



2022 State of the Los Angeles City Animal Shelters

OCTOBER 2022

PREPARED BY

Councilmember Paul Koretz
Chair, Personnel, Audits and Animal Welfare
Committee

Committees:

Chair

Personnel, Audits,
and Animal Welfare

Vice Chair

Transportation

Member

Energy, Climate Change,
Environmental Justice
and River

Public Works

Ad Hoc Committee
on 2028 Olympics
and Paralympics Games

Website: <http://cd5.lacity.org>
Email: Paul.Koretz@lacity.org



PAUL KORETZ
Councilmember, Fifth District

City Hall Office:
200 N. Spring Street
Room 440
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 473-7005
(213) 978-2250 Fax

Valley Office:
15760 Ventura Blvd.
Suite 600
Encino, CA 91436
(818) 971-3088
(818) 788-9210 Fax

West L.A. Office:
6380 Wishire Blvd.
Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90048
(323) 866-1828
(323) 852-1129 Fax

October 7, 2022

Honorable Eric Garcetti
Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council

Dear Colleagues:

As Chair of the Personnel, Audits, and Animal Welfare Committee, I have limited oversight of the day-to-day operations of the Department of Animal Services (Department). However, I do have the ability to oversee the Department's adherence to policy issues set by the City Council. As such, I held two public hearings in July 2022 regarding the current state of the Department. After hearing the public testimony during the first hearing, I promised to prepare a report on the current state of the Department. Preparing such a report is very unusual for a Chair of a Council Committee to undertake but I made the decision to do so based on my keen interest and concern over the testimony that was presented. Attached is my report.

The report takes into account comments and suggestions provided by members of the public, Department volunteers, and other stakeholders, both directly and during the hearings. It also considers the input of Animal Services Department management and staff and representatives of labor unions representing Department staff. In addition, it reflects the years of observation and experience I and members of my staff bring to these issues.

Though it doesn't deal with every aspect of Animal Services' operations, the report covers more than three dozen issues that have been discussed in public since the Spring of this year. The major thread running through most of the issues is that Animal Services has been, and remains, both underfunded and understaffed over many years. This has negatively impacted just about every facet of the Department's operations. Moreover, these problems have been greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Honorable Eric Garcetti
Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council
October 7, 2022
Page Two

Importantly, the document endeavors to treat opinions and suggestions fairly and with respect, no matter who offered them. Animal Services often has experienced controversies regarding its operations, some of which have been justified and some not. Rather than becoming mired in such controversies, I have worked hard to focus this report on making recommendations on how the Department can take steps forward to better serve Angelenos and the animals in the Department's care. I hope the report leads to a healthy and productive discussion.

In addition, I will also be introducing several motions to help address some of the issues covered in the report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Koretz". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

PAUL KORETZ

Chair, Personnel, Audits, and Animal Welfare Committee

cc: Sharon Tso, CLA
Matt Szabo, CAO
Annette Ramirez, Dept. of Animal Services

INTRODUCTION

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23, the total cost of Animal Services' operations is budgeted at \$27 million with 343 budgeted positions. An additional 21 unfunded positions were authorized in the adopted budget and the Department expects to use partial year funding for existing positions to cover those as well.

As of this writing, the Department's actual staff numbers approximately 300 with new hires in the process of being brought on board. The Department is still recovering from the loss of 26 experienced staffers in the 2020 "Severance Incentive Program," (SIP) a cost-cutting measure undertaken by the City to cope with the collapse of revenue associated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of that year.

The replacement of lost staff didn't begin in earnest until after the City began receiving federal COVID recovery funds from the federal government in 2021, but the City Budget provided only a measured ability to bring on new employees, thus leaving the historically understaffed Department even more so in just about every category.

The SIP left the Department's staffing level at a level comparable to what it was in 2014-15 when all of the City's Departments were working to recover from the economic setbacks of the 2008-09 "Great Recession." Adding to it was (and is) the impacts of the pandemic itself which, despite the best efforts of all involved, have found from approximately 20 to 60 Animal Services staffers out on sick leave and/or quarantine or isolation in any given month. Some other members of the staff resigned during the pandemic for various reasons, leaving the current staffing level well below its budgeted maximum.

Under the direction of current Interim General Manager Annette Ramirez, Animal Services operates out of an administrative headquarters in Downtown Los Angeles and at six City-owned animal shelters: (1) East Valley, (2) Harbor, (3) North Central, (4) South Los Angeles, (5) West Los Angeles, and (6) West Valley. A seventh shelter, Northeast Valley, has been operated as an adoption and animal care center by the Best Friends Animal Society since 2012 under contract to the City. This arrangement, which will formally end on December 31, 2022, was entered into to avoid having to shut down the Northeast Valley shelter with the expectation at the time that the result would be killing hundreds, if not thousands, of animals for space.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

1. Animal Care

a. Cleaning Dog Kennels

Volunteers and members of the public report repeated instances of dog kennels apparently not having been cleaned in a timely manner, including defecation and water bowls.

Comments and Recommendation

- The Department should work to expand cooperation between staff and volunteers so that kennels can be cleaned more often.

Dog kennels are primarily cleaned by Animal Care Technicians (ACTs), and occasionally by experienced volunteers. Staff notes that the dogs are fed twice daily and tend to defecate shortly after eating. Due to the high population of dogs, ACTs often are not able to clean kennels immediately after that happens, thus increasing the likelihood that volunteers or visitors will observe kennels in need of cleaning.

The Department should work with the Mayor and City Council to seek funding for additional ACTs and to recruit and train additional volunteers to allow for more frequent cleaning of kennels.

b. Walking Dogs

The combination of a shortage of ACTs and experienced volunteers, and some logistical issues have combined to create a situation in which the shelter dogs are not getting out of their kennels to be walked or exercised regularly, which ideally would happen on a daily basis. At present, most dog walking is handled by volunteers, but not enough is done to make sure every dog receives such an opportunity each day.

Much of the dog walking is done off shelter property and the lack of sidewalks in the area immediately surrounding some of the shelters

makes it less safe to do so in those locations. Walking the dogs within those shelter properties also reduces the number of dogs that can be walked at any one time.

Several attorneys have pointed out that leaving dogs in kennels for days at a time could be construed as a violation of California Penal Code Section 597.1, which mandates regular exercise for dogs in any kennel context, including government facilities, creating a potential legal liability for the Department and City.

Comments and Recommendations

- Prioritize dog-walking
- Expand the number of volunteers willing or eligible to walk dogs.
- Identify innovative approaches to increasing dog walking.
- Augment dog-walking with playgroups.
- Fine-tune the new systemization of monitoring dog walking to better track the effectiveness of the program.
- **Solve the problem of inadequate ability to walk evidence dogs and dangerous dogs under current circumstances, leaving some unwalked for months.**

Dog-walking is one of the key conditions at City shelters that precipitated the public and media outcry that occurred in the summer of 2022.

Unfortunately, a combination of staff shortages and pandemic-related absences, a substantial paring back of the volunteer program during the pandemic lockdown, and the repopulation of the shelters with dogs since late 2021 has contributed to a situation that everybody considers unacceptable. It is one which the Department has no choice but to aggressively address as soon as possible.

Several ideas have been suggested for improving the situation. Since volunteers currently are crucial to walking the dogs, the Department must do everything it can to involve more volunteers more often in this activity. Changes in leadership of the volunteer program and a shortage of shelter-level volunteer coordinators may have contributed to the

inadequate dog-walking and the Department must review its priorities to increase dog-walking rather than impede it or leave it at current levels.

The concept of doing “dog walkathons” at individual shelters or system-wide is one approach. Calls for large numbers of volunteers to participate on specified days could help to ensure that every dog would receive exercise during a given week until resources, staffing and volunteer turn-out allow for more regular walking. Such an effort could pose logistical issues that the Department would have to overcome, but the question of getting dogs walked regularly is too vital for hiding behind excuses.

Another effective concept is dog “playgroups,” which have been employed at most of the City’s shelters at one time or another and should be a focus for each shelter. This allows several dogs to get out into the exercise yard simultaneously and can be an efficient way to address this issue, and provide stimulation for the dogs. The absence of these playgroups has been attributed to the inconsistent availability of experienced staff or consultants to supervise the volunteers who help to run them. More about this concept is below in section d.

c. Walking Evidence Dogs

One of the most egregious issues to arise has been the allegation of an apparent lack of walking opportunities afforded to dogs being held in shelters as evidence animals in various kinds of legal or quasi-legal cases. These animals tend to be considered behaviorally problematic or have been involved in crimes or incidents in which they may have bitten or otherwise attacked humans or other animals. As such, there has been a reticence on the part of staff to take them out for walks, and a reticence on the part of the Department to allow volunteers to do so. The Department also has cited concerns about the possibility of owners of evidence dogs stealing them during walks conducted by volunteers.

