



Hall County Animal Control Shelter and Field Re-Assessment

Best Friends Animal Society's team provides customized assessments and support for individual animal shelters and the communities they serve. Through the outreach program, each community can receive a shelter operations and/or field services assessment designed to identify specific opportunities to build road maps for programming and impactful lifesaving. Ongoing support is offered and available to ensure that new programs and practices are sustainable and successful. Our outreach team uses a collaborative approach to each shelter partnership and believes that every shelter should have the opportunity to determine its own organizational needs based on lifesaving impact in that community. As a rule, we avoid a "one size fits all" approach because, just like every individual animal, each shelter and its community has its own individual personality and needs.

On December 17-19 of 2018, members of the Best Friends shelter outreach team did a three-day assessment of shelter and field operations at Hall County Animal Control. Since then, Hall County Animal Control leadership has accepted the recommendations and embraced partnering with Best Friends to implement many of the recommended changes. On November 1-3 of 2022, Best Friends staff completed a re-assessment of shelter and field operations approximately 4 years after the original assessment was completed.

This report includes the original findings and recommendations for Hall County Animal Control by the shelter outreach team as well as the updates from the re-assessment. Areas where improvement was needed were highlighted, followed by Best Friends' original recommendations. **In red, we have added the current status of those recommendations and any additional recommendations to improve lifesaving based on the November 2022 re-assessment.** Recommendations are based upon proven and successful policies and programs, as well as studies, research and fact-based practices.

Defining the opportunity

Hall County Animal Control is strategically primed to achieve and sustain [no-kill](#) status, which means saving 90% or more of the animals they take in. Over the years, the shelter has strived to improve their public image and to reduce the euthanasia of animals; however, they still have the second highest number of non-live outcomes for animals in the state of Georgia. With the dedicated team of animal care professionals currently employed at the shelter, we have no doubt that Hall County Animal Control can achieve no-kill by following the recommendations in this assessment and working with Best Friends.

While many recommendations will be incorporated into this report, the population most at risk of dying in the shelter is weaned juvenile cats, followed by adult cats, so there will be a strong focus on programming to help address the needs of these segments of the population. Other top-priority identified needs are the implementation of a managed intake program to reduce the number of animals

entering the shelter, updated sanitation protocols and procedures to maintain a healthier population, and an increase in staff dedicated to the care of the animals in the shelter.

Hall County Animal Services has undergone many changes in the last four years, including changing their name and chain of command within the county. The implementation of many of these programs along with the lifesaving success they brought, was lead by shelter director Mike Ledford and Veterinarian Meghan Seabolt, who have each recently left the shelter. The shelter is at a time of transition with the hiring of a new veterinarian and shelter director.

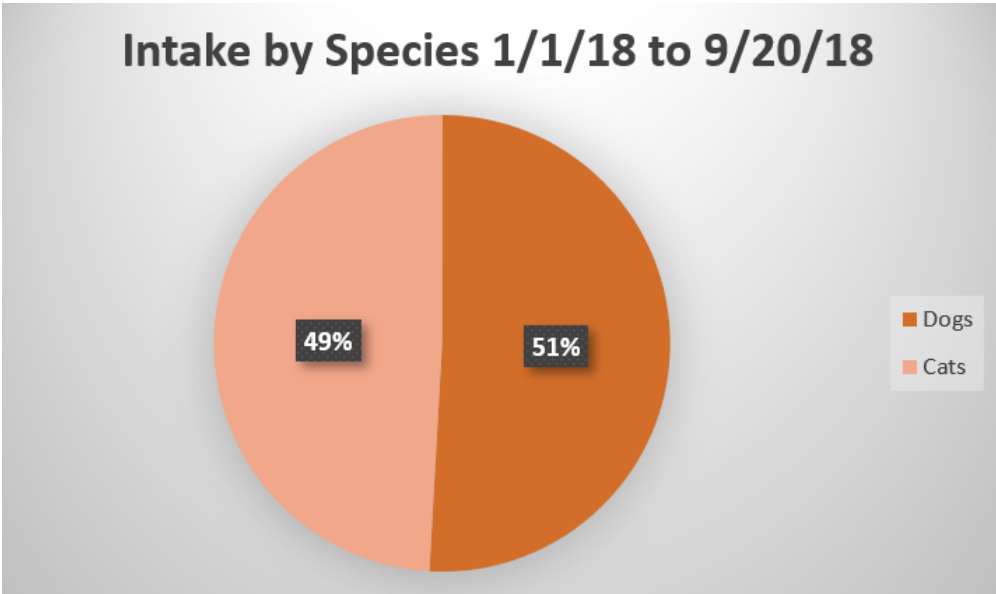
Demographic information

Hall County Animal Control serves a population of 199,335 covering 429 square miles. The county’s median household income is \$55,622 and approximately 13% of the population live under the poverty level. With an annual budget of \$1,419,000, Hall County spends \$7.12 per capita on animal services. This level of spending is comparable to other local counties of similar size, such as Augusta, which spends \$7.30 per capita. However, we do believe that incremental annual increases will allow the department to implement more progressive and effective programming to better serve the animal and human population of the county.

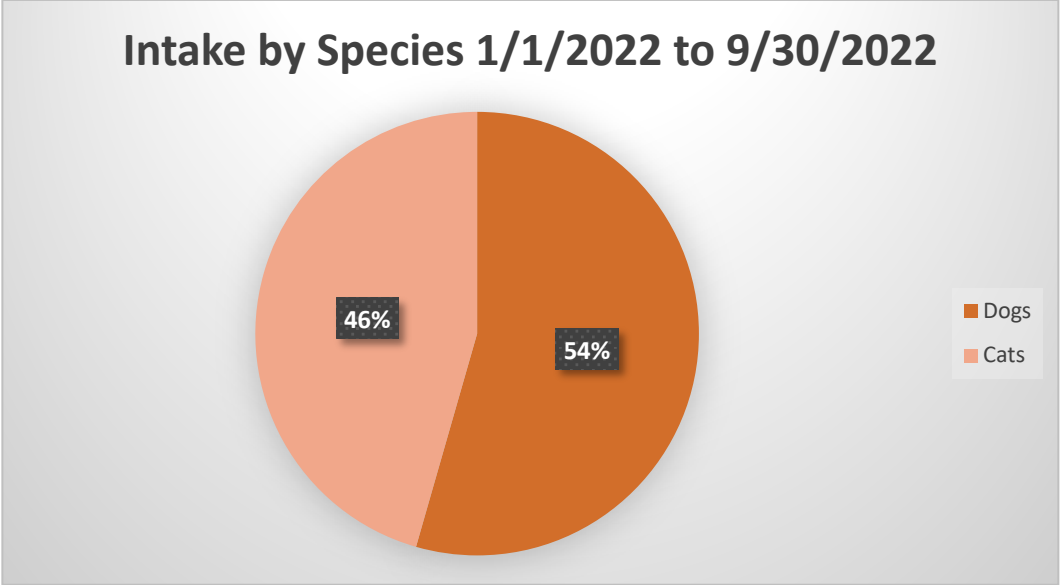
Hall County Animal Shelter is now serving a population of 207,369 with an annual budget of \$2,200,556. Hall County spends \$10.61 per capita on the Animal Shelter. This level of spending is between other local counties of similar size, such as Muscogee (\$12.59 per capita) and Paulding (\$5.45 per capita). Continued incremental annual increases will allow the shelter to sustain the lifesaving success they have seen the last four years.

