



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

January 9, 2024

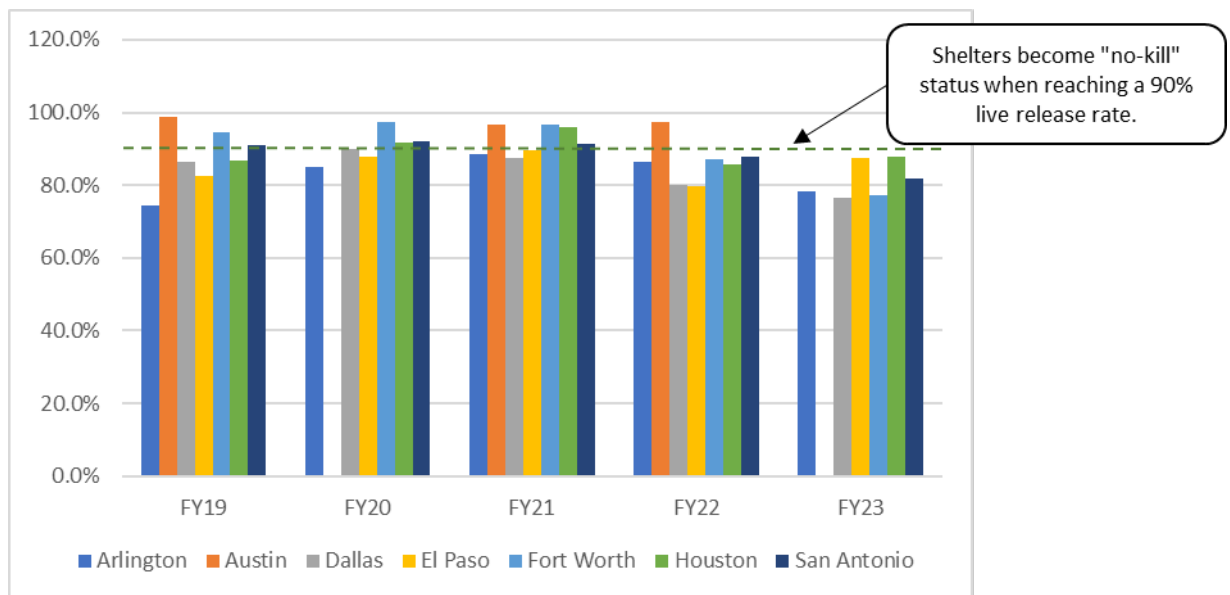
Page 1 of 5

SUBJECT: CLOSING THE LIVE RELEASE RATE AND COMMUNICATION GAPS

The purpose of this Informal Report is in response to the City Council's request for an update on Code Compliance's strategies for improving the animal shelter's live release rate.

Live Release Rate

The live release rate (LRR) is a key metric used in animal shelters to measure the percentage of animals that leave the facility alive, either through adoption, return to owners, or transfer to other organizations. From 2017 to 2022, the City's Code Compliance Department maintained a LRR greater than 90%. In 2020, the live release rate was its highest at 97%.



*Comprehensive LRR data for smaller municipalities in the metroplex is unavailable for the reporting period above.

Nationally, for several years, the market has been flooded with more homeless animals, and at the same time, shelters are not seeing much growth in adoptions. These factors have reduced the overall LRR and has posed complexities that were not relevant during the higher live release rate years.

Before and during the Pandemic, there was an increase in animal adoptions that had a positive impact on the LRR. This was fueled by factors such as remote work, low inflation, and more affordable housing. However, during this time, agencies realized that maintaining these high adoption rates may not be sustainable in the long term, given that pet adoption is a commitment of 10-15 years (people do not generally adopt a new pet every year or two).



