



Shelter Facilities, Operations, and Management Assessment

Rockingham-Harrisonburg SPCA

Harrisonburg, Virginia

March 14, 2016

Animal Welfare Management Services, llc.

Animal Welfare Management Services, llc. (AWMS) was formed in 2012 to provide animal welfare consulting and management services to public, private, and governmental organizations throughout the United States. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Humane Pennsylvania, a national leader in animal welfare founded in 1900.

AWMS brings together skilled and extensively experienced animal welfare and non-profit professionals to provide high quality, affordable services in an effort to improve upon and elevate the level of animal welfare nationwide. By offering access to a wide array of talented professionals which might not otherwise be available to organizations in an often underserved non-profit sector, AWMS allows for swift and efficient implementation of improved systems and models in animal welfare, animal control, and organizational management. AWMS staff and consultants include nationally recognized leaders in shelter and facilities management, animal control, Euthanasia by Injection (EBI), and non-profit organizational development.

AWMS staff and consultants are regular trainers and presenters at national and regional animal welfare conferences and trainings and serve on a numerous state, regional, and national animal welfare organizational and advisory boards. The goal of AWMS is to improve the lives of animals by improving the quality of the programs, services, and organizations serving them.

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Preface

“Shelter Facilities, Operations, and Management Assessment, Rockingham-Harrisonburg SPCA” has been prepared under contract with Animal Welfare Management Services, llc, at the request of Rockingham County (County) and City of Harrisonburg (City) governing authorities, and with the support and active participation of Rockingham-Harrisonburg SPCA (RHSPCA) management. The purpose of this document is to provide an outside, independent assessment of facilities and operations management, offer recommendations for improvement should any areas of possible improvement be noted, and provide a projection for potential capital and operations needs over the next five to ten years.

This document relies in part on the data and information provided by RHSPCA staff and County and City administration, comments offered during stakeholder interviews with AWMS consultants, the direct observations of AWMS consultants during a one day shelter site visit on January 15, 2016, a community “town hall meeting”, and a review of selected records provided by RHSPCA management at AWMS request. The limited duration of the site visit means that the evaluation is a “snapshot” evaluation, not a longitudinal operations overview.

AWMS was contracted to provide a general assessment and to project needs for the next five to ten years, and did not provide any deep program or data auditing function. In addition to the general operations and management assessment, the County, City, and RHSPCA requested that AWMS review the desire of interested citizens within the community who have expressed a desire to ensure RHSPCA is operating and performing in accord with contemporary animal sheltering standards.

AWMS extends thanks to Joseph S. Paxton, Rockingham County Administrator; Kurt D. Hodgen, Harrisonburg City Manager; and Anne Anderson, RHSPCA Executive Director, for their assistance in gathering documents, data, and materials and for coordinating onsite interviews. Where or if cost estimates are provided, they are based on published and reported costs attributed to similar programs, services, and facilities. This document has been prepared by Karel Minor, AWMS Chief Executive Officer, and Damon March, AWMS Chief Operating Officer.

The study authors wish to disclose a limited prior business relationship with Anicera Veterinary Hospitals, which had a representative at the public town hall meeting and has worked with RHSPCA in the past. In August 2014, AWMS provided limited consulting services to Anicera (then known as the Potomac and Shenandoah Valley Spay/Neuter Clinics). The services were limited to non-profit veterinary hospital operations consultation, and had no impact on this assessment process.

The various models and forms of animal shelters and animal control facilities are not generally familiar to those outside of the animal welfare community and sometimes even to those whose experience is limited to a single state or region. Some policies and approaches may be unique to a region, particularly suited to a community, or simply the preference of management, funders, and administrators. This evaluation report provides an assessment based on the assessors' views of best practices and all suggestions must be considered within the lens of the local community's needs and resources. The views expressed within this document are entirely those of AWMS and the authors of the report. This report provides an overview of what *could* be done and for the most part does not attempt to define what *should* be done. However, in places a value judgment on a specific topic, especially in areas of human and animal safety, may be noted based on the authors' professional experience and beliefs.

Please note: This assessment was focuses on potential areas of improvement. Operations of no concern or even excellence may not addressed beyond passing note in some areas. The lack of attention to what is “working” at RHSPCA is merely a function of the assessment process, which focuses on areas of need.