Shelter data

From January 1 through September 20 of 2018, Hall County Animal Control took in 4,966 dogs and cats. Of those, 2,527 were dogs and 2,439 were cats.



From January 1 through September 30 of 2022, Hall County Animal Shelter took in 2,498 dogs and cats. Of those, 1,360 were dogs and 1,138 were cats. This is a 49.7% reduction in intake overall.



The overall 2018 save rate for that time frame (January 1 through September 20) for Hall County Animal Control was 60.7% for dogs and cats entering the shelter. The benchmark for no-kill is a 90% save rate, so this data shows a lifesaving gap of 1,453 dogs and cats who need to be saved in order to achieve that status. Broken down further by species, dogs have a 79.9% save rate, with a lifesaving gap of 255, and cats have a 40.9% save rate, with a lifesaving gap of 1,198.

The overall 2022 save rate for that time frame (January 1 through September 30) for Hall County Animal Shelter was 86% for dogs and cats entering the shelter. This data shows a lifesaving gap of 100 dogs and cats who need to be saved in order to achieve that status. Broken down further by species, dogs have a 82% save rate, with a lifesaving gap of 111, and cats have a 91% save rate, with no lifesaving gap. This is a reduction in overall gap of 93%.

The 90% benchmark for no-kill status is a national standard adopted to help determine which shelters need more lifesaving support and their capacity to save more animals. Each shelter Best Friends works with is encouraged to adopt lifesaving practices which will lead to a 90% save rate. The primary goal is the lifesaving policies and procedures, not the 90% save rate. As the landscape of animal sheltering changes after the COVID shutdowns, we are seeing more people re-home easily adoptable animals themselves. This, in combination with the extra effort staff is putting in to reunite animals in the field and keep owner surrenders out when possible, has changed the makeup of the shelter intakes to be more medically or behaviorally fragile animals. It is understandable, therefore, that the percentage of animals taken into the shelter warranting euthanasia would increase. We are seeing this at shelters nationally.

Hall County Animal Shelter’s 2022 intake is half of what it was in 2018, resulting in a higher percentage of animals warranting euthanasia. Best Friends’ recommendation is always to focus on lifesaving

practices first, with the understanding that this always leads to an increase in save rate. Focusing primarily on achieving a 90% save rate could result in holding on to animals who warrant euthanasia which we would never recommend. If all lifesaving policies are adopted and the save rate is below 90% even with no euthanasia for space, Hall County Animal Shelter will be considered for a no-kill exemption meaning Best Friends will designate them as no-kill on our website.

Accolades

Before diving into specific recommendations, it is only appropriate to highlight aspects of Hall County Animal Control, and their staff, for work that is going notably well and can serve as a model for other communities.

1. During our time at the shelter and in the field, we observed the staff to be compassionate, hard-working, dedicated and eager for new ideas and progressive practices.
2. Returning animals to their owners both in the field and from the shelter is a top priority for all staff, and we commend their ability and willingness to be flexible with fees and citations, as well as their efforts to go above and beyond to achieve this priority.
3. The shelter keeps great documentation of individual animals and the staff update records with appropriate information in a timely fashion.
4. The shelter veterinarian networks with other shelter veterinarians to stay abreast of new trends and practices, and has great ideas for improvement.
5. During the time of our visit, there were no open positions in the organization, which speaks to employee retention and good leadership. This is especially true of the field officers who are POST-certified and have the ability to transfer to a more lucrative and well-respected role in the sheriff's office.
6. Leadership is focused on the internal growth of individual employees and has a path for upward mobility, which has created a culture that promotes employee satisfaction and retention.
7. The portals in the cat adoption kennels are a good design, allowing the cats to perch and the separation of food, water and bedding from the litter box when used appropriately.
8. Leadership for the field services operations has years of experience and a clear vision of how to best serve the community's needs. The animal control officers have a progressive mindset, are proud to be officers and value their role in the community.

Accolades

In addition to the above accolades from 2018, which all remain true, the following are new additions:

1. Since 2018, The staff has embraced a culture of lifesaving. With the implementation of many of our recommendations, the save rate has skyrocketed. They go above and beyond to find a positive outcome for each animal and have good relationships with many local rescues.
2. The shelter is very organized and free of clutter.

3. The staff feels included in the decision-making process and free to bring up any concerns to management. They recently started length of stay meetings to go over long stay animals and pathway planning with the team.
4. The county recently purchased a transport van for the shelter to make getting animals out easier.
5. We were happy to see many of the same staff from our previous visit, several who had moved into new roles. There were several open positions but this was more due to adding needing roles than staff turnover. Staff expressed happiness of the new leadership.

Recommendations

During our visit, we met with most members of the leadership and supervisory teams and had the opportunity to shadow staff members throughout the organization. The following recommendations are some identified opportunities for improvement, as well as potential solutions to challenges identified by staff. An attempt has been made to prioritize these recommendations based on impact and ease of implementation.

1. **Cats:** A full-scale community cat program will drastically reduce the overall number of cats entering the shelter and the number of kittens being born in the community. This shelter-based program, based on the trap-neuter-return (TNR) method of population management, is effective at reducing the number of these cats, reducing shelter admissions and shelter deaths, saving taxpayers money and providing a public health benefit to the community. In such programs, unowned, free-roaming cats deemed healthy enough to qualify for the program are sterilized, vaccinated and returned to their original location.

Best Friends has a [comprehensive resource](#) to guide you through the process and our staff are standing ready to support with the implementation. Updates in the local ordinance may be needed for implementation of this program. Our legislative team is willing to assist with suggested edits that have been proven to create safer, more humane communities across the country.