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

January 9, 2024

Page 2 of 5

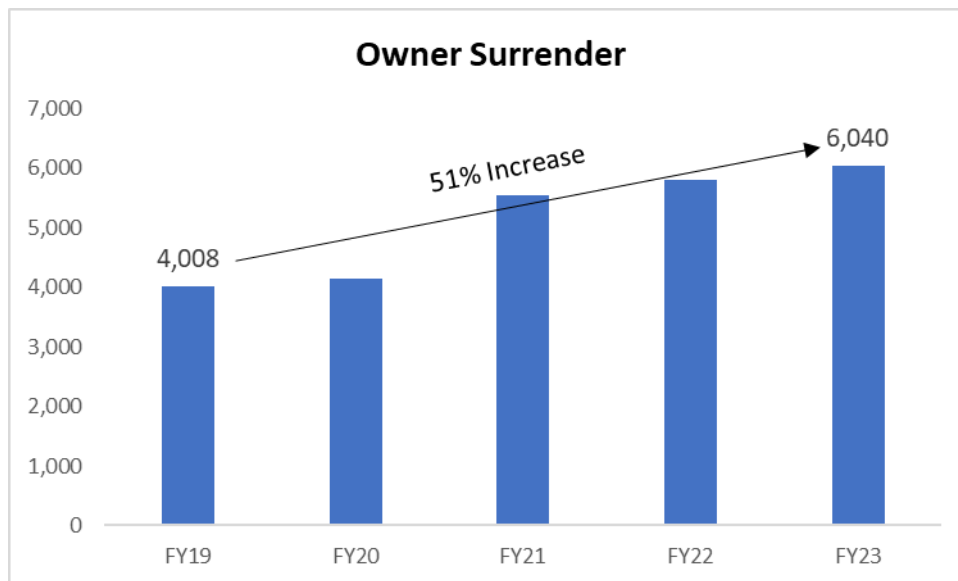
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Increase in the Number of Owner Surrenders

Since the Pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of owner surrenders due to several factors:

- People returning to work and children going back to school has led to less time with pets and has created situations where pet owners feel that they can no longer care for the pet. This includes pets that are kept in crates for too long, are moved to yards for extended periods, and other situations.
- Higher cost of living – This includes rent, food for people, food for pets, durables and other expenses.
- Transitioning from houses to apartments – Owners find themselves in spaces too small for pets. When moving from one apartment to another, sometimes there are additional costs like pet deposits and increased rent they can no longer afford. Sometimes the new rental does not allow pets.

Currently, the shelter is seeing about a 7% increase in animal intake with owner surrenders making up 31% of the increase.



Increase in the Number of Stray Animals

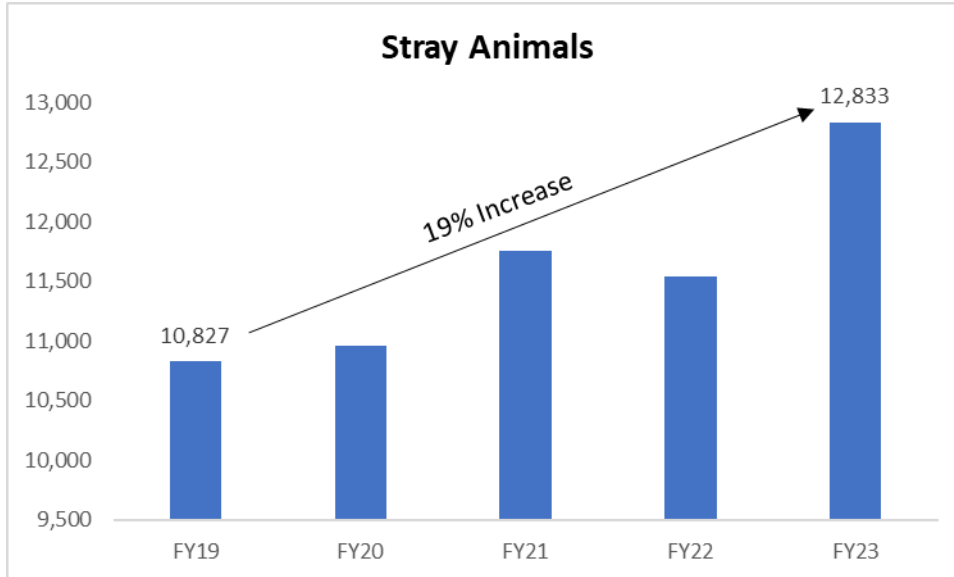
There has been a rise in the intake of strays; however, the term 'stray' can sometimes be misleading. These animals often have homes and owners but, for various reasons, are now roaming the neighborhood. Locally, fewer of these animals are being reclaimed by their owners. In fact, when owners are contacted about their lost pets, an increasing number are opting not to take them back.



