

# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Matt Cano

**SUBJECT:** SEE BELOW

**DATE:** August 30, 2022

Approved



Date

08/30/22

## INFORMATION

### **SUBJECT: ANIMAL CARE AND SERVICES UPDATE**

The purpose of this informational memorandum is to provide an update on how the City has been managing the service level and staffing challenges at the Animal Care Center. As noted in Manager's Budget Addendum #5 issued in May 2022<sup>1</sup>, the Animal Care and Services (ACS) Division within the Department of Public Works encountered an extraordinary level of staffing turnover from late 2021 through the first half of 2022.

This staffing turnover led to significant challenges in being able to meet the service levels that the Animal Care Center was expected to meet over the last several months, especially combined with the nationwide increase in animals needing shelter as COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. This has been an extremely challenging year for our City staff, the community, volunteers, and rescue partners. Staff, volunteers, and partners should be commended for going above and beyond in their jobs and for deeply caring for the animals, despite the extreme pressures that they have been challenged with daily.

## BACKGROUND

The ACS Division is part of the City's Department of Public Works. The primary objective of ACS is to provide a welcoming and humane place for animals and those who care for them; to protect, educate, and serve the public; develop programs that improve the lives of people and animals; and create opportunities for our community and supporters to succeed. ACS cares deeply about their employees, animals, partners, and the community. The ACS Division provides animal care and services to approximately 1.2 million residents in Santa Clara County.

ACS is responsible for sheltering, licensing, rabies compliance, and providing field service and programs to domestic animals. ACS provides services to residents in San José, Cupertino, Milpitas, Saratoga and the Town of Los Gatos.

Shelter operations includes adoptions, animal enrichment, animal feeding, owner surrender, spay and neuter surgeries, cage and kennel cleaning, and animal euthanasia (medical and behavioral). Animal population fluctuates from month to month, which is consistent with animal shelters elsewhere. March and October are transitional months, while April through September are high volume due to seasonal litters of kittens. The months of November through February are generally the lowest volume months in an animal shelter. In Fiscal Year 2020-2021, animal intake was at 13,619, less than the high of 19,000 in Fiscal Year 2016-2017. For Fiscal Year 2021-2022, the ACS animal intake was 15,532.

Medical operations staff includes full- and part-time Veterinarian and Animal Health Technician positions. The medical team provides medical care, treatment, health management, and emergency care. Medical staff will also conduct advance procedures such as X-rays, blood analysis, dental procedures/extractions, major surgery, orthopedic procedures, and forensic analysis for criminal investigations. The medical unit also conducts spay and neuter surgeries for shelter animals, owned pets, and stray cats.

Field Services responds to the following types of calls: aggressive animals, injured, sick, and stray domestic animals, dead animal pick up, noise complaints, vicious or dangerous animal regulation, pet shop inspections, injured or sick wildlife, and animal crimes investigations. In Fiscal Year 2021-2022, staff completed over 20,000 calls for service.

## **ANALYSIS**

Currently, there are approximately 430 animals on-site at the shelter. At one point in June 2022, the number of animals in ACS' care was over 650. Ideally, in order to properly function, the shelter would maintain an animal volume of less than 300 animals. The reason for the increase in animals was a result of a combination of factors including the regular increase that is always experienced during the Spring due to "kitten season," where more kittens are being born and brought to the shelter. In typical years, kitten season is difficult but manageable. However, a few significant factors caused a backlog in shelter services. Due to lack of sufficient medical resources, the shelter has been unable to perform trap/neuter/return (TNR) surgeries. When TNR surgeries are not being performed at normal levels, more kittens are born in the community, which leads to more kittens coming into the shelter. Additionally, since the shelter has not been able to perform as many spay/neuter surgeries on-site as is necessary, it has been difficult to move animals through the system for adoption causing a backlog of animals at the shelter. This backlog of animals and incoming animals created strained resources and challenges with providing adequate care to the animals in the shelter.

