



Washington County
Auditor's Office

Audit of Bonnie L Hays Animal Shelter: Second Follow Up Report

Final Report
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Follow Up Report: Audit of Bonnie L Hays Animal Shelter

Background and Summary

Animal Services is a division of Washington County's Health and Human Services Department (HHS). Animal Service operates the Bonnie L. Hays Animal Shelter, constructed in the mid-1990s. In 2018 Animal Service sheltered about 2,100 dogs and cats. The shelter also returned about 950 lost pets to their owners.

In July 2019, the Washington County Auditor released report "Audit of the Bonnie L Hays Animal Shelter," together with the response of the County Administrator and the Director of HHS. The Auditor made nine recommendations for action to improve compliance with industry standards for animal care.

Management generally agreed with the audit findings and agreed to implement most of the audit recommendations by March 2020. We scheduled this follow-up review to determine the extent to which management had implemented those nine audit recommendations.

We found that management adopted policies, procedures, protocols and a strategic plan to address seven recommendations. However, we were unable to confirm that they had been implemented. We consider implementation of those seven recommendations, and the recommendation to maintain adequate staffing as audit recommendations are implemented, to be In Process. The County did not implement one of the nine recommendations. We will conduct further follow-up after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Overview of the 2019 Audit

Audit Objectives

The Auditor's Office initiated the Animal Shelter Audit to provide management a detailed analysis of the shelter's capacity to provide the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) minimum level of acceptable care for dogs and cats in shelter.

Findings

Over the past decade, management and staff of the Bonnie L. Hays Animal Shelter have significantly improved the quality of care for animals in shelter. The demand for housing at

the animal shelter has been on the decline since 2012. The shelter has adequate space to shelter 26 cats and 48 dogs. Staff capacity for daily care and staff capacity for flow-through are more than adequate.

However, limitations of the facility and certain shelter practices prevent the shelter from providing what the ASV considers the minimum level of acceptable care. To achieve what the ASV considers a minimum level of acceptable care, additional improvements are necessary. While management action can address many of the issues identified, addressing other deficiencies may require remodel or replacement of the facility.

Recommendations

To achieve that minimum level of acceptable care, we recommended:

1. The shelter should adopt written policies and protocols that define maximum housing capacity based on the number of animals who can be adequately housed within available primary enclosures and ensure the number of animals housed does not exceed that capacity.
2. The shelter should install transfer doors in kennels used to house dogs restricted to kennel, so that staff can confine the dog to one side of the kennel while cleaning the other side.
3. The shelter should securely enclose its outdoor exercise yard and provide dogs held longer than two weeks with daily opportunities for aerobic exercise.
4. The shelter should provide dogs housed longer than two weeks with places to hide within their kennels and opportunities to play in the secured outdoor space.
5. The shelter should provide all cats with places to hide.
6. The shelter should develop a robust foster care program to better balance admissions and outcomes and control cat populations within housing capacity.
7. Animal Services should put processes in place to transfer any cat admitted to shelter more than two weeks earlier to foster care or to a facility equipped to provide appropriate long-term care. If it needs to hold animals long-term, the County should either remodel or replace the shelter to provide alternatives to traditional cage housing.

8. The County should include the animal shelter in its facilities master planning process to address deficiencies that may require capital investment to remodel or replace the existing shelter. To achieve ASV minimum level of acceptable care, remodel or replacement should provide appropriate housing for each animal, before and after surgery.
9. Animal Services management should ensure that shelter staffing remains adequate to provide higher levels of care as it implements the audit recommendations.

Status of Audit Recommendations

The County fully implemented seven the nine recommendations and partially implemented one recommendation. It did not implement one recommendation, and one remains in process.

1. The shelter should adopt written policies and protocols that define maximum housing capacity based on the number of animals who can be adequately housed within available primary enclosures and ensure the number of animals housed does not exceed that capacity.
Final Status - Fully Implemented. In March 2020, Animal Services adopted Policy & Procedure (P&P) #131 Maximum Housing Capacity, defining the maximum housing capacity of the shelter to be 26 cats and 48 dogs and establishing a procedure for maintaining populations within those capacities using transfers to other facilities, intake limitations, cat fostering and other options. We confirmed in a site visit on November 29 that the number of animals housed in the shelter is well below its maximum capacity.
2. The shelter should install transfer doors in kennels used to house dogs restricted to kennel, so that staff can confine the dog to one side of the kennel while cleaning the other side.
Final Status - Not Implemented. Animal Services asserts that retrofitting existing kennels to accommodate transfer doors is not feasible, and either a new facility or redesign and reconstruction of the existing facility will be required to implement this recommendation. There is currently no specific plan or target date for replacement or redesign of the animal shelter.
3. The shelter should securely enclose its outdoor exercise yard and provide dogs held longer than two weeks with daily opportunities for aerobic exercise.
Final Status - Fully Implemented. -In our 2019 audit, we found that the shelter was not using its large outdoor exercise yard because it was not secure. That yard

has not been secured and is still not used for aerobic exercise. However a smaller secure exercise yard is being used, and we confirmed that dogs held longer than two weeks are provided with daily aerobic exercise.