Comments and Recommendations

- Ensure that evidence dogs are walked or exercised regularly.
- Consider reviving old evidence animal protocols.

While there have been incidents of staff or volunteers being harmed by shelter dogs, the Department has received no formal advice from the City Attorney on this matter, raising questions about whether the Department is being *too* reticent to forge solutions. Leaving these dogs in their kennels for weeks or months on end is likely to exacerbate whatever behavioral issues placed them in the situation to begin with.

Back around 2006, prosecuting attorneys experienced in handling animal cruelty cases developed a protocol for how the Department could humanely handle evidence animals. The Department should re-examine that protocol to determine if it could help them address this issue.

More recently, the Department issued a memo to shelter staff in June 2020 allowing experienced volunteers to walk all but the most problematic evidence dogs, but anecdotal claims are that it is not happening. Since there only are around a couple dozen evidence dogs spread throughout the shelter system at any given time, identifying potential solutions should not be a major strain on the Department's resources. Funds from the Animal Welfare Trust Fund could be used to contract with trainers and/or behaviorists who conceivably could walk the evidence dogs and/or train the most experienced staff and volunteers to do so.

A complicating factor is that, even while they are in the shelters, evidence animals remain the property of their owners, and thus pose a different kind of liability challenge than normal, adoptable animals. Still, one way or another, the evidence dogs must be walked regularly, and preferably daily when possible. Some of them may pose behavioral challenges, but others don't. And none of them should suffer from neglect while in the custody of the City.

d. Exercising, Training, Assessment, and Enrichment

Strongly related to the issue of dog walking is the one regarding exercise, in general. As noted above, one of the most efficient methods of exercising dogs in the shelters has been the playgroup. This is a supervised group of dogs that are allowed to play as a group in the exercise yard in the shelters and is the equivalent of taking a dog to a small dog park, which seems to be a delightful experience for most dogs. In addition to exercise and social interactions, playgroups provide opportunities for enrichment, assessment, training, and behavior modification. There have been numerous complaints that the Department hasn't made these a priority, hasn't made sure that staff understood their importance and has been prepared to collaborate on them with volunteers, and hasn't provided continuity for outside consultants who have helped the Department organize such programs. Similar complaints exist concerning training for dogs, staff, and volunteers relative to handling and behavior.

Less widespread are complaints that the Department does not consistently undertake a behavioral assessment of dogs and cats to provide would-be adopters with more information upon which to base their decision. Some members of the humane community are wary of assessments because they feel they can be used to designate an animal as "unadoptable." Others strongly believe assessments are important tools to promote adoption.

Regarding enrichment, the complaint has been that encouraging volunteers to use dog toys to play with dogs in their kennels is being considered as a substitute for more vigorous exercise by the Department. It is fine to add toys to their enrichment, but not as an adequate substitute for playgroups and walks.

Comments and Recommendations

- Enhance opportunities for dog walking, exercising, and enrichment.

- Consider formalizing the use of programs such as “Dogs Playing for Life.”
- **Contract with an expert or experts on handling dangerous dogs to walk dangerous/evidence dogs, and to train staff and highly capable volunteers who are willing and know how to do this as well.**

Dog walking is an important part of providing humane care for dogs and improving their stays at City shelters. **In the last couple of months, the Department has begun using an app that allows for accurate tracking of how often each dog gets walked and by whom, something that apparently had not been previously systematized. This will help track when they’re not being walked enough, and help assure this does not occur in the future.**

The Department needs to use that technology to make more efficient use of its approximately 800 current volunteer dog walkers. Those dog-walkers are divided into three levels of expertise, with the most experienced and skilled handling the widest variety of dogs and assisting less experienced walkers in enhancing their skills. To the extent possible, the canine enrichment coordinators, the volunteer coordinator and the shelter-based volunteer liaisons should use every resource available to address this situation by ensuring that every dog is exercised regularly.

The Department should make basic playgroups a requirement for each shelter. The exercise yards at four shelters apparently need slight modifications to make them safe to be used for playgroups and the Department should work with the General Services Department to make those improvements as soon as possible.

On top of that, programs such as “Dogs Playing for Life,” currently undergoing a pilot test at the South Los Angeles shelter and, in partnership with the Annenberg Foundation, should be considered for system-wide implementation. Dogs Playing for Life involves professional trainers and behaviorists who provide structured exercise sessions and personality assessments to support the adoption process.

Anything the Department can do to **ensure that dogs get exercise and their adoptability enhanced should be fundamental.** The Department is encouraged to work with the Board of Animal Services Commissioners to formulate policies and programs in this area.

As noted previously, if the staff canine enrichment coordinators the Department is looking to add need assistance, the Department should make more use of professional trainers when necessary and possible to advance the staff and volunteers' skills in handling dogs, dealing with dangerous dogs, and those with other behavioral issues, and in directly addressing issues with individual dogs.

There are documented instances of staff and volunteers being injured by dangerous dogs, so the challenge associated with them should not be discounted, especially with volunteers. As long as the trainers are not regular staff it appears this would be an eligible use of the Animal Welfare Trust Fund, and staff should welcome the opportunity to improve their skills so that less such outside assistance would be required in the future.

Behavioral assessment programs aimed at enhancing adoptability have been implemented by the Department on a limited basis in the past. One such program was offered by ASPCA for the Harbor Shelter. The Department should work with its Board to establish policies leading to focused usage of such programs.

Enrichment programs should not be limited to playing with the animals while they are in their kennels and cages through programs such as "Boredom Busters." Playgroups provide expansive enrichment for dogs. **For cats, being able to spend more time in the community cat rooms that were designed into the latest generation of shelters over a decade ago should be better utilized and cat-oriented volunteers encouraged to play with the cats in those rooms.**

Given the importance of animal exercise and enrichment programs, the recent decision by the Board of Animal Services Commission to

make sure progress is discussed at each of its meetings is a significant step forward and should be helpful.

e. Prison and Probation/Parole Programs

Some activists have pointed to programs that allow dogs to be regularly transported to prisons to be trained by inmates and provide those inmates with an opportunity to learn skills they can use after release and would like to see the Department engage in more such programs. Others have noted how former inmates, whether they've participated in programs of the sort noted above or not, can benefit greatly from having a chance to help with the training of dogs.

Comments and Recommendations

- Seek additional opportunities to pair dogs with prisoners and parolees.

The Department has “dabbled” in these areas in the past and present. It has had a contract with a nonprofit organization to take dogs to a nearby state prison for training, both of the dogs and inmates. This program should be expanded as much as can be practicable.

Approximately 15 years ago, Tia Torres (who has since gone on to fame with the Animal Planet television program, “Pitbulls and Parolees”) proposed to bring a small number of parolees to an Animal Services facility to establish a pitbull training program that would enhance the dogs’ adoptability. The idea was thwarted by a City code prohibiting the hiring of ex-felons and Torres took her concept elsewhere, ultimately landing in New Orleans where she is now based. However, the City law has since been changed and this kind of program, if scrupulously well-managed, might be worth exploring further.

f. Cat Care

Most of the recent concerns have been raised about dogs, but cats have been included in complaints about enhancing adoptability and criteria for

surrender or relinquishment. Since the live release rate for cats typically lags behind that for dogs, these concerns should be taken seriously.

One recent complaint concerned shelter staff incorrectly telling a member of the public that, based on an alleged new City law, only injured or sick cats could be turned into a shelter.

Comments and Recommendations

- **Utilize community cat rooms in every shelter where they are available or build them if they are not.**
- Ensure that staff understands all applicable City and state codes.

As noted above, the community cat rooms that exist in most of the shelters are not consistently utilized. **The behavioral difference between cats who are relaxing and playing in those rooms and those crouching fearfully in regular cat cages is striking.** The rooms should be used regularly, perhaps rotating different cats through them periodically. The rooms could be tended to by volunteers under the supervision of knowledgeable ACTs.

