddiesfund.org/secrets-to-pet-foster-program-success.htm">http://www.maddiesfund.org/secrets-to-pet-foster-program-success.htm</a></p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Shelter staff will actively encourage community members to foster through our partner organization SOCA-FBC</p> <p>Shelter staff and SOCA-FBC leadership will review the information provided by Maddie’s Fund</p>

<b>8 - Sunday Opening</b>	<p><b>Fort Bend County Animal Services should be open to the public on Sundays for adoption.</b> The shelter takes in animals 365 days per year, and should maximize the opportunities to adopt out pets. Being open for adoptions during adopter-friendly hours is an important part of finding homes for the pets in the shelter's care. Sundays tend to be very strong adoption days at most shelters because it is a day when most potential adopters are off work and can visit the shelter with their families. Staffing on Sundays can also be offset by the fact that more volunteers are able to volunteer at the shelter on Sundays because they, too, are off work. Similar to the success of being open on Independence Day, being open on Sundays can capitalize on the shelter being open when it's most convenient for adopters to adopt.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shelter management and HHS management will evaluate the potential of Sunday opening hours. This evaluation will take place in February 2018.</li><li>• The shelter staff are stretched thin now with often 2-4 adoption events in various locations on Saturdays. Each staff member that works these weekend events is given time off during the week, which would impact cleaning and care of the animals.</li><li>• A stronger, consistent volunteer base for adoption events and weekend hours could assist with this possibility.</li></ul>
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<p><b>9 - Behavioral / Enrichment Options</b></p>	<p><b>Implement a canine behavior and enrichment program.</b> Currently, 88% of the dogs that enter the Fort Bend County Animal Shelter achieve a positive outcome. This is an admirable accomplishment. Based on the feedback from shelter staff and volunteers, the dogs at the shelter that are most at risk are those that exhibit behavioral challenges that are not really aggressive, but are not ideal. Shelters provide a particularly challenging environment for assessing behavioral needs of dogs as dogs often act differently in the shelter than they would outside of it. However, a well-designed canine behavior program can help shelter staff to work with basic behavioral challenges, as well as better assess dogs that exhibit particular behaviors so they can feel confident in the placement of these dogs into the community.</p> <p>It is recommended that Fort Bend County Animal Services investigate options for implementing a canine behavior and enrichment program that may include the use of daily playgroups and the use of a volunteer-based Canine Good Citizenship program for dogs with extra needs. It is noted that shelter staff says they do have a playgroup program, but it does not appear that playgroups happen daily as they did not take place on days during the evaluation. The best way to do this would be to do a short “internship” at Austin Pets Alive in Austin TX – where they regularly train organizations such as Fort Bend County Animal Services to implement these types of programs at their shelter.</p> <p>Grants and/or scholarships may be available to help fund the travel for this training for staff or key volunteers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Shelter staff is looking to include some enrichment activities with animals at the shelter to include indestructible toys and simple socialization training, such as the sit command.</li> <li>•At this time the addition of a long term aggressive behavior rehabilitation program at the shelter is not feasible. Animals that need this additional attention and time would need to be housed in foster homes or boarded elsewhere due to overcrowding at the shelter</li> <li>•Shelter management will discuss with volunteers and rescue organizations whether there are programs available elsewhere for animals needing this kind of rehabilitation</li> <li>•Shelter staff will take advantage of the internship opportunities at Austin Pets Alive! and Maddie's Fund as soon as possible</li> </ul>
<p><b>10 - Public Microchipping / Vaccination Program</b></p>	<p><b>Develop a public microchipping and vaccination program.</b> Last year, 16% of dogs entering the shelter were successfully returned to their owners. However, of the 345 dogs returned to their owners last year, only four were returned because they were wearing a ID tag or microchip. If the shelter is not actively checking for tags and microchips it should begin doing so immediately. If the practice is already in place, it is recommended that the Fort Bend County Animal Services begin a low cost vaccination and microchipping program.</p> <p>Low cost vaccination &amp; microchipping programs should be set up, on weekends, in areas with the highest numbers of intakes.</p> <p>By providing a low-cost service, Animal Services can also microchip pets so they can be more quickly identified at the shelter and returned home more quickly. This saves the shelter from having to care for the pets for an extended amount of time and ensures a quick, positive outcome which saves the shelter time and money. Grants are generally available for low cost vaccination and microchipping clinics like this to help defray up-front costs.</p>	<p>At this time, the shelter is not able to run a public facing vaccination and microchipping program. There are other entities running programs either in mobile or fixed venues in the community and the shelter will attempt to make this information available via social media to those in the community who may need to take advantage of the programs</p> <p>All animals entering the shelter are scanned for microchips</p>