4. The shelter should provide dogs housed longer than two weeks with places to hide within their kennels and opportunities to play in the secured outdoor space.

Final Status – Fully Implemented. Animal Services adopted P&P #133 and #134 Providing Hiding Space for Dogs. Those policies require that dogs held longer than two weeks be provided with a hiding space within their kennel and with daily outdoor play time. We confirmed during our site visit that dogs are provided with hiding places, unless they prefer not to hide, and with daily outdoor playtime.

5. The shelter should provide all cats with places to hide.

Final Status – Fully Implemented. Shortly after release of the original audit report, the shelter revised its protocol for cat cage setup to provide a place for the animal to hide. We confirmed during our site visit that all cats are provided places to hide.

6. The shelter should develop a robust foster care program to better balance admissions and outcomes and control cat populations within housing capacity.

Final Status – Fully Implemented. In March 2020 Animal Services adopted P&P #131 defining the cat capacity of the shelter as 26 adult cats, and during the Covid-19 pandemic, the shelter stopped accepting healthy stray cats. The shelter has resumed accepting healthy stray cats on an appointment only basis. The shelter has not established a foster care program, but controls the cat population within its housing capacity by limiting admissions of healthy stray cats and promptly transferring cats to other facilities better suited to providing long-term care, foster placement and adoption.

7. Animal Services should put processes in place to transfer any cat admitted to shelter more than two weeks earlier to foster care or to a facility equipped to provide appropriate long-term care. If it needs to hold animals long-term, the County should either remodel or replace the shelter to provide alternatives to traditional cage housing.

Final Status – Fully Implemented. Animal Services adopted P&P #132 Transfer of Cats, which provides that under normal operating conditions cats will not be in the shelter longer than 2 weeks. When a cat reaches 10 days in the shelter, staff will issue an Urgent Transfer Request to members of the Animal Shelter Alliance and Foster Requests to approved foster volunteers. We confirmed during our follow-up

site visit that this policy is being followed. Cats are rarely held longer than 2 weeks, transfer requests are processed timely, and cats are transferred to facilities equipped to provide appropriate long-term care.

8. The County should include the animal shelter in its facilities master planning process to address deficiencies that may require capital investment to remodel or replace the existing shelter. To achieve ASV minimum level of acceptable care, remodel or replacement should provide appropriate housing for each animal, before and after surgery.

Final Status – Partially Implemented. In September 2019 the Facilities Manager and the Real Property Manager presented to the Board a Strategic Facilities Master Planning project that would result in adoption by the Board of a Facilities Master Plan in March of 2021. However, the Facilities Manager acknowledged that the strategic plan has not yet been implemented. Due to uncertainties arising from the Covid-19 epidemic, Facilities was unable to provide a revised date for the development of a Facilities Master Plan.

9. Animal Services management should ensure that shelter staffing remains adequate to provide higher levels of care as it implements the audit recommendations.

Current Status – Fully Implemented. As a result of management of shelter populations within shelter capacity, additional staff has not been needed.

About this Review

In April 2020 we initiated a follow-up review to determine whether management had implemented the nine recommendations from our July 2019 Audit of the Bonnie L Hays Animal Shelter. We asked the Animal Services Manager to describe any actions taken to implement the Auditor's recommendations, and to provide documentation that would support the actions taken. We reviewed the response to our request, reviewed the documentation submitted, and collected additional information as necessary to provide sufficient, appropriate evidence to conclude whether each recommendation was fully implemented.

We concluded that a recommendation was Not Implemented if we found that management had taken no action to implement the recommendation and had no specific plan to implement the recommendation. We concluded that a recommendation was In Process when management had not completed planned implementation or when we were unable to verify that policies and protocols adopted by management during our review had actually been implemented. We concluded that a recommendation was Fully Implemented when

management had completed the recommended actions or has adequately addressed the issues identified by alternative means.