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Table of Contents

Background and Executive Summary.....	6
General Operations	14
Animal Handling Statistics Overview	14
Facilities, Buildings and Grounds.....	18
Facilities, Buildings and Grounds Recommendations	20
Shelter Personnel, Policy, and Operations.....	20
Rescue Partnerships	22
Behavior Assessments	23
Adoption Policies.....	24
Shelter Personnel, Policy, and Operations Recommendations	25
Technology and Outreach.....	26
Electronic Newsletter/Web Presence.....	27
Media Presence	28
Proactive Community & Advocate Outreach	29
Technology and Outreach Recommendations	30
Animal Care and Handling	30
Animal Care and Handling Recommendations.....	31
Trap/Neuter/Release/Return	31
Conclusions.....	32
Appendix I: Combined Recommendations.....	35
Appendix II: Assessment Team Biographies	37
Appendix III: TNR Opinion Letter.....	38

Background and Executive Summary

Background

In September, 2015, AWMS was contacted with an inquiry from County and City administration regarding assessment services. During a subsequent conference call, the County, City, and RHSPCA expressed their desire to engage in longer range planning and to have sense of the current state of shelter operations, community engagement and perception, and possible needs, from an outside perspective. RHSPCA provides animal intake and associated services under contract with the City and County. It was noted that there were no specific major concerns about operations of the RHSPCA from contractual or legal standpoint, but there was a desire to ensure that services being provided under the contract were keeping pace with animal welfare industry standards and meeting the reasonable expectations of residents and taxpayers of the City and County.

A prior assessment was conducted by Humane Society of the United States, and it was felt the outside perspective was valuable at that time. It was expressed that because of the desire to look forward at possible community animal welfare needs, as well as some clearly articulated aspirations by some members of the County and City animal advocacy community to have a shelter that incorporates the most current practices and policies, another outside, independent assessment would be valuable.

The administration group (County, City, RHSPCA) asked that attention be paid to three primary areas of interest: 1. Current operations, programming, and standards as related to contract requirements and obligations and legal standards in Virginia, to ensure that RHSPCA was meeting or exceeding those standards and requirements. 2. Future needs and trends and what may be considered for longer term planning purposes, via facilities, program, operations, and staffing. 3. The input articulated by members of the community relative to improvements to animal welfare and positive outcomes in the County and City.

It was agreed that members of various stakeholder groups should be interviewed separately, to allow for a free and open exchange of ideas and concerns, if any. It was mutually agreed that

these stakeholder groups would be City governmental representative, County governmental representatives, City and County Animal Control professionals, RHSPCA staff and management, and any interested members of the community. AWMS consultants met with County, City and Animal Control professionals in private meetings. RHSPCA staff and management were interviewed during an extensive tour of the RHSPCA facility, both in groups and privately and confidentially. Community stakeholders were provided an opportunity to share their views at an open “town hall meeting” held at the City of Harrisonburg Municipal Building. At AWMS request, no City, County, or RHSPCA paid staff or elected officials were present at the public meeting in order to allow for open and honest discussion by community members.

RHSPCA staff and management also provided unfettered access to all areas of operation, provided all data and records related to operations, animal statistics, a programs, as well as allowed contact with any and all staff and interviews in private.

Based on these stakeholder meetings, the tour of operation, RHSPCA staff and management interviews, and the extensive data and operations information provided, the following assessment has been prepared.

Executive Summary

Damon March and Karel Minor visited the Rockingham County/Harrisburg community on January 14 and convened a series of meetings with governmental and community stakeholders. These meetings provided a sense of the community impressions, satisfaction, and concerns regarding the contract serves provided by RHSPCA. The meetings included a group representing a County governmental group, a Harrisonburg governmental group, representatives of governmentally employed animal control professionals and supervisors, and a “town hall” meeting open to members of the community.

Based on these meetings the assessment team is able to establish a basic assessment of community perception, to the extent the community was represented in the meetings. It is acknowledged that with a single meeting that opportunity for the community to speak was limited. However, these meetings demonstrated some consistent perceptions across multiple

groups. In brief summary (and listed as presented with no evaluation of the perception offered in this section):

Rockingham County Group Meeting:

- The group expressed a general satisfaction with RHSPCA's service as defined by the service agreement.
- The group felt RHSPCA to be a good service partner.
- The group expressed empathy for the burden placed on RHSPC because of its position in a county with profound dichotomies of industry, residential density, community expectations, and a growing population and rapidly changing demographic.
- The group felt that RHSPCA was performing at a level that was generally viewed as acceptable to the greater Rockingham County community.
- The group acknowledged a difference of expectations from a vocal group of Rockingham County residents, particularly those residing in or around Harrisonburg, and the rapid shift in these expectations over the past decade.