The Community Cat program has been fully implemented and staff is working together to mitigate complaints in the field, and get free roaming, outdoor cats sterilized and vaccinated instead of impounded wherever possible. We have no recommendations on improving the program at this time.

1. **Housing and care:** “Capacity for care” refers to how many pets a shelter can house while still providing them with appropriate care, veterinary attention, adequate space, stress relief and caregiver attention, not simply how many cages and kennels a facility has. A well-run foster program can exponentially increase a shelter’s capacity and capacity for care, as animals can reside in homes rather than the shelter. Capacity for care goes beyond the simple aspect of physical space. It also largely depends on the level of enrichment activities and/or human interaction provided, as well as the ability to deliver and maintain health and sanitation standards, which form the overall quality of life.

Each of these aspects requires adequate workforce in the form of staff and volunteers. At Hall County Animal Control, the current reliance on inmate workforce does not ensure adequate workforce on a daily basis, as the number and skill level of inmates who report to this duty on a

daily basis vary greatly, often resulting in inadequate staffing levels. We recommend that Hall County Animal Control increase kennel staff levels so they are not reliant on the inmate workforce, or work with the jail to ensure that an adequate number of skilled inmates report to this duty daily.

In addition, the guillotines are currently down in all the dog kennels to double the number of dogs the shelter can house. While we commend the shelter for being creative to increase lifesaving, this is a short-term solution and we encourage the shelter to move toward not utilizing this practice long-term.

With the implementation of recommendations in other sections of this report, such as modifying daily sanitation, creating a robust volunteer program and increasing positive outcomes for animals through updated adoption practices, Hall County Animal Control can maximize capacity without compromising care and reduce euthanasia due to lack of space.

A critical factor in determining and maintaining capacity for care is maintaining and accessing population data. This includes being able to populate a daily census and determine length of stay for every subpopulation of animal (dogs, puppies, cats, kittens), as this information is needed to calculate adoption-driven capacity. Refer to chapter three of the ASV guidelines for more information on capacity for care.

During our visit, the topic of capacity for care came up a lot. Hall County Animal Shelter leadership is trying to preserve their lifesaving while maintaining quality care for animals in their building. The foster program is up and running but we recommend improving public calls to action around fostering. There are no recent foster pleas on social media but the website does have a clear call to action to sign up to foster.

The guillotines are still down between each dog and it doesn't look like the population will be low enough to change that anytime soon. Cleaning is accomplished by removing each dog while their kennel is cleaned. Engaging volunteers to run dogs out to the outdoor kennels could result in shorter, safer, and more effective cleaning if the staff is not cleaning kennels one at a time.

Although there were several months this year where euthanasia for space decisions weren't having to be made, that has changed in recent months with an increase in intake and decrease in rescue placements. Current leadership is struggling with how to make these very difficult decisions. We recommend establishing an SOP around space euthanasia decisions to clarify how and when these decisions are made. We would also recommend that once the list of euthanasia candidates is made, it be shared out to rescues and posted on the rescue only Facebook group at least 24 hours before any animals are euthanized. This gives rescues a chance to mobilize if they are able. We understand the fear that a post or email like this may be picked up and circulated, with the potential to reflect poorly on the shelter. These should never be exaggerated, but if the shelter is making euthanasia for space decisions, being transparent about them is only going to improve the community's trust in the shelter.

A common issue with making space euthanasia decisions is deciding on how much space is realistically needed to allow for new intakes. There are currently outdoor kennels that are empty. The vet doesn't want dogs to stay there long term due to weather, which is completely

understandable but these could be used as overflow for new intakes until kennels are opened up post euthanasia. Our recommendation would be to house new intakes in the outdoor kennels, weather permitting, until a more permanent space can be opened up in the kennels.

2. **Sanitation:** Current daily cleaning/sanitation protocols and procedures need to be updated to ensure proper sanitation of the animal areas, proper use of chemicals, knowing when to spot clean and when to do a full clean, reduction of stress for the animals, and proper training for those responsible for this vital task. This is not a negative reflection of the shelter supervisor or the staff. They simply do not have the bandwidth to do all that is necessary, considering the limited number of staff and the reliance on the inconsistent inmate workforce. In some cases, they do not have the appropriate tools for efficient sanitation.

For both dog and cat housing areas, we observed that those doing the cleaning of the cages and kennels believe they are doing a deep clean daily, with either a two-step process (Palmolive, then Rescue) or a three-step process (Rescue, then Palmolive, then once again with Rescue). In many instances, Rescue was not being given the appropriate amount of contact time to be effective. We observed the inmate workforce doing different variations of the above, in one instance pouring Palmolive directly on piles of dog poop in the kennels. We also observed the use of pump sprayers to spread Rescue and others pouring it directly from the gallon containers onto the kennel floors.

All of this results in a lot of time being spent cleaning ineffectively, overusing products, and creating stress for the animals. We recommend creating a standard operating procedure to identify when it is appropriate to spot clean and when a full clean is necessary, allowing the full contact time of Rescue for effective disinfection and discontinuing the use of Palmolive. Please refer to [this resource](#) to determine when it is appropriate to spot clean and when a full clean is necessary. The resource also gives specific concentrations of Rescue for each type of cleaning. By understanding when to spot clean and when to do a full clean, and the appropriate use and contact time of products, the organization can save money, shelter staff can save time, stress will be reduced for the animals and a healthier environment will be created for the animals.

In addition, [this resource](#) can be used to train those doing the cleaning in the appropriate ways to spot and deep clean both dog and cat housing. Utilizing the videos will help create consistency regardless of who is doing the cleaning. We also recommend purchasing hose end sprayers that can be set to automatically dilute chemicals to appropriate concentrations. Best Friends is willing to work with the shelter to help update SOPs and implement this recommendation.

Another recommendation is that anti-bacterial hand soap should be available at every sink throughout the shelter and hand-sanitizing stations should be strategically placed around the shelter. Signs should be placed with the sanitizing stations encouraging the public to use them in between handling different animals.

There does not appear to be a system for cleaning and storing carriers. We observed dog and cat carriers being used immediately after they were donated or switching from holding one animal to another without sanitation. It would be helpful to have an area where dirty kennels are collected prior to sanitation and an area where clean carriers are kept. Several families came to pick up cats from surgery without a carrier and were given one. We suggest advising families to bring a carrier and/or offering [cardboard carriers](#) for sale if a family does not have a way to get their new cat home.