Regarding surrenders or relinquishments, there is no City law governing which cats may be turned in to the shelters and management must make sure that shelter staff fully understand all the applicable laws, procedures, and policies so they are not providing the public with erroneous information, as has been reported.

g. Rabbit and Other Small Animal Care

Several volunteers and activists complained that small animals (hamsters, rabbits, turtles, etc.) do not receive adequate care and attention from staff or, with some exceptions, volunteers.

Comments and Recommendations

- Ensure good small animal care at all times.
- Encourage small animal volunteers.

There have been allegations of a general disinterest in the small animals and rabbits on the part of the Department. However, the Department reports that, contrary to the allegations of some, small animals are being looked in on and fed by staff on the night shift. Facilities have been provided for them, though not always in the most thoughtful manner, and volunteers with special expertise in those species and breeds are not always afforded much attention or respect.

Small animals tend to be relatively low maintenance compared to the dogs and cats who dominate staff, volunteer, and public attention, but they deserve first-class care and treatment like any other animal in the Department's care. Volunteers interested in focusing on these small animals should be encouraged and supported and the animals **should be included in the Department's adoption promotions.**

2. Adoption and Foster Programs

a. Socialization of Animals

The multiple complaints regarding dogs stuck in their kennels for extended periods of time and cats similarly extensively held in cages speak to the behavioral problems animals sometimes develop while in the shelters. The issues of exercise and enrichment, discussed above, are directly related to animal socialization and can contribute to animals exhibiting aggression, fear, or other anti-social behaviors which affect their marketability to would-be adopters.

Comments and Recommendations

- Improve efforts to socialize shelter animals to increase adoptability.

Providing all animals in the shelter with good care, exercise, enrichment and general interaction with humans is a necessity to help them cope with what is an inherently unnatural environment for them. The various ideas discussed above can contribute to this end.

b. Orange List

A longtime volunteer has reported that rescuers, New Hope Partners, and potential Good Samaritans are not notified of animals on the health-related “orange list,” potentially leading to their being euthanized unnecessarily.

Comments and Recommendations

- Proactively notify New Hope Partners and Good Samaritans of orange-listed animals.

For the last fifteen years or more, the Department has employed a color-coded alert system to identify the status of dogs and cats in the shelters. Two of the colors used in the system are especially important, red and orange. Animals on the red list are at imminent risk of being euthanized, a status which was crucially important when the Department was still euthanizing tens of thousands of animals per year. Animals on the orange list are suffering from serious medical or health conditions and may require veterinary care the Department cannot reasonably provide.

Rescue organizations registered in the Department’s New Hope program, which provides the New Hope Partners with enhanced, free access to shelter animals for purposes of getting them out of the shelters, are regularly notified of animals on the red list. These generally are animals who have spent many months in the shelters without being adopted by the public or pulled by rescue groups. In the last few years, as the Department has achieved a high “live release” rate for both dogs and cats, the red list has been used to motivate New Hope Partners to get the animals out of the shelters before they’re killed. The strategy has been quite successful.

Animals on the orange list are a different story. Apparently, orange list notifications are internal to the Department and staff veterinarians that hold the power of life and death over these animals, and to New Hopes. In some cases, a beneficial program called Good Samaritan is employed to reach out to animal lovers who have expressed a willingness to cover

any extraordinary medical expenses an injured or sick animal may require to survive and recover but, according to the complaining volunteer, it is not consistently used.

If this is the case, the Department should be more systematic about notifying known would-be Good Samaritans of animals on the orange list so that these animals have a better second chance at life. They shouldn't be written off simply because staff can't or doesn't make an effort to seek help for them.

c. Recruiting, Training, and Equipping Fosters

A common complaint is that the Department doesn't try hard enough to find foster homes for shelter animals to ease overcrowding.

Comments and Recommendations

- Improve the identification and recruitment of fosters.
- Provide more thorough guidance to fosters as to how to handle emergency situations with fostered animals.

Following a near-heroic effort in the spring of 2020 to find new or foster homes for more than half the animals in the shelter system as it was being closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, Animal Services has worked to make recruitment of fosters a regular part of its marketing program. The Department periodically issues email blasts promoting foster care. However, the Department should explore ways to reach out to a wider audience, using social media, electronic media, and other forms of marketing, including press events and media advisories.

As of this writing, the pandemic is slowly fading and the shelters have been re-opened to the public while protections for tenants with animals are at risk of being lifted as pandemic regulations for tenants are sunsetted. This seems to be directly contributing to an increased number of animals entering all six shelters that are currently operating more or less at capacity. The feeling of community spirit that saw hundreds of people adopt or foster shelter animals at the beginning of the pandemic

allowed the Department to entirely close two shelters for more than a year and is now in need of revival with more fosters recruitment.

On occasion, a foster will be faced with major health issues in the animal they're caring for. This especially can be the case with young animals who may have been prematurely separated from their mothers. The Department should be prepared to provide fosters with preventative education, symptoms to look out for, and clear guidance when these situations arise.

d. Cat Fosters

An ongoing concern for the Department is the unfortunate number of neo-natal kittens that have to be euthanized for want of people available to provide the intensive care they need when separated from their mothers and deposited in the shelters. These kittens comprise a disproportionate number of the felines killed in the shelters.

As noted above, fosters for these young cats sometimes aren't given clear guidance on what to do when these kittens suffer health issues and what the ramifications will be for the foster.

Comments and Recommendations

- Improve the identification and recruitment of kitten fosters.
- Provide clear guidance for fosters regarding kitten health issues.
- Seek opportunities to establish kitten nurseries.

The Department consistently welcomes members of the public willing to take on the challenge of nurturing neonate kittens for the several weeks they need to become viable and adoptable. Upon occasion members of the staff and management take on the challenge themselves, in addition to their normal employment duties. But there never seem to be enough kitten fosters to save all of the kittens who arrive during the spring and summer each year, "kitten season."

The Best Friends Animal Society has been operating the Northeast Valley shelter as a no-kill adoption center for ten years. One direct benefit is that Best Friends set up a kitten nursery for part of that time allowing interested volunteers who lacked the ability to take on full-time kitten nurturing could visit the nursery and cover shifts so that the babies received the round-the-clock care they needed. That program, unfortunately, has ended and how that shelter is operated in the future will determine whether re-starting a kitten nursery there will be possible. Opening or reopening a couple of kitten nurseries seems to be a critical answer.

Being a kitten foster requires training, supplies, and a willingness to feed the kittens every three hours for their first few critical weeks. It can be a tiring, but rewarding experience. The Department is prepared to help would-be fosters but should make recruiting them a part of its regular public outreach efforts.

e. Customer Service

A chronic complaint over the years – and currently – has been that shelter staff do not provide appropriate customer service to would-be adopters. Even in times past when staffing was not hobbled by shortages and COVID absences, staff sometimes did not provide much help to visitors unless they were sought out and asked to help. At times providing such help is left to volunteers, only some of whom may be adept at doing so.

Comments and Recommendations

- Provide shelter staff and volunteers with customer service training **that emphasizes the importance of encouraging adoptions.**

The involvement of volunteers in “marketing” the shelter animals to potential adopters is both admirable and welcome. Among the shelter staff, ACTs would be the ones to take on that duty were there enough of them, but there are not.

In the past, the Department has offered customer service training to shelter staff to enhance their skills in dealing with the public, with mixed results. Unfortunately, this kind of training does not appear to be a regular part of the Department's staff training program, but it should be. When appropriate and if possible, interested volunteers should be allowed to sit in.

In general, the ability of the Department to provide better, more prompt customer service would be greatly enhanced by alleviating the staff shortage. There is no quick fix for that so, in the meantime, personable volunteers should be further cultivated to lend a hand.

A long-awaited reworking of the Department's website due to go live as this report is released should contribute to better public and customer service as well.

f. Retention Resources

A common complaint is that too many animals are relinquished at the shelters by guardians who can't afford to keep them and that these people sometimes appear to be uncaring in their attitudes. The phenomenon contributes to shelter crowding with sick or elderly animals who deserve better.

Comments and Recommendations

- Expand and support retention and intervention programs.

Animal Services is fortunate to have developed relationships with several nonprofit organizations over the last couple of decades that can assist would-be relinquishers whose issues with their animals can be addressed with veterinary care, food, or other help these experienced experts can offer at the shelters or upon referral. These include Downtown Dog Rescue, whose work at the South Los Angeles shelter is renowned for its ability to keep families together. Another is Better Together, which works at other shelters.