City of Harrisonburg Group Meeting:

- The group expressed a feeling that RHSPCA's service expectations, as defined by the service agreement, were being met. However, it was suggested that the contractual service expectations may not be keeping kept up with the community's expectations.
- The group felt RHSPCA to be a reliable service partner, but had a perception of a lack of flexibility and responsiveness to community inputs.
- The group expressed empathy for the burden placed on RHSPC because of its position in a county with profound dichotomies of industry, residential density, community expectations, and a rapidly changing demographic, yet noted a feeling that there was little evolution in response to these changes.
- The group felt that RHSPCA was performing at a level that was generally viewed as somewhat acceptable to many Harrisonburg residents, but not at a level expected by those with a stronger interest in animal welfare. It was noted that the latter reflect a rapidly expanding, and increasingly vocal citizenry, organized and educated on the issues.
- The group acknowledged a great difference of expectation from some residents of



Harrisonburg and the shift in these expectations over the past decade and that this shift was leading to a forward look at how services would or should be delivered in the future.

Local Government Animal Control Professionals Meeting:

- The animal control professional expressed a general satisfaction with RHSPCA as working partners.
- The animal control professionals acknowledged very different expectations from the various communities they represented and felt they were given the latitude professionally to best address these expectations.
- Officers serving more suburban/urban areas noted that they were sometimes stuck between community expectations, the letter of animal ordinances, and the level of flexibility of RHSPCA in managing these competing concerns.

Community Town Hall Meeting:

- This gathering appeared to be overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the operations of RHSPCA.
- While there was a wide variety of specific concerns noted, they tended to coalesce around several specific concerns, beliefs, or impressions:
 - Perception of euthanasia (death) rate to be high compared to other communities.
 - Perception of a lack of community engagement by RHSPCA- low public profile, lack of willingness to partner with other animal welfare groups, lack of press presence.
 - Perception of poor customer service.
 - Perception of out of date policies and apparent lack of interest in changing to meet current practices and trends.
- The specific issue of Trap/Neuter/Release/Return as a factor in cats' outcomes in the community was mentioned repeatedly.
- A general "Us Against Them" feeling was expressed, and the perception was reported as being acknowledged both directions.
- Several speakers noted satisfaction with their experiences with RHSPCA.

Using the feedback received from these meetings as a starting point for interviews and discussions with RHSPCA, Minor and March and visited the shelter on January 15, 2016. They interviewed staff, as well as toured the facility and observed public interaction with staff in the lobby and staff interaction with animals throughout the facility. They also had received operational information in advance of their visit that was very helpful and guided them in their assessment. Staff and volunteers present were spoken with and extended discussion in private were undertaken with management staff for various departments.

The assessment team viewed RHSPCA operations against a yardstick of organizations within its pool of peer equivalents in the Mid-Atlantic region. In other words, its operations were compared against the subjective “industry standard” of shelters of similar type (private non-profit), size and intake (serving a smaller community with moderate to low population density and a relatively low intake level of >5,000), and providing similar services (open admission intake as well as depository under contract for active animal control programs). The assessment team also took into account basic minimum industry standards and expectations for animal sheltering agencies of any type and size.

For outcomes assessments, the team compared RHSPCA against peer shelters in Virginia. Virginia offers a unique public reporting database by which outcomes can be compared against statewide, shelter type, and specific individual shelters.

Based on these interviews, tours, and peer comparisons, the consulting team observed RHSPCA to be a generally effective, well managed, well maintained organization, and in compliance with Commonwealth laws. The physical plant, which was fairly recently built with the assistance of county and city funding, is of comparatively high quality, reasonably well designed and outfitted, and quite modern in comparison to many in RHSPCA’s peer group. The facility was maintained in a sanitary and orderly manner. Animals on site during our tour were observed to be well cared for and to be receiving appropriate treatment, vaccinations, and exercise. Staff was observed to be skilled and committed to the work of RHSPCA. Staff morale was generally good, but there were signs of workplace stress both observed and stated by most members of staff at all levels. It has stable funding from its contributing localities. It has the financial support of donors, although the local animal welfare “market” is being increasingly split



between newer RHSPCA and newer groups. An example of this is demonstrated by a local cat rescue which adopted 847 cats in 2015, up from 351 in 2004, and reported that most of these cats were being transferred in from out of county animal shelters. In the same period RHSPCA cat adoptions declines from 310 to 242. Adequate support from area veterinarians was reported by staff and management, however it was noted that additional veterinary resources would be welcome and of value. Written Standard Operating Procedures are in place, are detailed and lengthy, and were observed by the assessment team to be adhered to.