Recommendations for the cat areas specifically:

- Some of the cat kennels have portals, which is ideal for humane housing of cats in a shelter environment. The portals allow those cleaning to block the cat on one side of the cage while cleaning the other side. They also allow for adequate separation of food and water from the litter box when used appropriately. While at the shelter, we observed cages with portals where the food, water and litter were placed on one side of the cage. We recommend always separating the litter box from the food and water in cages with portals.
- Not all cages have portals and we observed the moving of cats from one cage to another or putting them in a crate in order to remove the cat to clean the kennel. The cage or crate to which the cat was moved was not sanitized before the next cat was placed in it, which increases cross-contamination. We recommend putting portals in the cages in all cat areas and/or each cage having a [humane den](#) so that the cat can be safely secured while the cage is spot cleaned.
- We recommend prioritizing the use of all cages with portals, making sure that those are used before any other kennels when possible. Currently, they are being reserved for potential intake of larger litters, resulting in portal cages remaining vacant while other cats are in single cages.
- Deep cleaning should only occur when a cage is empty (the cat has been moved) or there is an extreme mess. If using humane dens, those must also be deep cleaned before use with a new cat.
- We recommend switching to the use of towels in place of newspaper. Towels do not need to be changed daily and can follow the animal from intake to adoption if it stays clean. Unlike newspaper, towels also provide a familiar scent and therefore a sense of security. This does make for more laundry, but the staff time saved by not deep cleaning every kennel every day will compensate for that.

The cat room was clean and fairly empty while we were there, portals were installed and being utilized whenever possible. Food and litter were separated, and most cats had cardboard dens. Newspaper is still being used in the cat cages but that seems to be working well. We would still recommend adding blankets or bedding but overall, the cats seemed very happy and healthy.

Recommendations for the dog areas specifically:

- Currently, with the guillotines being down in all the dog kennels and, in most cases, dogs being housed on both sides of the kennel, cleaning the kennels requires one individual to hold the dog (or stay close and monitor while the dog is tethered to the wall) while the other cleans the kennel. This is an inefficient

use of time and leads to cross-contamination, as the area where the dog is held is not sanitized between dogs, and the individuals holding the dogs are not changing gloves between each dog.

- For more efficient cleaning, we recommend utilizing the two sets of 20 outdoor kennels to temporarily house dogs. A system can be set up to ensure that only one room of dogs is using a set of outdoor kennels at a time, and that they are sanitized between dogs. Using the same two individuals currently doing the cleaning, one can begin running dogs out to those kennels while the other sanitizes. This will allow for adequate contact time of the disinfectant, more efficient use of time, and the opportunity for the dogs to get a brief leash walk and time outside in the fresh air.
- We recommend, when possible, that dogs not be housed on either side of the guillotine. When cleaning is not occurring, dogs should have access to both sides of the kennel; during cleaning, they can be blocked on one side while the other side is cleaned. We did observe instances, such as in the quarantine room, where dogs were not housed on both sides of the guillotine, yet the guillotine always remained closed, blocking the dog's access to the other side. When given the choice, most dogs will urinate and defecate on one side of the kennel and sleep, eat and drink on the other. Allowing them access to do so reduces potential for disease and reduces stress, both of which can result in reduced length of stay.

We continue to recommend the outdoor dog runs be utilized for safer and more effective cleaning. Engaging trusted volunteers to run the dogs out in the mornings could allow the staff and inmates to focus on the cleaning.

Accel foot baths are being used in front of the quarantine dog room doors, these are outdated and have been proven to be ineffective. If there is a concern of cross contamination, we recommend booties between rooms.

We were told that there have been instances of dogs having chemical burns due to being on the floor after cleaning. If Accel is being diluted properly it should not cause this, kennel staff should routinely check nozzles. Some dogs have recently gotten raised to help but proper dilution and having the floor dry after cleaning would help the dogs skin.

3. **Medical:** The shelter has a dedicated veterinarian who is committed to the health and well-being of the individual animals in the shelter and the population as a whole. Because sanitation is a large contributor to the overall health and well-being of the shelter population, implementing the sanitation recommendations above will assist in reducing the number of animals on medications, which will free up medical staff time to address other crucial needs, such as spay/neuter. A few other observations and recommendations:

- Currently, animals enter Hall County Animal Control and wait 24-48 hours for medical intake. We recommend vaccinating each animal on intake. Administering core

vaccinations to all animals at intake is a critical practice in minimizing infectious disease and preventing widespread outbreaks. Vaccines are the best defense we have against some of the most serious (and sometimes deadly) contagious diseases that are of concern to animal shelters.

- For cats, this means administration of the FVRCP vaccination, which provides protection against panleukopenia and the two upper respiratory viruses, herpes and calici, at the time of intake.
- For dogs, this means giving both the DA2PP vaccination, which provides protection against distemper and parvo as well as adenovirus and parainfluenza, and an intranasal vaccination containing bordetella and parainfluenza with or without adenovirus at intake.
- Currently, the medical team does not have the ability to spay or neuter animals prior to them being available for adoption and once an animal is adopted, it can take several days to get the surgery done. This means that adopted animals are taking up needed cage and kennel space, as they cannot leave immediately.
- We recommend labeling kennels with some sort of [signage](#) indicating that a pet is on medications. This practice may reduce the time it takes to medicate pets in the shelter twice per day. Care will have to be taken to move the signage with the pet should he/she be moved to a new location.
- Currently, when an individual expresses interest in adopting a particular cat, the cat is tested for FeLV and FIV. If the cat is positive for either, the adopter is directed to select a different cat and the positive cat is tagged for “rescue only” (and ultimately euthanasia if a rescue group does not select the cat). We recommend empowering staff with information, so they can have educated conversations about FeLV and FIV with adopters and allowing cats who test positive to be adopted to appropriate homes.

All animals are now vaccinated on intake.

The vet team is doing their best to spay/neuter as many animals as possible but there is still a backup, and many animals are still waiting several days after adoption to have surgery before they can go home thus taking up kennel space. Once the new veterinarian is hired, Best Friends medical director can come assist with high volume spay/neuter training to increase the number of surgeries per day. Our goal would be to get every animal sterilized prior to going up for adoption so they can leave as soon as the adoption is finalized.

Signage is now used to indicate an animal is on medication.

Cats are still mostly tested for FIV/FELV when they are adopted. If the staff has a slow day, they will get all adoptable cats tested. Positive cats are prohibited from being adopted into a home with another cat. We no longer recommend shelters combo test cats at any point. This expensive, time consuming and unreliable practice only hinders lifesaving. We recommend adopters be given information about FeLV and FIV and informed that they may choose to have the cat tested at their vet. You may still choose to combo tests cats if a rescue requires it.