Over the past several months, a significant number of resources have been allocated in order to begin to get service levels back to where they should be. Key successes include:

- Two new senior management positions, an Assistant Director with a focus on shelter operations and a Medical Director, were approved by the Mayor and City Council as part of the annual budget process. Both of the positions have been filled. The new Assistant Director started in late June and the Medical Director begins this week.
- Three existing senior management positions that had been vacant were also filled: Administration Manager, Public Relations Manager and Field Captain.
- Six contractual custodial staff have been added to the shelter to provide cleaning of the kennels.
- The Department of Public Works shifted a Maintenance Repair Worker to work full-time at the Animal Shelter to efficiently process and implement facility repair requests and prioritize all Animal Shelter work orders.
- Overall, through extraordinary efforts from the hiring team, nearly 50 new full and/or part-time staff have started work at ACS within the past six months.
- With the support of the Mayor and City Council, pay increases have been approved for Animal Care Attendants, Animal Health Technicians and Veterinarians.
- Early this year, the City applied for a capacity of care review by Maddie's Million Pet Challenge (<https://maddiesmillionpetchallenge.org/>) ("Maddie's") Maddie's is the leading national non-profit animal welfare organization. In July, a large robust team from Maddie's Fund visited the shelter for on-site inspections, conversations, and interviews. A written report of their finding is posted on the Animal Care & Services website.
- A workplan for implementation of the results of the Maddie's report is currently under development. However, certain recommendations such as vaccination of animals upon intake are already in the planning and implementation stages.
- Several medical partnerships have been developed with shelter partners such as the Humane Society of Silicon Valley, Foothill and Carrington Colleges Veterinarian programs, and non-profits such as Snip Bus and Whis-Purr Rescue. These medical partnerships have provided additional capacity for medical treatments and surgery for the animals.
- City staff has developed an internal tracking dashboard to provide real-time information on shelter capacity and statistics. Weekly strategic priorities are publicly shared on the Animal Services website. Staff will be reviewing statistics with a working group of rescue partners to determine additional key information that could be useful to be shared regularly with the public.

While the above resources have been extremely helpful, a significant and challenging amount of work remains over the next several months to ensure that the shelter is prepared for calendar year 2023. Key areas of focus moving forward are:

- **Medical Resources:** While the Medical Director position and the part-time Animal Health Technician (AHT) positions have been filled, two full-time Veterinarian positions and three of the four full-time AHT positions remain vacant. Staff is focused on these recruitments while simultaneously continuing to seek out outside medical partnerships to mitigate the impact of these vacant positions as much as possible.

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- **Successful outcomes for animals:** When the capacity to medically care for animals is limited and volumes are high, it is challenging to continue to achieve the desired successful outcomes for animals. The past six months in particular have been extremely challenging in this regard. Staff is working hard on adding additional resources and enhancing collaboration with rescue partners and other shelter partners to ensure that every animal has the best possible chance for a successful outcome.
- **Staff Training and Organization:** With the new positions on board, including many new managers, training and organization are the primary focus for the team over the next several months. The Department of Public Works, and the ACS Division, has adopted an “Objectives and Key Results” method of tracking progress and will be using this process to allow for tracking and progress on improvements. The team has also identified key managers who will be leading the training of new staff.
- **Rescue Partners:** While this has been a challenging year for staff, it has also been challenging for our rescue partners. The rescue partners provide a pathway for saving thousands of animals per year. Given the transition that the shelter staff has gone through as well as the extremely high animal volumes, the rescue partners have worked tirelessly to help, and their value cannot be understated. As ACS moves forward, the team is committed to strengthening relationships and communication with rescue partners.

Overall, the animal services industry nationwide is having extreme challenges this year with high animal volumes and low staffing. While we recognize that there are issues nationally, this has not deterred us from committing to “build back” at the Animal Care Center. Most importantly, our staff, volunteers, and rescue partners have all been working tirelessly to provide services to the community and care for our animals during this extremely challenging time. As ACS continues to address the staffing and operational challenges, ACS will continue to work with partners, volunteers and the community to maintain necessary services for the animals and provide for successful outcomes.

/s/

MATT CANO

Director of Public Works

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