Several other such organizations work with the shelters and the public to keep families together with their animals and these relationships and arrangements must be encouraged and expanded as an important public service offered by the Department. **Providing counseling to prospective relinquishers is important, as is providing goods and services that they otherwise can't afford, enabling them to keep their animals.**

3. Shelter Facilities

a. Equipment Maintenance

After the City's animal shelter system was upgraded and expanded in the 2000s the maintenance and repair of the facilities and equipment became one of the ongoing concerns Animal Services has had to deal with. Kennel doors and misters have needed periodic repairs and replacement of parts and kennel floors needed to be resurfaced to improve drainage. Other structural and design issues remain in need of attention.

Comments and Recommendations

- Work with General Services and Recreation and Parks to better maintain shelter facilities and landscaping.
- Consider City sustainability policies and maintenance capabilities in choosing equipment and planning retrofits.

After a citywide bond measure to modernize the shelter system won approval in 2001, Department officials worked with the City's Bureau of Engineering and several architectural firms to design both new shelters and expansions of others. The Department staffer who oversaw the concepts for the shelter designs determined that indoor/outdoor dog kennels were an optimal way to provide healthy environments for the dogs. A water-misting system was chosen to help keep the dogs cool in hot weather.

As it has turned out, this concept didn't anticipate the rising summer temperatures now caused by climate change and relied upon misters that have proven to be more fragile than anticipated, as well as hard to repair

due to the absence of off-the-shelf replacement parts. Additionally, malfunctioning small doors between the indoor and outdoor portions of the kennels occasionally need to be repaired.

When any maintenance is necessary in the shelters, the Department must go through a formal repair ticket process with General Services (GSD), the City Department responsible for maintenance of most of the City's facilities. Getting the work done depends on GSD's sometimes inadequate staffing levels and the availability of parts. **The system generally functions, but not always to a satisfactory level.**

A related phenomenon is the fact that maintenance of shelter landscaping historically has been the responsibility of the Department of Recreation and Parks, another Department that often faces challenges to maintain its own sprawling system of parks, recreation centers, and senior centers. Thus there are times when shelter landscaping suffers. Some argue that it suffers all the time.

In recent years, the City has explored and adopted sustainability measures intended to combat the challenges posed by climate change. These must be factored into the maintenance and improvement of Animal Services facilities.

The Department has been good about reporting its maintenance needs to General Services and trying to work with Recreation and Parks on landscaping issues. It is unclear whether anything can be done by Animal Services to change the situation in the short term apart from considering portable backup cooling solutions. **Shelter landscaping maintenance may need to be moved under Animal Services' jurisdiction and GSD's processes streamlined. The Department should also look at replacing equipment with more off-the-shelf products so maintenance isn't made so slow and difficult.**

b. Kennel Area Repair

A portion of the North Central Shelter's dog kennel area has been afflicted with subsidence in the underlying soil which has cracked the

concrete surface and rendered several kennels unusable for the time being.

Comments and Recommendations

- **Prioritize** needed kennel surface repairs at North Central Shelter.

This problem first manifested itself several years ago. The Department turned to the Bureau of Engineering to analyze the problem and propose an appropriate repair. While that process took longer than hoped for, a repair project apparently finally made it onto the 2023-24 work program and potential funding sources have been identified to pay for the work.

It appears that the underlying problem rests with unstable soil beneath the kennel area which has not negatively affected any other portion of the North Central Shelter. Ideally, this is an issue that should have been addressed in the earliest stages of construction back some 17 years ago. Now it has to be fixed retroactively. **Depending upon the availability of funding, this work should be undertaken as soon as possible.**

c. Rat Infestation

A Neighborhood Council recently alleged that rats have been seen in the animals' living quarters at shelters. Others have said that rats were seen in food storage rooms. The specific shelters where these issues apparently exist have not been identified.

Comments and Recommendations

- Develop and implement any needed integrated pest management system in a manner that is both effective, humane, and animal-friendly, **including a working cat program.**

Any infestation issues should be addressed in an appropriate manner. However, there is a certain irony to the notion that animal shelters might have a rodent problem, given that the Department is a staunch supporter of the "working cat" concept to control rodents in various facilities. The

concept has been used in several LAPD stations, warehouses, on farms, and elsewhere.

The working cats concept allows cats to live in the facility suffering from a rodent problem. Sometimes otherwise unadoptable feral cats are employed for this purpose. Whoever operates the facility also feeds the cats and provides litter boxes, as needed. The cats typically are effective in reducing or eliminating the infestation.

A working cats program is a way of controlling rodent infestations **without using dangerous rat poison** or other inhumane methods. If there is truth to the allegation of rat infestations in shelters, the Department faces the challenge of dealing with them in a manner consistent with its humane values.

As stated above, this program has been successful elsewhere in the City, and, ironically, we are not using it in our animal shelters for the above reasons. We recommend a working cat program at any shelter with a rodent problem.

d. Washing Machines/Volunteer Expenses

Washing machines in the shelters sometimes break down and are not repaired promptly. That, in and of itself, should be addressed.

But when it happens, generous volunteers have been known to take it upon themselves to take blankets and other shelter materials in need of laundering and pay for it to be done in commercial laundry centers. Some have asked the Department for reimbursements but have not received them. When the repairs have taken a long time to be done, the volunteer expenses can mount up.

Comments and Recommendations

- Maintain and promptly repair shelter washing machines.

- **Implement streamlined reimbursement** for volunteers who spend personal funds to clean shelter blankets when machines are inoperative.

The Department, with the guidance of the Board, should consider using Animal Welfare Trust Fund or other monies to reimburse out-of-pocket laundry expenses by volunteers that should otherwise not exist.

4. Volunteer Program

a. Volunteer Intake Process

For decades there have been complaints about the length of time that passes between a volunteer submitting an application and being invited to orientation meetings which preface beginning their service. The Department's current staffing issues have led to extended delays in processing applications of up to several months. As of this writing, the Department has estimated that it has approximately 300 unprocessed applications on top of more than 1,500 active volunteers.

Comments and Recommendations

- Continue the process of computerizing the application process to the extent feasible.
- Provide full-time, part-time, or temporary staff to eliminate the backlog of unprocessed applications and speed up the intake process.
- Keep background checks to the current minimum.
- Consider merging application processes into a centralized volunteer registration and management program.

Several issues contribute to the delays in processing volunteer applications, the least of which is the recent surge in the volume of applications apparently owing to the program re-opening after the pandemic lockdown. That's a good thing.

Less optimal is the fact that turnover in the Department's volunteer coordinator position over the last couple of years has combined with

other staffing issues to slow down the processing of new applications. The Department currently is working to provide more administrative support to process applications.

Related is the process of transitioning the application process from paper to a computerized process. Fewer applications are being submitted on paper, but the more that are submitted online, the faster they can be processed by fewer staff.

It has been rumored that one of the delaying factors is the Department running background checks on volunteers comparable to those the City does for new staff. According to the Department, it only checks its internal records to see if a would-be volunteer has been reported or cited for animal abuse or cruelty. That appears to be the extent of any background check and shouldn't delay the intake process in any significant manner.

At times in the past, the City has looked at the possibility of consolidating its several volunteer programs under one umbrella. This was most recently explored at the recommendation of the Council as part of the 2014 City Budget approval process. The Personnel Department prepared a report but did not make a specific recommendation. Some of the challenges the volunteer intake process at Animal Services faces might be alleviated through a more centralized system. Would-be volunteers could apply there and be referred to the Department for final vetting.

b. Friction Between Staff and Volunteers

Another category of complaints that **long** predates any recent controversy (**and we believe goes back decades**) is the occasional friction that arises between staff and volunteers. **This friction can quite negatively impact the volunteer program and the performance of staff.**

Comments and Recommendations

- Seek to improve preparation and training of both staff and volunteers for dealing with each other and for understanding the nature and limitations of the roles of each.

The PAAW Committee received plenty of testimony and other input from volunteers regarding dissatisfaction with the way volunteers are supervised and treated by certain Department staff. Sometimes the friction is due to personality clashes. Sometimes it's due to attitudinal differences. And sometimes it arises from one or the other being observed breaking rules or violating protocols, leading to confrontations. These kinds of issues are found in many organizational settings in which volunteers play a substantive role, from the government to nonprofits to political campaigns.

Animal Services sets certain expectations and rules for its volunteers which are spelled out as part of the application and subsequent orientation processes. However, it appears that some volunteers don't internalize the need to observe these rules following acceptance into the program. **Some have claimed there is fine print in the agreement they sign, but they liken it to other fine print in purchase contracts, that most people never read.** This can lead to incidents that in turn lead to suspensions or dismissals that could have been avoided.