The shelter also offers low-cost vaccines to the public which is a wonderful resource for the community to have. While we were there, we saw 2 appointments, both by elderly people who told us they were very grateful.

4. **Adoptions:** The shelter is striving to adopt out more animals, and the following observations and recommendations will assist staff in doing so.

The term “open adoption” is often misunderstood to mean simply handing pets over to anyone who wants them. In fact, instituting an open adoptions policy means focusing on setting proper expectations and giving guidance to adopters about each pet whom they are interested in, while reducing barriers to adoption. The adoption counselor asks prospective adopters to fill out a brief survey (instead of a rigorous application) to start a conversation about adoption and encourage open communication. This non-judgmental approach encourages all types of people in the community to adopt animals from shelters and rescue groups, rather than acquiring them from other sources.

We commend the shelter for embracing certain aspects of open adoptions and recommend the following to fully implement the practice:

- Currently, citizens can walk through the adoption areas and take out and interact with any animal they want. We observed citizens putting cats and dogs back in the wrong kennels, doing dog/dog introductions with a shelter dog and their personal dog, and taking young puppies to outdoor play yards. In addition, they were not washing their hands or sanitizing between animals. These practices can result in injury and cross-contamination. We recommend having staff available to interact with these potential adopters and assist them with meeting the animals, which also allows the opportunity to engage in conversation to help both clients and pets find a new loved one.

Although adoption numbers are very good, this practice is still happening, the front desk staff, while friendly, has little interaction with the potential adopters until they are ready to adopt the animal. They are working to hire someone specifically for adoptions. If that person is hired, we believe adoptions will continue to increase. While technically their adoption hours are still by appointment, they do not turn anyone who walks in away. We would recommend taking adoption appointments away entirely.

- We recommend updating the adoption applications to encourage open conversation. Examples can be found here: [Dog Adoption Survey](#), [Cat Adoption Survey](#).

The current adoption application is multiple pages and includes details about the adopter's landlord, who may be contacted. We recommend revamping the application and advising adopters to check with their landlord about restrictions and fees and trusting them to adopt an animal that fits that without requiring landlord verification.

- We observed staff giving potential adopters incorrect information regarding cat health, care and vaccines. We recommend that all staff receive training on basic animal care

and medical concerns, and that handouts be available for them to distribute to potential adopters.

Staff seemed much more knowledgeable about animal care and concerns now.

- We observed the client service staff juggling a plethora of phone calls unrelated to adoptions, which left citizens waiting in the lobby for assistance. We recommend that the client service staff's first priority be engaging with the public in the lobby; addressing phone calls should be secondary.

This is still a concern, again due to staffing issues.

- As mentioned below in the section on intake, the shelter is open the same number of hours for adoption and intake, and both are conducted in the lobby. Ideally, adoptions would have a lobby separate from intake, but we did not identify a space to allow for this, so we recommend adjusting the hours so that intake and adoptions are not occurring at the same time. The hours should be set up in a way that limits intake and encourages adoption. In addition, the adoption hours are not conducive for citizens who work a 9-5 schedule, as the shelter closes at 5 p.m. daily during the week. We encourage Hall County Animal Control to extend adoption hours into a few evenings a week, with the ultimate goal of being open for adoptions every night of the week and open to the public for adoptions on Sundays.

Owner surrender/public intake procedures have improved drastically, they are only done by appointment, and they have seen a significant decrease in number of intakes due to this.

- We recommend lowering current adoption fees to engage the community and encourage adoption from the shelter. Shelter leadership did say they reduce fees and are "practically giving cats away," but the website states that the adoption fee is \$85. We recommend heavily marketing the [reduced-fee and/or free adoptions](#) so that citizens are aware. Research shows that the number-one place people acquire a cat or kitten is from the street; number two is from a friend or family member, and number three is from a shelter. The first two options allow citizens to acquire a cat or kitten for free, so posting an \$85 adoption fee without advertising the "specials" handicaps the shelter's ability to compete with those other two sources.

The adoption fee is still listed as \$85 and if there are adoption specials, we didn't see them advertised. Longer stay and harder to place animals should not have an adoption fee.

- We recommend that the shelter run specials from time to time, borrowing creative ideas from successful campaigns from other shelters, such as the [APA Adoption Center's recent campaign](#). Relying on revenue from adoption fees is an antiquated practice. The agency will never recuperate the amount of money spent on the care and housing of an animal via those fees, and higher fees result in longer length of stay, which results in higher costs for care.

Animal adopted at offsite adoption events may have a reduced fee but otherwise, there are no specials on adoption fees.

- We recommend that each animal have a cage card (printed out from the shelter software) on the outside of his/her cage or kennel, to allow potential adopters to quickly review pertinent information and to assist staff with placing animals back in the correct cage or kennel. If an animal is on hold for adoption or a medical reason, that information should be clearly indicated so visitors can identify who is available without asking staff.

A kennel card with basic intake info about the animal is on the cages however we did suggest having other information that would be helpful to adopters such as dog friendly, low energy etc. This would be especially useful while they are short staffed.

Additionally, the intake staff is currently guessing the dog's breed and adding it to the software and kennel card. Research shows that shelter staff is bad at accurately guessing a dog's breed mix and that those inaccurate breed labels hinder their chances of getting adopted. Dogs with an unknown breed mix should just be labeled as mixed breed. The breed should only be listed if staff knows without question what the dog's breed is.

- The current naming of the adoption areas (e.g., "female dog") is not accurate, since there is a mix of both male and female dogs in each room, which can cause prospective adopters to not go into a particular room and potentially miss out on an ideal match. We recommend updating the names and signage to remove the words "female" and "male." This is an opportunity to engage the community and staff with a naming contest.

The shelter is no longer doing this, the rooms are now just lettered

- We recommend that the shelter allow viewing of all animals in the facility, with the exception of those on bite holds and cruelty cases. In addition, to reduce length of stay and increase adoptions, we recommend allowing potential adopters to reserve pets not yet finished with their stray-hold time. Even animals in isolation can be adopted, with the remainder of their medications going home with them. This is being done as staffing allows.
- All owner-surrendered animals should be placed up for adoption immediately. Currently, they are being held for a 24-hour period in case former owners change their mind.