Based on the data provided for animal intake and disposition for the years 2012 through 2015 (through December 8 due to timing of assessment), three distinct trends are noted. First, the number of animals entering RHSPCA is declining, as is the “per 1,000 residents” rate of euthanasia at RHSPCA. This decline tracks the decline seen in both at a statewide level; however, RHSPCA remains on the lowest level of positive outcomes and highest of euthanasia rate per 1,000 residents. Successful outcomes are also declining both numerically and as a percentage of intake for dogs and cats and are far behind reported statewide data.

RHSPCA management appears attentive and conscientious of the needs of the organization. It has identified organizational needs and taken steps to implement changes to improve, particularly in the area of community outreach. The assessment team noted an unwillingness, both implicit and expressed, on the part of senior management to alter operations approaches which might bring it more in line with current industry trends, specifically in the areas of partnership with other organizations and liberalization of adoption policies. Staff was observed to work hard and well under some limited, though not egregious, resource and operational constraints. There is a clear “siege mentality” among staff and management, who expressed the feeling that they were under attack unfairly from elements of the community. Management’s knowledge of the “state of the industry” and industry trends appeared somewhat behind current trends, particularly in the areas of community outreach, partnerships, and adoption policy trends. In many cases, the organization as a whole seemed to demonstrate a desire to take on a responsibility for and control over issues beyond their control, at a detriment to positive outcomes within their control, especially in the area of adoption policy and partnerships with other organizations. A need to reassess what the RHSPCA’s actual or appropriate spheres of

control or influence is indicated. There is a hyper-safety footing associated with temperament evaluations for animals which appeared to the assessment team to be beyond the scope of reasonable liability concern, and which has a negative impact on animal outcomes.

Based on our review of RHSPCA data, its operations, and its contractual expectations with the County and the City, the assessment team can comfortably offer the assessment that it is operating in a lawful manner, that its operations are driven by established and adhered to policies and procedures, and that the expectations as defined by its contractual agreements are being met. Animals were observed to be treated humanely and compassionately, and the staff takes their work seriously. It is a generally high functioning organization. With these measures serving as a bar, RHSPCA certainly meets or exceeds the expectations of the assessment team in the area of general operations.

When looking at the organization from the standpoint of what is possible in modern sheltering, live outcome and euthanasia by population rates, comparable reported statistics in Virginia, RHSPCA has much room for improvement. While it is clearly “high functioning” operationally as noted above, it is functioning in a model which appears to the assessment team to be decade or more behind many or most other shelters of its type in many ways. The assessment team feels that significant improvement in animal outcomes is possible with organizational policy redirection, should it choose to undertake it. The assessment team is fully confident that many of these redirections are possible under the current level of resources and under the current management regime, which is capable and experienced.

RHSPCA management and RHSPCA’s Board can make some changes to operations through revisions of existing practice which will require minimal, if any, additional resources. Other changes, which will be specifically noted in this assessment, require a reconsideration of current organization policy, which could impact the RHSPCA’s relationship with outside agencies and groups. These decisions are up to the RHSPCA Board of Directors. Likewise, some of these changes may require additional and sustained resources. These areas will be specifically addressed within the assessment report.

Based on the assessment team’s review of animal intake figures in Rockingham (as compared to

other localities in Virginia), the current adoption and placement policies of the RHSPCA, and the growing presence of alternative animal placement groups, it is reasonable to predict that the number of animals housed at RHSPCA will either continue to decline or maintain current levels unless the County and City experience a significant increase in population; further, additional local government resources for the facility and operations are not projected for the next five to ten years. Additions or improvements to programs and services, general facility upkeep and maintenance, and the cost to offer compensation that keeps pace with industry standards will have an impact on future resource needs; however, and should be considered.