The Department should place more emphasis on making sure new volunteers are familiar with and understand the constraints under which they are to function, as well as reinforce that familiarity and understanding during the new volunteer orientation process. Making sure volunteers understand the roles and responsibilities of the staff they are working with also is important to avoid misunderstandings.

Staff operates under a voluminous set of Standard Operating Procedures, civil service rules, and other employee policies promulgated by the Department or the City. They also have a specified set of protections and means of recourse derived from the civil service rules, union Memoranda of Understanding, and Department procedures. Staff also go through training before they begin formal work. For any staff likely to interface with volunteers, that training should include guidance on how best to work with them.

One method the Department is introducing to improve volunteer/Department relations is the creation of volunteer advisory or volunteer relations committees in the shelters. These committees could be an effective vehicle for improving the program.

Another would be introducing some form of a mediation process when conflict occurs between volunteers and staff.

c. Suspensions, Terminations, Appeals, and Reinstatement

Prominent in the minds of Department critics among the volunteer corps has been the recent suspension for cause of several experienced volunteers. It has led to the allegation that “many” volunteers are suspended. These suspensions appear to have taken place for the kinds of reasons noted in section 4.b.b. In at least one instance, a volunteer respected by other volunteers was eventually terminated for having several rule violations on his record. Common among the complaints PAAW received are demands that all recently suspended volunteers be reinstated.

Comments and Recommendations

- Consider involving a third party in the volunteer suspension appeal process, possibly via a centralized citywide volunteer program.

The disciplining of volunteers is one of the more sensitive issues facing the volunteer program. Department management states that the process roughly parallels that imposed upon paid staff. That appears at least superficially to be the case, with volunteers being offered a meeting/consultation before a decision is made, and an opportunity to appeal.

Without going into all the details of the differences between the two procedures, it should be said that a suspended or dismissed civil service staff member has the ultimate right of appeal to the Board of Civil Service Commissioners, a Mayorally-appointed body that sometimes finds in their favor and reinstates them. **Animal Services volunteers can appeal, but the appeal is decided by the General Manager. This is an important difference and perhaps probably not a fair one for the appellants.**

In cases where a suspended volunteer feels strongly enough about their case to file an appeal, it could be useful to have a third party adjudicate the appeal instead of the General Manager who suspended the volunteer in the first place. This could be the Board of Animal Services Commissioners (which handles dangerous and barking dog appeals), an attorney from the City Attorney’s staff, an officer in the City Attorney’s

dispute resolution program, or some other carefully chosen arbiter. **We are inclined to recommend a dispute resolution process.**

The demands from volunteers and others that recent suspensions should be rescinded and the volunteers reinstated fail to **acknowledge** the procedures as they currently exist. Some complainants insisted that PAAW or the City Council should intervene and force the reinstatements. This misunderstands the role of the committee and Council in overseeing the Department.

d. Volunteer Rules

Related to the allegations that the recent suspension/firing of certain volunteers was due to violations of the Department's rule that volunteers are not permitted to speak to the media about the department and/or animal conditions without the permission of their supervisor or the volunteer coordinator. These incidents have been widely criticized as being an infringement of First Amendment free speech rights.

Comments and Recommendations

- Review Department volunteer rules and disciplinary procedures to determine continuing appropriateness.

The First Amendment involves the government infringing on free speech, so it's not irrelevant with regard to the rules a City Department imposes on volunteers or employees. However, because each volunteer agrees in advance to the rule regarding speaking to the media (along with more than a dozen other rules) before being accepted into the volunteer corps, they ostensibly have voluntarily waived their right to an unfettered right to speak to the media or press. This is a gray area that we will leave to First Amendment attorneys to sort out.

In the recent cases that drew so much attention, the volunteer who was suspended for speaking to the media without permission acknowledged after the fact that, while he did implicitly agree to the rule as a condition of becoming a volunteer, he hadn't retained an active mindfulness of the body of volunteer rules over the years he'd worked in the shelters. He also stated that he did talk to shelter staff about leading a television camera person on a tour of the shelter and received permission for that,

but not for the informal interview he gave on camera outside the shelter afterward.

That case is less an indictment of the rule and how it was implemented than it is one raising questions about whether the Department optimally handled its aftermath. The Department arguably followed its standard procedure and in doing so generated counterproductive controversy. The Department should use the current period to implement a review of its volunteer rules and disciplinary procedures to determine whether improvements can be made.

The Department should consider a reset with suspended volunteers, engaging in the City Attorney-led dispute resolution process with them, and working to get on the same page with staff so they can be reinstated.

e. Optimizing Volunteer Access

Multiple complaints spoke to the fact that volunteers can only work in the shelters during regular shelter hours, which do not always lend themselves to the availability of some volunteers. A corollary is that many believe that the shelters are not open for enough hours to optimize adoption opportunities for the public and the animals.

Comments and Recommendations

- Consider adjusting volunteer access to accommodate after-hours work.

The question of whether the shelters are open for sufficient hours to maximize volunteer and customer access is not a new one. In 2009-10, the Board asked the Department to keep the shelters open longer hours two days a week, leading to a shift from 9-5 hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays to 11-7. This required working with shelter staff to adjust schedules to ensure that sufficient staff coverage was available to process transactions after the normal 5 p.m. close of business.

Subsequently, management instructed shelter staff to keep a tally of how many members of the public visited between 5 and 7 p.m. on those days and found that attendance dropped off dramatically after 5 p.m. to the point where it was determined that the change in hours on those days was

not accomplishing the desired improvement in access for the public. The shelters were then returned to traditional hours of operation.

This experience didn't address the question of whether volunteer access was enhanced by the change in hours, or whether there was adequate marketing to the public during the later hours. On the surface, it appears that a limited number of volunteers could conceivably work after hours under the supervision of the reduced swing shift staff to undertake such tasks as dog walking or assisting with cleaning tasks. This likely would require careful planning and selection of appropriate volunteers who would be willing to work in the early evenings and wouldn't require constant supervision.

f. Role of Volunteer Coordinator

One complaint (as reported in the Los Angeles Times) involved a comment by the current system-wide volunteer coordinator overheard by a small number of staff and volunteers to the effect that he was afraid of large dogs but not small dogs because he could hit them. Various volunteers then chastised him for this statement.

Comments and Recommendations

- Monitor the performance of the new volunteer coordinator.

The Department told the Times that it was investigating this incident. Because City personnel matters are kept confidential, the results of this investigation are not known. However, at a recent Board meeting, the coordinator apologized and clarified that he "loved animals and would never hurt them."

The coordinator also reported that he is working to improve the volunteer application process, systematize the dog-walking and exercising programs to provide dogs with more frequent opportunities to get out of their kennels and make other changes to improve the volunteer program and experience.

5. Staffing

a. Staffing and Budgeting Shortfalls

A fundamental complaint – and a widely acknowledged problem – is understaffing of Animal Services in many of its key staffing categories. Chief among them are Animal Control Officers (ACOs) and ACTs, the two staffing types that interface most regularly with animals. The staffing shortfall impacts the welfare of shelter animals and the ability of the Department to enforce all of the various ordinances within its jurisdiction.

Comments and Recommendations

- Work toward enhancing the Animal Services budget to provide better animal care and customer service.
- Focus on permanent, as opposed to emergency and temporary, hires in key staffing categories.

As noted in the introduction to this report, the 2022-23 operational budget for Animal Services is approximately \$27 million, excluding pension and benefit expenses. During the recent hearings, discussions, and media coverage, various estimates have been floated of additional funding needed for the Department to fully staff its shelters while accomplishing its other obligations.

A recent article in CitywatchLA suggested that the Department budget requires an additional \$25 million. While that figure is desirable, it's also based on the City's existing budgeting philosophy. With the support of Councilmember John Lee, Councilmember Koretz proposed that the City formally explore alternative means of funding the Department to reach an ideal level of staffing and funding, or at least to an adequate level for doing the work discussed in this report and expected of the Department. Many commenters, from unions to staff to volunteers to activists and members of the public, have emphatically echoed that sentiment. This would entail either proposing a very modest tax to guarantee that the Department has a funding source in perpetuity, or something like Measure L, which mandated that the City budget fully fund the Library Department each year.