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

January 9, 2024

Page 3 of 5

SUBJECT: CLOSING THE LIVE RELEASE RATE AND COMMUNICATION GAPS

There has also been an uptick in 'stray' animals being brought to the shelter by individuals who, in many cases, are actually the owners. They see surrendering the animal to the shelter as the best option, partly due to our high live release rates in the past. In a sense, the shelter's success has inadvertently contributed to the intake.

Area Rescue Groups and Not-for-Profits

On the intake side, area non-profits and rescue partners are experiencing this same impact. As a result, they are also full/at capacity. Many of the animals that they would have taken in the past are now sent to the City shelters. Often, these referrals are animals that are harder to find homes for such as larger and older animals, animals with behavior issues, etc. Even so, without these partners, City shelters would be facing an even greater challenge.

Filling the Gaps

Even though adoptions are up slightly, increasing the LRR will require a significant change in the number of animals coming into the shelter. Reducing intake and increasing adoptions in this market will require more staff and creative strategies. The Department recognized this earlier in the year and requested additional resources. In the fiscal year 2024 budget, City Council approved the following positions to focus on this very challenge:

- Two (2) new Veterinarian Technicians to supplement the Foster Program. This will increase the number of animals able to be placed in foster homes and provide necessary follow-up care.

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****January 9, 2024**

Page 4 of 5

SUBJECT: CLOSING THE LIVE RELEASE RATE AND COMMUNICATION GAPS

- A second Volunteer Coordinator so each shelter has a dedicated coordinator to develop and maintain a more robust program.
- A Media Specialist to focus on social media and other resources for educating the public about shelter programs, how to get involved, how to adopt and other communications.
- The Department also reassigned an existing position to be an Events Coordinator who is responsible for coordinating events and developing additional partnerships within the community.

The dedicated Animal Shelter staff are committed to providing the best care and environment for the animals. These staff have developed a number of progressive strategies to consider moving forward:

1. Partner with Spay Neuter Network to implement a managed intake pilot program for six (6) months that will be appointment based for non-emergency owner surrenders only. This approach involves appointment-based intake of animals in non-emergency situations into the animal services facility. It is only used for pets being surrendered by their owners that are friendly and healthy. Cats, dogs, puppies, and kittens, along with other companion animals may be scheduled for intake following an initial assessment (by phone or web/e-mail) to determine if shelter intake is the only viable option or the best option for that pet and family.
2. Recommend implementing a rotational closure schedule for adoption and intake services at both the Chuck & Brenda Silcox Animal Shelter and the North Animal Campus—closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, respectively. The decision to close each shelter to the public one day a week brings numerous advantages, including staff training and development and deep cleaning of the facility, resulting in reduced risk of disease transmission and a cleaner environment. While each campus will experience a weekly closure day, residents can access services at alternate locations. For example, when the Chuck & Brenda Silcox Animal Shelter is closed, services will be available at the North Animal Campus, encompassing stray surrender, owner surrender, adoptions, and lost pet reclamation.
3. Continue to engage with the media to support pet adoption and pet retention. Craft compelling narratives that highlight the joys and benefits of pet ownership. Share stories that focus on successful adoptions, the positive impact of pets on mental and physical health, and features on resources like affordable veterinary care, pet food banks, and behavioral training that can inspire the community. Partner with local news, social media influencers, and community leaders who can reach a wide audience and foster a pet-friendly community.
4. Grow partnerships with non-profits that focus on pet retention, such as Spay Neuter Network and Operation Kindness that can provide behavioral and medical assistance for pet owners in need.
5. Implement a new mandatory spay/neuter campaign. Fort Worth has a progressive spay and neuter law. It is mandatory except for intact permits designed to accommodate AKC show dogs and similar situations. Staff have been and continue to aggressively enforce this ordinance. However, with the new media positions we can update our messaging and implement a new campaign.