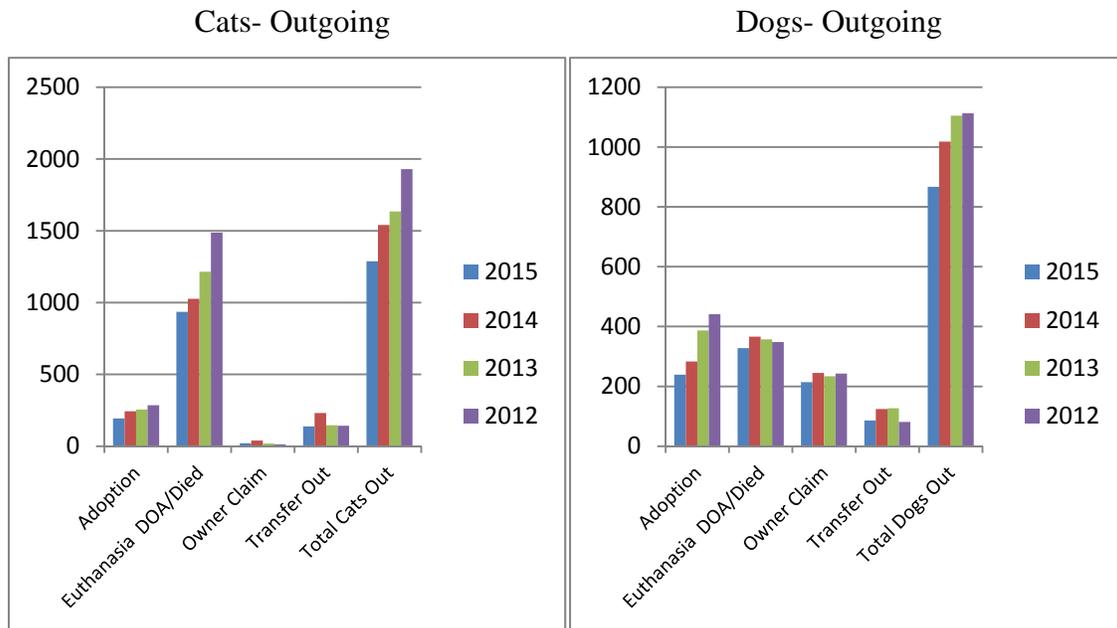
The following assessment report contains a “General Operations” portion, which will include a broad statistical review, and portions specifically addressing the issues raised at the community town hall meeting are addressed throughout. A general overview of areas of potential improvement is provided in each section and subsection, along with a bullet point summary of recommendations for potential improvement. These recommendations are also combined in Appendix I.

General Operations

Animal Handling Statistics Overview

RHSPCA Management provided the assessment team with animal handling data for 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. 2015 data is through December 8, 2015, as a result of the timing of the request, so counts for the year were slightly depressed. This is not particularly relevant since the analysis was focused on rates, as opposed to only counts. The data provided by RHSPCA is in Asilomar reporting format, and follows the essential terminology used to track incoming and outgoing animals in Asilomar reporting. Asilomar reporting format is the industry consensus reporting format among a majority of those organizations which track and report animal handling data. The team used this data to determine the “live release rate” of the organization. This is the percentage of animals which leave the shelter alive through any avenue, in most cases through adoption, transfer to another organization for adoption, or owner claims of strays.

This live release percentage is determined by dividing the number of animals leaving the facility alive by the number entering. Animals which entered the shelter dead on arrival, were wildlife and subject to state game regulations beyond the shelter’s control, animals which died due to severe injury, and animals presented to the shelter for euthanasia at the request of their pet’s owner are excluded from these totals. Since these animals do not reflect a population which the shelter could reasonably hope to successfully release alive, the assessment team does not feel it is appropriate to include this group in the live release percentage. Based on the reporting provided, the following charts show that while the intake and euthanasia numbers for cats and dogs over the past four years have declined, so adoptions, and transfers to other organizations have remained essentially flat. As a result, successful animal outcomes as a percentage of intake have not improved (see outgoing data chart on following page).



Over the past four years RHSPCA dog euthanasia rates ranged from a high of approximately 34% (2015 YTD) to a low of 27% (2012). Cats do not fare as well at RHSPCA with euthanasia rates ranging from high of 76% (2012) to a low of 65% (2014)¹. These euthanasia rates are quite high compared to other shelters of all types statewide and in adjacent communities as reported by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VCACS) database. These rates have also not improved as significantly as other shelters across Virginia over the past decade, despite RHSPCA experiencing a major decline in animal intake.