In the current budget process, the General Manager asks for much less than the Department really needs, striving to be a team player working

under sharply managed expectations. Historically, the Mayor provides a fraction of what the Department asks for in his Proposed Budget and then may ask for the Department to trim another 5-10% in salary savings. When Councilmember Koretz served as a member of the City Council's Budget Committee, he routinely pressed the GM to identify the two or three most important positions not funded, and then he would work to have funding for those positions placed into the Budget. Councilmember Koretz has not served on that Committee for the past couple of years, so he hasn't had the ability to add back some funding through the budget process has not been available. **As part of the many requirements and demands of the overall City budget, Animal Services is not a "sexy" Department to fund, so it may eventually take a ballot measure to achieve adequate permanent funding at levels needed for ideal staffing and adequate resources.**

What does "ideal" or "adequate" look like?

- Employing enough ACTs to ensure that all shelter animals receive proper daily attention and thereby reduce over-stressing staff or an over-dependence upon volunteers.
- Employing enough ACOs to better enforce the laws protecting animals and promoting animal welfare, while reducing response time on service calls.
- Employing sufficient clerical and administrative staff to eliminate excessive wait times for the Department's customers and those calling in from around the city.
- Properly funding veterinary care to eliminate the possibility of euthanizing animals prematurely for health reasons.
- Properly funding spay/neuter to ensure a robust surgery voucher program for both companion animal guardians and Citywide Cat Program participants.
- Properly funding dog training, socialization, and enrichment that can enhance adoptability and physical and mental well-being.
- Employing volunteer liaisons at each shelter for a robust and well-run volunteer program.

At its July 19th hearing on Animal Services, Members of the PAAW Committee asked management how many shelters it could currently staff to the preferred level. The answer was four. Subsequently, the Department has begun discussions both internally and with the Mayor's

office about what funding level would be necessary to address the various shortfalls. These discussions must continue.

Complainants have criticized Animal Services for not asking for everything it needs to fully staff all of its facilities and activities, but the process described earlier in this report should explain why that has not been happening. The PAAW Committee and every animal welfare stakeholder is looking forward to an earnest dialogue with City decision-makers, especially the current Mayor and the next Mayor, to improve Animal Services' budget and staffing issues as soon as possible. **The goal should be to maximize fully-qualified permanent Department staff with a strong commitment to the welfare of the animals, service to the public, and a collegial team approach to getting the work done.**

b. Animal Welfare Trust Fund

One long-time Department critic asked why funds from the Animal Welfare Trust Fund were not being used to hire staff to improve the dog-walking program. This is a good idea, and Councilmember Koretz' Office will contribute \$50,000-\$100,000 from his discretionary funds for this purpose.

Comments and Recommendations

- Use Animal Welfare Trust Fund monies for eligible purposes to better address animal welfare needs.
- Expand efforts to raise public contributions to Animal Welfare Trust Fund and other Department trust funds.

The City Administrative Code prohibits funds from the Animal Welfare Trust Fund to be used to pay for regular City staff. Trust Fund monies can be used to contract with consultants or contractors to handle various specific tasks that Department staff is unable to address at a given time.

Thus, the Animal Welfare Trust Fund can be used to bring in consulting firms, nonprofits, and/or individual experts to address various Departmental needs. Regarding dog walking and exercising, the aforementioned program, Dogs Playing For Life, would be an eligible expense from the Animal Welfare Trust Fund.

The Animal Welfare Trust Fund depends upon public contributions, grants, and bequeaths for funding, so the Department should make fundraising for this fund and the Spay/Neuter and Star (medical expense) trust funds to supplement the operating budget a top priority.

c. Impact of COVID Protocols

Related to the seemingly constant staff shortages in the shelters since the onset of the COVID pandemic are the protocols the City has imposed on staff that contributed to higher levels of sickness-related absences than would normally occur. Several activists testified that the protocols are too strict and that the City should relax them.

Comments and Recommendations

- Work to relax the City’s employee COVID mandates as circumstances permit.

In 2020 the City of Los Angeles established protocols recommended by the Los Angeles County Department of Health to try to contain COVID outbreaks among staff. They have been adjusted as society has moved through the pandemic. Animal Services adheres to those protocols and will do so until they are formally lifted. Requiring a ten-day quarantine after exposure is probably no longer necessary. We would recommend a protocol of five days and a negative test. The Council should consider relaxing those protocols and Councilmember Koretz is encouraging this change.

d. Upgrading Qualifications

Several individuals who testified at the hearings and the employee unions urged the City to upgrade the qualifications for ACTs to attract more skilled applicants.

Comments and Recommendations

- Work to continue recruiting the best quality ACTs possible.

The definitions and qualifications for City employee designations are developed by the Departments in conjunction with the Personnel Department and other relevant City staff. The City’s public employee unions also are consulted when appropriate.

Upgrading the qualifications for ACTs is something that can be considered. However, raising the salary range likely would be the most efficient way to attract more skilled, experienced applicants. Doing so would require reviewing salaries for a variety of Department positions and considering the potential impact of increasing salaries on the overall budget for personnel.

When it is given the budget to hire new ACTs, the Department attracts a variety of applicants. It is up to the management and Personnel to choose the best available candidates, no matter what the salary range is, and to provide them with the training necessary for them to do their best for the Department and the animals.

e. Liaison to LAPD

The Department was urged to designate staff liaisons to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in each shelter.

Comments and Recommendations

- Ensure communication as needed between Animal Services and LAPD.
- Work with the LAPD to restore the Animal Cruelty Task Force.

This recommendation presumably is motivated by a perceived need for the Department to be more involved and in touch with criminal cases involving the evidence animals being held at the shelters.

For more than a decade through 2020, the Department was part of a partnership known as the Animal Cruelty Task Force (ACTF), consisting of Animal Services, LAPD, the City Attorney, and the County District Attorney. The partnership was formed to ensure that there is designated staff in each Department with focused expertise on animal abuse and cruelty issues and crimes. The Task Force was moderately successful, leading to an increased number of prosecutions.

Partly as a function of the pandemic-related City budget issues and partly as a matter of the police chief's priorities, during the 2020-21 fiscal year all of LAPD's special task forces, including its participation in the ACTF, were suspended. The City Council voted to provide LAPD with \$1 million in 2021-22 to revive its participation, but that Department chose

not to use it. That funding was not renewed for 2022-23. There still is communication between LAPD and Animal Services as necessary.

f. Joint Labor-Management Committee

A staff member testified at the first PAAW hearing that more meetings of the existing Joint-Labor Management Committee would help address issues at the shelters.

Comments and Recommendations

- Convene more regular meetings of the Department's Joint Labor-Management Committee.

In the interest of better problem-solving and communication within the Department, this appears to be a good idea, and one which the Department already has expressed a willingness to pursue.

g. Strategic Plan and Standard Operating Procedures

Testifiers urged that the Department make sure its plans and operating procedures are regularly updated.

Comments and Recommendations

- Review and update these documents as necessary.

The Department's Strategic Plan was updated late in the last decade after considerable input was gathered from interested stakeholders and members of the public in each region of the city. The Standard Operating Procedures have been periodically revised and updated over the last decade-and-a-half. Staff has typically been very involved with that process.

With two budget-related early retirement programs and the normal retirements and departures of Department staff over the years since 2009, the Standard Operating Procedures and Strategic Plan should be reviewed for necessary revisions and updates once a new permanent General

Manager is chosen and to take advantage of the infusions of new staff since their last iterations.

h. Targeted Local Hiring

Complainants who have come to the Department via the Targeted Local Hire (TLH) program noted that required training is made inconvenient for them and that existing staff sometimes make derogatory remarks and is not welcoming.

Comments and Recommendations

- Ensure that Targeted Local Hire trainees are treated with respect and professional courtesy.

The committee has received complaints that the way incoming TLH recruits are treated by staff during training shows a level of disrespect not shown to regular new employees. Among the complaints is an appearance of the use of what is known as “freeway therapy” for training sessions by locating them at shelters that are not close to where many of the TLH trainees live. This could be coincidental, but it’s something management should be mindful of.

Another concern expressed is that TLH trainees are not consistently provided hands-on training in the shelters but rather are instructed to shadow ACTs who are not always helpful or respectful. As described, some of the staff (and volunteer) behavior toward TLH trainees might be characterized as retaliatory in response to trainee questions or expressions of concern.

Since the beginning of the TLH program several years ago, Animal Services has been a leading Department in employing these trainees and the currently understaffed Department can ill-afford to be anything short of fully welcoming to them. Most Departments have found that TLH hires have been among their best and most highly motivated employees.