Staff is still holding owner surrendered animals for 24 hours. Holding all owner surrenders for the rare case that someone changes their mind is creating a bottleneck and adding additional stress to the animal and staff. If the animal has the opportunity to get adopted quickly, they should go home.

- To reduce length of stay, free up space and allow families to take their new pet home immediately, we recommend allowing pets to go home as foster-to-adopt animals. The adopter brings the pet back for the spay/neuter appointment and the pet does not have to spend any more time in the shelter than is absolutely necessary. This is especially important because adopted pets are currently taking up space as they wait several days for surgery, potentially resulting in euthanasia of other pets for lack of space.

Adopted animals are still waiting at the shelter for surgery after being adopted though most cases it is only a day or so until surgery. If the surgery backlog is longer than a few days, the adoption should be completed, and the animal should come back for surgery.

- Another avenue for increasing adoptions is implementing a system to [fast-track](#) animals who will likely be adopted quickly. Using a customized matrix to determine “quicker to adopt” status, pets in this category could be spayed or neutered the day after their stray-hold period is up, so that they can leave the shelter immediately after being adopted. These pets should also be placed in adoption areas immediately. The idea is to get fast-track pets out of the shelter as quickly as possible, in an effort to make room for those who need more time. **The shelter is using this system now.**
- Other recommended resources include [Adopters Welcome Manual](#), [Open Adoptions](#) and Humane Network’s [comprehensive 10-step guide](#) to establishing a “culture of adoption.”

5. **Intake:** Currently, the shelter does intake anytime it is open, making it just as easy to surrender an animal as it is to adopt one, and both occur in the same lobby. Below are some observations and recommendations to reduce intake and serve the public better.

- The shelter should be more focused on getting animals out rather than taking them in. We recommend implementing a managed intake program, which refers to any form of regulating or scheduling intake. Managed intake can be thought of as controlling the “how” and “when” of intake, but not necessarily the “who.” This is a cornerstone best practice that will give Hall County Animal Control the ability to implement other best practices to fully support their community and achieve no-kill status. More information can be found in Best Friends Animal Society’s *Humane Animal Control* manual in the chapters on [intake diversion](#) and [delayed or diverted intake](#).
- The staff currently offer food if a citizen needs it to retain an animal, but intake staff need more resources to offer the public to increase owner retention. Resources should include [Adopt a Pet](#) flyers to encourage owners to find a new home for the pet themselves (so the pet doesn’t have to enter the shelter), materials to assist with behavior issues, and supplies such as leashes and collars, which can be acquired via donations. Other resources, such as medical care, can be obtained through working with local veterinarians to offer services at a reduced cost and/or offering some of those services in-house at the shelter. By offering resources and limiting the hours for intake, overall intake at the shelter will be drastically reduced and more animals will remain

with their families.

- We recommend shoring up resources for educating the public on what to do when they find a stray. With the size of the service area, impounding a stray animal and bringing him to the shelter is often an impediment to the animal getting home. However, we have trained the public to do this, so we need to retrain them and encourage community members to help stray animals find their way home without bringing them to the shelter. Ways to do this include posting the animal's photo on social media, driving around the area where the animal was found and asking folks in the area, and having the pet scanned for a microchip at a local animal hospital.
- Client service staff in intake need to be empowered to be transparent with individuals relinquishing animals to the shelter. The drop-off forms need to be updated to include a box for individuals to check off if they want to be notified if their animal is in danger of being euthanized. This will drive home the fact that euthanasia is a potential outcome, in addition to the staff saying it's a possibility. A system needs to be implemented to ensure that if that box is checked, the previous owner will be notified and given the option to reclaim the animal free of charge.
- Immediately after intake, animals' profiles should be posted on the website for viewing by the public, whether the pet is an owner surrender immediately available for adoption or a stray. In addition, having a lost-and-found section on the website, which pet owners can search to see if their animal is in the shelter, is critical to increasing the return-to-owner rate and reducing euthanasia.

As mentioned above, the shelter has done an excellent job taking on managed/delayed intake and seen fewer owner surrenders. We did not witness any owner surrender appointments during our time there, but we did overhear some phone calls. Each caller was immediately given an intake appointment with no further conversation. Front desk is limited in the time they can spend with each person calling to surrender an animal but need to be empowered with multiple resources to share with owners during that initial contact. The goal would be for them to utilize the resources available, so they don't have to surrender their animal in the long run.

Currently, even stray intakes require an appointment. While this may work for some people who have found strays, it won't work for everyone. We witness front desk staff telling someone who found a dog to drive it back to where it was found and let it go again, which could be unsafe for both the animal and the finder. Appointments for stray intakes should be recommended but not mandatory.

Stray animals are not listed online anywhere. They need to be posted on the website immediately so that people looking for their lost animal can view photos of the stray intakes.

6. **Volunteer and foster programs:** The shelter has the opportunity to dramatically improve its volunteer and foster programs. A well-run volunteer program will provide the shelter with an immense amount of help to support the staff and animals at the shelter, and a well-run foster program will increase capacity and improve the overall health of the animals. Both programs will engage the community and garner support. Some recommendations:

- Currently, the volunteer program doesn't have a dedicated individual to lead it. Several staff (including the warden, the director and the front staff supervisor) share the responsibility. Because they have many other responsibilities, they don't have time to create and run a robust volunteer program. We recommend identifying one individual who can lead this program and creating the bandwidth in that person's schedule to do so. Best Friends has a volunteer mentorship program and we encourage Hall County Animal Control to participate in it once someone is identified to lead the program. Through the volunteer mentorship program, our experts assist the shelter in implementing industry best practices for volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention, as well as utilizing volunteers in all aspects of operations.
- We recommend that all staff receive training on how to engage with volunteers. (We are happy to provide that training.)
- Currently, volunteers are only allowed to come in during normal business hours and are restricted to areas open to the public. A successful program allows volunteers to help with the general workload by giving them the opportunity to help perform almost all daily duties, regardless of whether the shelter is open to the public.
- To update the volunteer program, we recommend that a tiered system be put in place to allow volunteers to advance in the program. Volunteers who show competency and follow all requirements should be allowed to move to opportunities that will be of greater assistance to the shelter, such as working with animals normally deemed "staff only," when appropriate.
- We strongly recommend creating a robust foster program to allow all segments of the animal population to be fostered. Foster families should be empowered to adopt the animals directly into new homes, rather than returning them to the shelter for adoption. The [Adoption Ambassador](#) program is a great resource. We also encourage the shelter to consider other creative fostering ideas, such as recruiting businesses to foster pets.