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****January 9, 2024**

Page 5 of 5

SUBJECT: CLOSING THE LIVE RELEASE RATE AND COMMUNICATION GAPS

Finally, we urge pet owners facing challenges to explore the numerous community resources at their disposal, including complimentary pet food, affordable spay and neuter services, and low-cost or free vaccines. If the difficult decision is made to part ways with the animal, we recommend considering rehoming within their circle of family, friends, or co-workers. This approach not only alleviates the shelter's intake, freeing up valuable space, but also contributes to healthier outcomes for the animals involved. Attachment "A" is the list of resources that we currently provide pet owners and it is updated as more resources become available.

For questions regarding this information, please contact Chris McAllister, Code Compliance Assistant Director, at christopher.mcallister@fortworthtexas.gov or (817) 392-2766.

David Cooke
City Manager

PET SURRENDER RESOURCE GUIDE

Resource Type	Name	Contact Information
Pet food	Arbor lawn UMC Food Pantry	4917 Briar haven Road Fort Worth, TX 76109 (512) 914-5784 www.arborlawnumc.org
Pet food	Bibles and Bread Ministries	5817 Waddell Street Sansom Park, TX 76114 (817) 773-8233 www.biblesandbread.org
Pet food	Community Crossroads	1516 Hemphill Street Fort Worth, TX 76104 (817) 921-3955 www.fpcfw.org
Pet food	Community Food Bank	3000 Galvez Fort Worth, TX 76111 (817) 924-3333 www.food-bank.org
Pet food	Community Link	300 Belmont Street Saginaw, TX 76179 (817) 847-4554 www.communitylinkmission.org
Pet food	Eastside Community Assistance	5929 E. Lancaster Fort Worth, TX 76112 (817) 446-3278 www.eastsidecommunityassistance.org
Pet food	Fort Worth HOPE Center	3625 E Loop 820 S. Fort Worth, TX 76119 (817) 451-6288 www.fwhope.org
Pet food	Spay Neuter Network	3117 E. Seminary Drive Fort Worth, TX 76119 (682) 247-2740 www.spayneuternet.org
Pet Food	Meals on Wheels	1-888-998-6325 https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/
Pet Food	City of Fort Worth	Available on Tuesdays & Thursdays from 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM 4900 Martin St Fort Worth, Tx 76119

Resource Type	Name	Contact Information
Low-cost medical care	Spay Neuter Network	3117 E. Seminary Drive Fort Worth, TX 76119 (682) 247-2740 www.spayneuternet.org
Low-cost medical care	SPCA of Texas	2400 Lonestar Dr Dallas, TX 75212 (214)-742-7722 www.sPCA.org
Low-cost medical care	Texas Coalition for Animal Protection (TCAP)	(940) 566-5551 https://texasforthem.org/
Low-cost medical care	Low Cost Pet Vax	(817) 282-1000 https://www.lowcostpetvaccinations.net/
Low-cost medical Care	Vaccination Station	(972)385-1001 https://www.vaccinationstation.com/
Pet Support	SPCA of Texas	https://spca.org/resources/pet-needs/support-to-keep-your-pet/
Rehoming	Home to Home	Home-home.org
Rehoming	Adopt a Pet	https://rehome.adoptapet.com/rehome-my-dog/texas/fort-worth
Rehoming	Facebook	Join Facebook communities by searching for “Pet Rehoming in Fort Worth” https://facebook.com/
Lost and Found	Petco Love Lost	https://lost.petcolove.org/
Lost and Found	Mission Reunite	https://missionreunite.org/
Lost and Found	PawBoost	https://www.pawboost.com/
Lost and Found	Nextdoor	Post picture and location of pet. https://nextdoor.com/
Lost and Found	Facebook	Join Facebook communities by searching for “Lost and Found Pets in Fort Worth” https://facebook.com/
Lost and Found	Microchipping	Lost Pets: Check with your pet’s registered microchip company and let them know that your pet is missing. Make sure your contact information is up to date Found Pets: Check with local shelters or vet clinics to scan for possible microchip. If microchip is

Resource Type	Name	Contact Information
		found, the microchip company can be contacted to advise of found pet, notifying the owner their pet has been found
Behavior Support	Good Pup	Free week of Dog Training https://links.goodpup.com/shelter/FWACCTraining Free online webinars https://goodpup.com/webinar-series