6. Community Relations

a. Lack of Outreach to Neighborhood Councils

The Department has been criticized for not making adequate use of the one hundred or so Neighborhood Councils (NCs) to distribute information and promote its programs.

Comments and Recommendations

- Strengthen the Department's relations with Neighborhood Councils and use them as a vehicle for promoting its activities including adoption events, recruiting volunteers, and other support.

Animal Services has an inconsistent history of relating to the City's network of Neighborhood Councils. In the late 2000s, an enterprising activist voluntarily established Animal Welfare Liaisons from as many NCs as were interested. These liaisons held monthly meetings and were tapped to provide ideas for the landmark spay/neuter ordinance created during that era. Unfortunately, this group has not been active in recent years.

Subsequently, other activists have visited NC meetings to promote specific programs such as the Reserve Animal Control Officer program. And former General Managers would upon occasion attend NC meetings when invited.

Management and the Department's communications team should strategize as to how NCs can be made more effective partners for the Department and its animals. Presumably, the NCs are on the Department's email list for email blasts, but that is a passive strategy.

b. Lack of Outreach to Beverly Hills

Animal Services has a contractual relationship with Beverly Hills that allows it to only recoup the costs of providing animal control and shelter services. More should be done to involve that city in its work via stronger community relations.

Comments and Recommendations

- Strategize how to strengthen the relationship with Beverly Hills residents.

For approximately a decade, the Department has had a contract to provide animal control and shelter services to the City of Beverly Hills. Apart from an ongoing partnership for adoption events with one prominent nonprofit animal organization based in Beverly Hills, it is not clear what other efforts are being made to raise money and recruit volunteers from that community. This is a potentially fruitful situation that appears to have been under-utilized. The Department should work to rectify that.

7. Other issues

a. Spay & Neuter Enforcement

Several members of the public noted that the Department does not proactively enforce the Spay & Neuter ordinance.

Comments and Recommendations

- The Mayor and Council should commit to a healthy annual contribution to the Animal Sterilization Fund in order to vigorously enforce the City's spay & neuter regulations.
- Ensure that the Department has a robust licensing canvassing program, be it with the current category of employees or a County-like infusion of ACOs.
- Spay & neuter enforcement should always be one of the enforcement priorities for the Department's existing corps of ACOs.
- All shelter staff involved with selling licenses to dog owners should be fully trained on the license and permit requirements for unaltered dogs and required to enforce them at all times.
- Steps should be taken to further simplify and invigorate online dog licensing.
- The City Attorney and Council should complete the process of adopting the pending rabbit spay & neuter ordinance.

- The Department should undertake vigorous annual spay & neuter promotions – possibly in conjunction with existing National and World Spay-Neuter Days – to keep the issue in the public’s mind.

There are several ways to enforce the Spay & Neuter ordinance:

The first is to use Administrative Citations to cite the owners of dogs that are found to have not been sterilized/altered and have not been appropriately licensed by the City.

The second is to use the licensing process as leverage to motivate dog guardians to spay or neuter their dogs.

Third, a corollary of licensing is the Department’s licensing canvasser program by which a crew of canvassers fans out into the city’s communities to afford owners of unlicensed dogs the opportunity to buy licenses, at which time they are cited to incentivize and require compliance.

After the ordinance was approved it was challenged in court and the judge found that it provided owners with options sufficient enough to allow it to remain in force. The ordinance provides limited flexibility by offering owners the alternative of purchasing a more expensive license and a breeding permit to avoid having to alter their dogs.

Over the years since its adoption, complaints have been voiced that the Department doesn’t vigorously enforce the ordinance. There can be disagreement as to what that means. When the ordinance was adopted by the City Council, certain Councilmembers voiced the concern that it would lead to a “spay & neuter Gestapo” going door-to-door to force dog guardians to alter their animals. The Council has never provided sufficient funding to dedicate any Animal Control Officers to focus on spay & neuter enforcement. They enforce in a manner incidental to their other enforcement activities.

The aforementioned licensing canvassers are as close as the Department gets to roaming enforcement agents, but their scope of activity is limited to selling licenses and issuing Administrative Citations. It has been noted that the County of Los Angeles has a large crew of Animal Control

Officers devoted to licensing enforcement and the City has been urged to follow suit.

Shelter clerks play a role in enforcing spay & neuter by making sure owners of unaltered dogs pay for the appropriate license and permits (if necessary). Unfortunately, there have been times, and in fact, it may be most of the time, when owners of unaltered dogs who are buying licenses are not required to purchase breeding licenses, thus giving them an unwarranted and unlawful discount.

Those who offer the generalized complaint that the Department is not enforcing the City's Spay & Neuter ordinance should be reminded that based on the comparable circumstances surrounding the issuance of citations for traffic violations, citing violators when they are encountered in unlawful circumstances is indeed "enforcing the ordinance."

That being said, the City's Spay & Neuter ordinance performs best when most companion animal owners are aware of it. At the time of the ordinance's adoption, LAPD management reminded Mayoral and Council staff that studies had shown that at least 80% of the population readily complies with laws as long as they're aware of them.

Accordingly, the City undertook several months of intensive promotion of the ordinance after it was adopted, using public service videos and announcements, media contact, and heavy word-of-mouth. Consequently, public awareness was notable. Unfortunately, there have been no similarly intensive campaigns in support of the ordinance since then, which definitely has rendered the ordinance less effective than it could be as the years have gone by.

The same could be said for dog licensing in general. While in 2010 the Department went so far as to successfully sponsor and promote state legislation that made the online licensing process more seamless, it has not been effective in ensuring that more than a modest percentage of L.A.'s dogs are licensed. This, in turn, means that the Spay & Neuter ordinance also hasn't approached maximum effectiveness and the flow of the Code-mandated licensing surcharge revenue into the Animal Sterilization Fund has been limited.

To extend the scope of the City's spay & neuter regulations, at the request of rabbit activists, an ordinance is pending to make rabbits subject to those requirements. This ordinance has been in the works for more than two years and needs to be adopted as soon as possible.

Finally, one of the most successful spay & neuter programs the Department has ever undertaken is the distribution of discount vouchers to subsidize surgeries for the public's animals (both dogs and cats). The City maintains an Animal Sterilization Fund to fund this program and, as noted above, a portion of dog licensing fees is regularly deposited into this Fund.

However, to subsidize the number of surgeries needed each year, the Mayor and the City Council must deposit General Fund monies as well. Over the last 15 years, gyrations in the health of the economy have led to those General Fund contributions falling dramatically during poor budget years. This has hampered the Department's efforts to increase spay & neuter to reduce pet overpopulation at the exact time that awareness of its importance has become widespread.

b. "No-Kill" Designation

The City has stated and re-stated a goal for the Department of achieving "No Kill" status since the Mayoral administration of James K. Hahn in the early 2000s. Some have questioned the appropriateness and achievability of that goal, and others have questioned whether short-cuts have been taken or other animal welfare goals short-changed, to accomplish it.

Comments and Recommendations

- No-Kill is an achievable goal, but corners should not be cut to achieve it.
- The Department should make every effort to increase the public's confidence in its statistics.
- Decision makers should provide the Department with the resources it needs to care for and save the animals in its care.

Without going into the history of the No-Kill movement in the nation's humane community, suffice it to say that this effort to save the lives of as

many shelter animals as possible has generally caught the public's imagination. Whatever inconsistencies there may be in a community's commitment to taking proper care of companion animals in every household, there is a common sentiment that when animals find their way into publicly-run animal shelters they should be treated as humanely as possible, given good care, and not killed if there is a viable alternative that doesn't undercut the other goals.

Those who believe that No-Kill is not possible have developed alternative concepts such as "Socially Conscious Sheltering." Department leadership over the last decade has not chosen to adopt that alternative, arguing that it could be considered a marketing term for failing, or a disinterest in trying, to achieve No-Kill. No doubt that debate will continue.

Achieving No-Kill is inherently a backward-looking concept, accompanied by a lofty aspiration for the future. A shelter or shelter system achieves No-Kill in the past but only may or may not achieve it in the present or future. But it can try, and it appears that Animal Services does so.

The "industry standard" for achieving No-Kill is a 90% live-release rate for adoptable, viably healthy animals, as opposed to keeping every animal alive at all costs. The standard is usually applied to dogs and cats, who dominate shelter populations. Animal Services has met that standard for dogs for several years, and for both dogs and cats in 2020.