Below are some resources to assist with these vital programs and, again, we encourage working with our mentorship program:

- Best Friends [volunteer resource](#)
- Additional Best Friends volunteer resources can be found [here](#)
- Best Friends [foster resource](#)
- Best Friends Animal Society's *Humane Animal Control* manual, chapter on [volunteer programs](#)
- Best Friends Animal Society's *Humane Animal Control* manual, chapter on [foster programs](#)

Based on this shelter assessment, a fulltime foster/volunteer coordinator was hired and has been working to expand the programs. Volunteers were there each day to walk dogs and help adopters. We believe experienced volunteers can be elevated to help with the cleaning and taking the dogs out to the outdoor kennels in the mornings. The foster program is growing and needs to be advertised and marketed. There are currently no posts on social media about fostering. Specific

animals in need of time outside of the shelter should be listed with a clear call to action for how long the animal needs to be fostered.

7. **Daily rounds:** Conducting daily rounds ensures that all animals receive the care and attention they need each day to move as safely and efficiently as possible through the shelter. Daily rounds are distinct from the daily monitoring of health and behavior that the kennel supervisor currently does, and distinct from the daily veterinary rounds being done. Doing rounds as a group has the intended purpose of getting a collaborative view of the current population and their movement through the shelter. Refer to [this resource](#) for more in-depth information on the purpose of daily rounds, as well as the components.

In addition, all pathway decisions should be made as a consensus, utilizing a decision-making matrix, and conversation should be encouraged among all members of this group before a final decision is made. To assist with the creation of a matrix, a resource can be found [here](#).

Daily rounds are currently not being completed but this is in the plan once staffing allows. The length of stay meetings are the current opportunity for staff to talk about plans for specific animals.

8. **Euthanasia:** Currently, the burden of performing euthanasia falls on two staff members alone except for wildlife, emergencies and after-hours. This duty is extremely taxing emotionally and should be more evenly distributed among more staff members to prevent burnout.

Current euthanasia is performed by the kennel supervisor alone. This needs to continue to be diversified among more staff members.

9. **Enrichment:** While it is obvious that the staff care a great deal about each individual animal, daily enrichment is not something that the animals are receiving. Daily enrichment is as essential as food and water to an animal's overall well-being and plays a key role in reducing stress and arousal levels, both of which, when elevated, suppress the immune system and increase the likelihood of disease and cross-contamination. Enrichment also plays a key role in increasing the adoptability of the animals and preventing the behavioral problems that can be created in a shelter environment. We recommend incorporating enrichment, which can be simple and free, into the daily routine.

As the volunteer program grows, enrichment for both dogs and cats needs to be grown as well. Playgroups will go a long way to making the large dogs more adoptable.

The following are links to resources to assist with providing enrichment:

- [Enrichment for shelter dogs](#)
- [Dog enrichment](#)
- [Kennel enrichment](#)
- [Enrichment on a Dime \(webinar\)](#)
- [Enrichment for shelter cats](#)
- [Hiding places for cats](#)
- [Best Friends Animal Society's Humane Animal Control manual, chapter on shelter cat enrichment](#)

- [Best Friends Animal Society's Humane Animal Control manual, chapter on shelter dog enrichment](#)

10. **Communication and culture:** Communication was identified as a priority area for improvement. Leadership is making strides to support the team and changes are being implemented with the best interests of the staff and the animals in mind, and the supervisors do effectively meet on a weekly basis. However, information is being lost in translation as it makes its way down the chain of command, and there is an unintentional lack of internal transparency. We strongly recommend hosting an all-staff meeting at least monthly and sending out emails with updates in between.

There is also a disconnect between departments at the shelter. We recommend that steps be taken to bridge this gap, such as having staff from different departments shadow each other, including sending shelter staff into the field to ride along with the officers for a shift. To avoid the confusion that is happening with other well-intended changes, the purpose of this practice needs to be fully communicated in advance, and staff should be given the opportunity to provide feedback.

Recommendations to help with communication:

- Host monthly all-staff meetings to discuss changes in policy and the reasons why those changes are taking place; talk about statistics, with comparison to prior months or other time periods; share accolades to highlight employees' successes; and give staff from each program the opportunity to provide updates.
- Host daily briefings and roll-call for individual departments.
- Create monthly reports outlining important stats and stories, and distribute them to the entire staff via email and posts on bulletin boards.
- When a policy change is announced, include the rationale behind it and encourage feedback from staff.
- Increase internal transparency (e.g., share the training budget, allocations and the rationale behind the staff selection process; share the bureaucratic process for equipment orders; keep staff updated and follow through).
- Provide management, supervisory and leadership training or coaching for all of those acting in a supervisory capacity.
- Include accolades and statistics as regular agenda items in meetings.

Current staff feels like they are listened to and that their opinion matters. While there is currently no ongoing all staff meeting schedule, this is in the plan once the leadership staff is finalized.

11. **Transfer and transport programs:** The shelter currently works with many rescue organizations that pull animals and recently moved to a system in which the rescue groups must make

appointments to pull animals. The shelter instituted this practice to focus their limited staff on adoptions and public interactions on Saturdays, but it has caused dissension with the rescue groups.

In addition, there is no dedicated staff member who works with the rescue organizations; it is a duty shared by the client service staff. We strongly recommend identifying one staff member to take the lead on this vital program and convening a meeting with the rescue groups, so that all parties understand each other's realities and an effective solution that's agreeable to most can be worked out.

While other recommendations throughout this assessment need to be implemented to resolve the root causes of the dog overpopulation situation, transporting animals north to no-kill communities can help address the immediate need. Many of the dogs in Hall County Animal Control appear to fit the criteria for what receiving shelters are looking to import. A well-functioning transport program will help alleviate the problem of having to euthanize for space, give the shelter the ability to focus on long-term solutions, and bring animals to areas where adoptable dogs are needed.

HCAC no longer requires appointments for rescues to pull animals and has a good relationship with many local rescues. They have a van to transport animals long distances. There is still no staff member dedicated to working with the rescues and that duty is shared between many staff. A full time rescue coordinator is also in the future plan for the shelter.

12. **Strategic spay/neuter services:** Being able to provide free or low-cost spay/neuter of owned animals is key to reducing the population of homeless animals in the community and a cornerstone to reducing shelter intake. We recommend continuing to collaborate with nonprofits in the community that can help provide low-cost services, potentially setting up a fund for individuals to donate to support this vital service, and allocating budget funds as well. County funds would be well spent on spay/neuter, because it will result in reduced intake over time. In addition, spayed or neutered pets who do happen to enter the shelter have a shorter length of stay because they don't have to wait for spay/neuter surgery, which results in reduced housing costs.