RHSPCA's current euthanasia rates exceed statewide euthanasia rates from 2004, when shelter intake and euthanasia were nearly double the 2015 statewide numbers. Because of RHSPCA's animal control intake contract city shelters are a reasonable high end benchmark for comparison. Even among City shelters, which have shown the euthanasia highest rates since reporting began in 2004 due to their animal control intake, RHSPCA shows a euthanasia rate nearly as high the historical reporting highs of 2004 for City shelters.

¹ RHSPCA raw data. These numbers which may vary slightly from state reporting numbers due to formatting.

<u>Shelter By Type²</u>	<u>2015 Euthanasia Percentage</u>	<u>2004 Euthanasia Percentage</u>
Statewide Cats	33%	57%
Statewide Dogs	12%	28%
Total Statewide	22%	41%
Humane Society Facility Cats	17%	49%
Humane Society Facility Dogs	6%	25%
Total Humane Society Facility	11%	39%
County Facility Cats	45%	62%
County Facility Dogs	16%	43%
Total County Facility	28%	51%
City Facility Cats	57%	69%
City Facility Dogs	24%	45%
Total City Facility	41%	55%
RHSPCA Cats	68%	87%
RHSPCA Dogs	36%	57%
RHSPCA Total	55%	77%

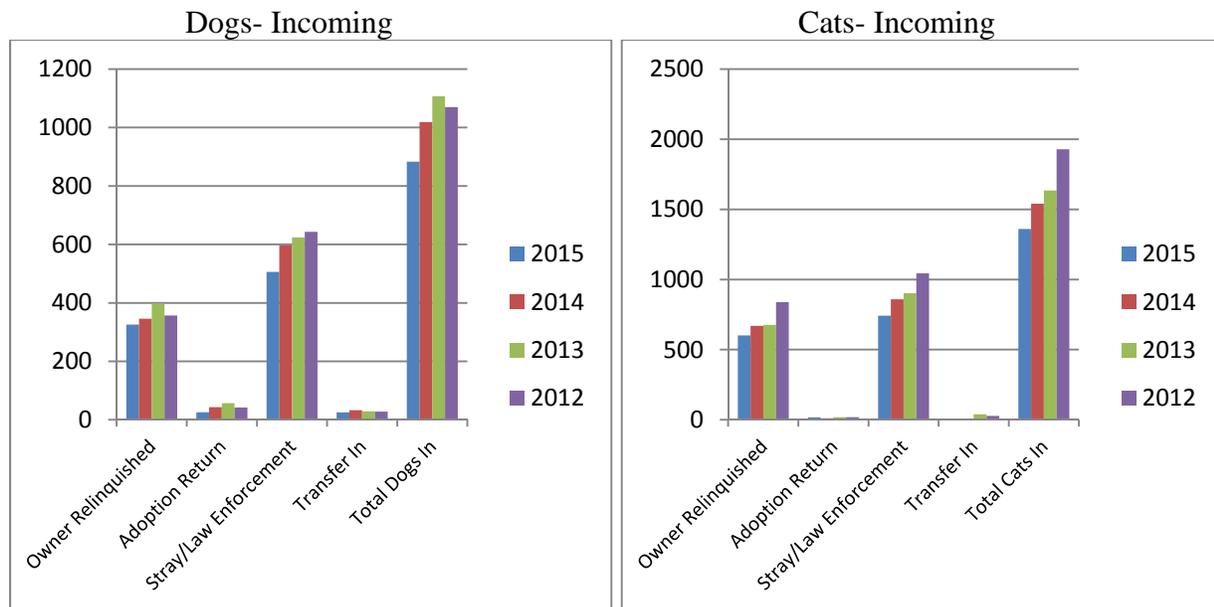
Merely looking at counts and live out percentages can be misleading, as community demographics and the animal welfare community and capacity can often impact these numbers. For example, a very small community may have lower numeric euthanasia numbers but actually euthanize more animals per 1,000 residents. Therefore, another statistic that the assessment team reviewed was the “shelter euthanasia per 1,000 residents” number based on a 2013 population estimate of 130,229 for Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg, and approximately 8,270,000 residents in Virginia (changes over the four year period would slightly decrease current rates and slightly increase previous rates). This rate allows for a baseline of comparison between communities with different populations. Data was collected from the VCACS database.