Because No-Kill is a statistically-based designation, it naturally leaves room for debate as to whether killing an animal in a shelter is truly justified for health or behavioral reasons and not for space. Situations have arisen where, for reasons of resources or staffing, animals have been chosen for euthanization who might have been saved (see "Orange List" discussion above).

Some critics simply believe that the Department consistently "cooks the books" by designating certain animals as unadoptable and not counting them as having been killed for space. To the extent that this might happen, it lacks integrity and must be avoided. Achieving No-Kill status in such a manner does not live up to the spirit of the concept.

No-Kill is a goal, and it sometimes – but not always - also is a state of being in a shelter system. Three consecutive Mayors have committed the City to the goal and future Mayors and Councilmembers should retain that goal. The Department should respond honestly, creatively, and with full integrity to do its best to find "forever homes" for as many animals in its care as possible, and City decision-makers should provide it with the resources to do so. There is no shame in missing the goal by a few percentage points if an earnest, vigorous and truthful effort is being made to achieve it.

c. Role of the Mayor

Complaints have been registered that the Mayor (or a succession of Mayors) has not given due attention to Animal Services.

Comments and Recommendations

- The Mayor should commit to providing Animal Services with the funds required for it to do the job it's expected to do.

The primary role of any Los Angeles Mayor relative to Animal Services is to provide the Department with a budget allocation (ultimately amended and/or approved by the City Council), support (and, when necessary, guide) its overall direction, and appoint a General Manager when a vacancy exists.

Some Mayors have been more engaged than others in the ongoing functions of the Department, but the most consistent issue over the years has been the underfunding of its budget. This partly has been the result of overall shortfalls in the City's annual revenues, usually connected to the health of the local, state, and national economy. It has also been a lack of prioritization of the Department.

As noted earlier, the City Council now has an opportunity to look at alternative means of improving the Department's budget situation and should make a sincere effort to do so.

At times, Mayoral administrations have sought to "keep a lid" on Animal Services so that periodic criticism of the Department doesn't reflect poorly on City Hall. When this has happened it usually has backfired. A policy of engagement over the last 15 years or so has led to the progress

the Department has made in several issue areas, most notably the live-release rate.

d. Role of the City Council's PAAW Committee

The current controversies have led to criticism of the Committee's role as not being sufficiently "hands-on."

Comments and Recommendations

- The PAAW Committee should conduct its oversight and legislative role vigorously but within the limits provided by the City Charter and Codes.

The Personnel, Audits, and Animal Welfare Committee of the City Council primarily has a legislative and arm's length oversight role relative to the Department. In keeping with the mood of the times, critics have alleged that the committee should be stepping into the role of giving direct instructions to Department management as to operations and personnel matters. Under the City Charter and Administrative Code, that is not a lawful role. The General Manager may be a limited report to the committee and the Board of Animal Services Commissioners, but he or she is a direct report to the Mayor.

At times the General Manager might find that having three entities holding some form of jurisdiction over the Department a complicating factor in doing the job. But each entity has a slightly different job. The PAAW Committee (and the full Council) influences and/or directs policy through legislation, and may, on a very limited basis, review operations and management performance as necessary (but without dictating operations). The Board of Animal Services Commissioners makes direct policy and recommendations and provides month-to-month oversight. The Mayor oversees budgeting, makes management choices, and directly oversees management performance.

Thus, when an opportunity is provided by any one of these entities for the public to offer its opinions and suggestions as to what should be done to improve Department operations, those offering the comments should understand the powers of the body they're talking to so as to focus the dialogue on what actually can be accomplished. If the intention is merely

to be critical, that is the commenter's prerogative but, realistically, expectations should be calibrated accordingly.

The current Chair of the PAAW Committee has conducted informal oversight through regular meetings with the General Manager and, less regularly since the onset of the pandemic, the president of the Board over several years. In this manner, issues and suggestions for addressing them are regularly discussed. But many of the most serious issues and circumstances have not surfaced through this process.

d. Citywide Cat Program Status

The Department has been criticized for not doing enough to help feral cat trappers and colony managers with the Trap-Neuter-Return technique of population control.

Comments and Recommendations

- Invigorate the launch of the Citywide Cat Program.

It is well-known that the City lost litigation in 2009 regarding its having carried on activities related to supporting those who care for unowned feral cats. The court found that the City had failed to adhere to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in doing so. A long and costly process of complying by preparing a full Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was finally completed at the end of 2020, allowing the City to resume such activities in a lawful manner.

Inconveniently, this resolution to the CEQA issues occurred at a moment in time when the City's finances were not allocated to support the level of spay/neuter activity necessary to immediately launch a robust program.

That program, defined in the EIR as the Citywide Cat Program, proposed to fund the spay/neuter of up to 20,000 such cats a year, on top of the program to fund the surgeries for owned cats. Unfortunately, the funding to launch the full program was not available until the 2022-23 (current) fiscal year. A limited pilot program began in the spring of 2022 and now is in the process of being expanded, with two additional staff to administer it. The program directly involves several cat rescue organizations and spay/neuter providers and utilizes dedicated vouchers to fund surgeries.

The ongoing complaints that the Department has not gotten the Citywide Cat Program up and running should be addressed directly by launching it in earnest with more adequate funding and making sure that potential participants and the general public are aware of it.

e. Consider Privatization

The current controversies led to calls for a “complete overhaul” and consideration of privatization of the Department.

Comments and Recommendations

- Continue to pursue Department improvements within the City structure for reasons including a lack of interest from outside parties for taking over the operation.
- Ensure that agreements with any future outside operators for shelters set clear, achievable goals and provide both transparency and flexibility mechanisms that allow the Department and the contractor to make adjustments as necessary.

The City has looked at the concept of privatizing or outsourcing Animal Services’ duties at least twice since 1990. In the early ‘90s, the City Council held a full public hearing during which representatives of Los Angeles County and its Department of Animal Care and Control appeared before the Council to discuss the idea of merging the City’s operation into the County’s. This idea was not well-received either by the County or by the local animal welfare community and was not pursued.

During the economic downturn of 2008-09 (the so-called Great Recession), the City again explored ideas for outsourcing its animal control activities. Meetings were held between City staff and representatives of other local private entities who might be able to take over some or all of the Department’s duties. None were identified who were willing to take on the entire operation.

One entity was found that was willing to consider taking on the adoption program for one or two shelters, leaving the animal control and law enforcement functions to the City. The fact that no alternative was found

that would provide the City Budget with any real relief led to the idea being dropped once again.

In 2009, the Best Friends Animal Society approached the City offering to assess the City's animal care and control operation and make recommendations for improving them. This assessment never took place, but the conversation began a line of communication that eventually led to the City agreeing with Best Friends to operate its newest animal shelter, the Northeast Valley Shelter in Mission Hills, as a No-Kill adoption and care center in 2012. **The Best Friends contract came about because the City didn't have the funds to open Northeast Valley, and it was believed at the time that hundreds if not thousands of animals would otherwise have been euthanized for space and lack of staffing.**

This, in turn, led to the creation of a broad coalition called No-Kill LA and the independent creation of a second Best Friends adoption center in West Los Angeles. At the time when Best Friends was contracted to operate the then-new Northeast Valley facility, the City Budget had not supported its operation as a full-service shelter. During the 10 years Best Friends has operated the facility (with the City paying for utilities), the Mayor and Council did not pursue full funding for the operation of the shelter, a wise decision considering the level of underfunding of the system.

Critics have raised questions about whether Best Friends violated any of the obligations of its contract with the City, including the allegation that the organization may have brought animals in from sources other than City shelters, and whether outsourcing management of the facility is still appropriate. At the same time, the organization has at various times undertaken the provision of services such as kitten nurseries and dog training that far exceed their contractual minimums.

At the present moment, with that organization preparing to cease operating the shelter at the end of 2022, the Department is looking to find another entity that can operate it in a similar manner. Critics are objecting, insisting that it instead finally be operated as a full-service shelter. The Department still has not been given the budget to fully staff its other six shelters at present, let alone staff a seventh, so it likely will continue to seek an outside operator.

As part of an overall effort to seek funds to provide the Department with a more robust budget, the Mayor and Council should consider what it would cost to operate Northeast Valley as a City shelter, but not to the detriment of the needs of the other six shelters

The Department currently is being operated under interim management and the City has every intention of bringing in a permanent General Manager in the near future. The Mayor controls that process and the current Mayor will decide whether to make that decision or defer it until a new Mayor is seated in December 2022. In the meantime, implementing these suggestions for reform would be a very significant step in the right direction.