The veterinary shortage has caused an issue with even getting adoptable animals sterilized locally. Now that the Humane Society's clinic is back up and running, the local bottleneck is starting to resolve. Once the new shelter vet starts and increases the number of surgeries per day, offering surgery to targeted pet owners in the community will be helpful in mitigating future intakes.

13. **Community outreach and engagement:** The shelter needs to increase the level of engagement with the local community and create inroads to build relationships. Best Friends Animal Society's *Humane Animal Control* manual has a comprehensive chapter on community outreach and engagement that can be found [here](#). Field officers especially can benefit from more community engagement. When officers are well known in the community they serve, residents are more apt to provide valuable information, collaborate with officers to solve neighborhood problems and increase their overall compliance rate for violations.

Currently, certain staff members go to local schools, but we encourage giving staff, especially field officers, the opportunity to attend neighborhood meetings and other events that allow them to engage with residents outside of responding to calls. The Best Friends *Humane Animal Control* manual has an appendix dedicated to [community engagement strategies](#). The Humane Society of the United States has a thorough guidebook, *Pets for Life*, that's available for download on their website and is considered a valuable resource. We also encourage the shelter to hold vaccination clinics regularly throughout the year and to continue to provide dog and cat food to anyone who requests it during normal business hours.

Field services officers are well received by the community and are dedicated to keeping pets and people together whenever possible. Adding a more comprehensive community engagement program in the future could help further build relationships with pet owners in the community.

14. **Training:** Field officers receive extensive training through the state POST academy, but specific issues related to animal control are not part of the state's program. Before entering the POST academy, officers go through a ride-along training program that, while typical of many agencies, is less than ideal. Therefore, we recommend:
 - Building out a full pre-academy field training program consisting of both classroom and field studies as well as written examinations.
 - Implementing a mandatory number of CE hours per year for veteran officers and ensuring that leadership provides opportunities well beyond that number of hours. This can include participating in local and national conferences, nationally recognized training academies, free webinars and other online training.

Field services officers still receive ride-along training before attending the POST academy. Officers are given opportunities to attend local and national animal welfare conferences.

15. **Data collection for field services:** At the time of our visit, field services had responded to 7,972 calls for the service year to date. With 5 field officers and one field supervisor, this call volume does not appear to be overwhelming, which places Hall County in a unique position to move to a more proactive-focused department (including implementing the community engagement recommendations above). Being able to collect and analyze data would allow the department to identify hot spots for specific issues in the community, so that a proactive approach can be taken to reduce the incidents from occurring.

Many agencies have utilized this approach (which is similar to the community-based or problem-oriented policing models found in most traditional law enforcement agencies) to reduce free-roaming animal issues and incidents of dog bites. Unfortunately, all calls are being dispatched through the county's CAD system and capturing extensive data isn't possible. We recommend moving the call data to the shelter software system in order to get a better understanding of animal issues facing the community.

Calls are still dispatched by the county's CAD system but the officers remain proactive whenever possible.

16. **Focused marketing:** We recommend the implementation of a focused marketing strategy to engage the entire community in achieving and sustaining no-kill. Marketing efforts need to contain calls to action to give citizens tangible ways to get involved in achieving and sustaining their community's no-kill status. Best Friends has marketing experts standing by ready to assist, and here are a few additional resources:

- Join the [Best Friends Digital Community](#) to have access to prerecorded webinars from public relations and marketing experts, along with the ability to connect with others around the nation.
- Read the Best Friends resource on [media relations for animal organizations](#).
- Build out a presence on social media (e.g., Facebook) and supplement with shelter-driven social media guided by the county's communications and outreach coordinator.
- Engage shelter staff in providing positive, accurate content for social media and the website. Incentives can be provided via modest but meaningful rewards. If appropriate, encourage friendly competition between teams.
- Identify market segments in the county and work with the county's communications and outreach coordinator to sketch out basic strategies.

The current capacity issues at the shelter should be shared with the community with clear calls to action for the public to help. Although the shelter is euthanizing dogs for space, this has never been shared with the public who are unaware of the current situation at the shelter. Sharing the capacity crisis with the public in an honest and actionable way will only increase their trust in the shelter and awareness about ways they can help. The county's communication department is on deck to help but needs to be given clear guidelines about the current situation and the call to action.

17. **Best Friends Network:** Best Friends Animal Society firmly believes that collaboration with local animal shelters and rescue organizations — the people who know their communities best — is key to saving the lives of dogs, cats and other pets in America's shelters. The [Best Friends Network](#), comprising public and private shelters, rescue groups, spay/neuter organizations and other animal welfare groups across all 50 states, is at the heart of the collaborative spirit that helps define Best Friends.

We believe that each shelter and the community it serves have their own individual personality, just like animals in the shelter's care. And because of that, each shelter deserves support and resources designed to address its specific lifesaving needs. Joining the network is free and comes with benefits, such as access to a variety of professional resources and mentorship opportunities to achieve organizational goals and increase lifesaving impact. A few select organizations, which have a significant and measurable impact on reducing deaths in shelters in their communities, may qualify for special grants. We recommend that Hall County Animal Control join the Best Friends Network to gain access to all the benefits and be eligible for support to fully implement the above recommendations. **Hall County is now a network partner!**

Conclusion

Best Friends is committed to helping shelters across the nation improve their shelter operations for the safety and well-being of the animals in their care, and to help them achieve a no-kill community. Hall County Animal Control is strategically primed to achieve and sustain no-kill and become a local, regional and possibly a national leader in the field of animal services. Best Friends Animal Society stands by ready to assist with strategy and implementation of the above recommendations provided leadership is in full support.

About Best Friends Animal Society

Best Friends Animal Society is a leading national animal welfare organization dedicated to ending the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters. In addition to running lifesaving programs in partnership with more than 2,500 animal welfare groups across the country, Best Friends has regional centers in New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Salt Lake City, and operates the nation's largest no-kill sanctuary for companion animals. Founded in 1984, Best Friends is a pioneer in the no-kill movement and has helped reduce the number of animals killed in shelters nationwide from 17 million per year to about 1.5 million. That means there are still more than 4,100 dogs and cats killed every day in shelters, just because they don't have safe places to call home. We are determined to get that number to zero by the year 2025. Working collaboratively with shelters, rescue groups, other organizations and you, we will end the killing and Save Them All. For more information, visit bestfriends.org.