² Data taken from VDACS database.

<u>Euthanasia Per 1,000 Residents</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012</u>
Statewide Cats	3.3	4.1	5.1	6.0
Statewide Dogs	1.4	2.2	2.7	3.3
Total Statewide	4.8	6.3	7.8	9.3
Humane Society Facility Cats	0.5	0.8	1.0	1.2
Humane Society Facility Dogs	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.4
Total Humane Society Facility	0.7	1.2	1.4	1.6
County Facility Cats	1.6	2.0	2.5	3.0
County Facility Dogs	0.7	1.3	1.7	2.1
Total County Facility	2.3	3.3	4.2	5.2
City Facility Cats	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.7
City Facility Dogs	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.7
Total City Facility	1.8	1.8	2.2	2.5
RHSPCA Cats	6.8	7.5	8.9	10.9
RHSPCA Dogs	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.0
RHSPCA Total	8.9	9.6	11.2	12.9

While clearly on a very significant downward trend in Rockingham County, the rates are still well above Virginia averages, by all types of shelters (private, county or city), and they lag by comparison in the percentage of the decline over the last four years.

When considering likely intake rates for coming year, RHSPCA mirrors the trend reported by most of Virginia's animal shelters and has seen a steady decline in incoming animals.



RHSPCA is experiencing a significant numerical decline in animal intake, as have shelters of all types which have seen a statewide decline of approximately 50% in the past decade. While the majority of organizations have also seen a subsequent decrease in euthanasia numbers and rates and increase in live outcome rates, RHSPCA is well behind the curve compared statewide and by shelter type.

Based on the trend of the last four years, **it is reasonable to conclude that animal intake will continue to decline or level out, as seen in shelters of all types statewide over the past decade. Additional space resources are not likely to be required in the future assuming no major change in operations or dramatic population increase.** Decreasing intake does not necessarily mean decreased costs of housing as animals are likely to fill cages, just for longer periods of time. For these reasons, **there should also be no projections of decreased operating or contract costs,** as animals will simply require longer term care by RHSPCA.

Facilities, Buildings and Grounds

Based upon a thorough guided tour as well as self-guided inspections, the RHSPCA facility appears to be well maintained, and inviting. Most issues were minor and of little more than passing note. The exterior of facility is well kept, but multiple letters were missing from the sign out front and some general weeding needs noted, which cause a slightly shabby first impression.

The old facility remains on the property and is not kept up as well as current facility. Better upkeep, or removal, of exterior, line of sight barriers (fence/hedges) may offer a cosmetic improvement.

We were politely greeted upon entry to the facility. Interior of the shelter is clean. Dust and hair was observed on items and structures above eye level, but not obtrusive to the casual observer. A schedule of cleaning such “above the usual line of sight” areas would be helpful. Front office area has a minimum of clutter and is well maintained. There was no excessive signage and areas were well labeled. One misspelled permanent sign was noted (“Isalation”).

The animal areas are generally clean and in good repair. The building is relatively new and layout and appointment is well thought out. Extending epoxy flooring to outside play areas is clever. The public cat enclosures with lighting behind them are particularly pleasant to see. Animals appear clean and under minimal stress. Animals have food and water, staff actively works to clean and maintain animal areas. Enrichment items were observed in cat enclosures. Several window blinds are destroyed by feral/fractious cats (as noted by staff), but still in place. These should be removed or replaced.

Animal intake and medical areas appear set up and appointed appropriately. Staff reports that gloves are used when handling animals, but instead of changing gloves, they use sanitizer on them between animals. The efficacy of this is uncertain, but it is likely more cost effective. The euthanasia area is set up and secured appropriately. Offices are cluttered but reasonable. Staff’s appearance was neat and well groomed, most were wearing scrubs. Cleaning protocols, feeding, and general care all appear in line with industry standards. The shelter currently feeds donated or store bought foods. A feeding program of consistent high quality food may help to improve the overall health of the animals, but at an increased cost to the shelter. For example, Science Diet offers reduced cost shelter feeding programs. These costs would range in the thousands of dollars.

A crematory is on site and is reported to be in good repair. The “high profile” location and operation warrants some additional comment. Multiple staff and public interviewed noted issues relating to the crematory operations. The smell from operation was noted to sometimes permeate the building. The smoke stack operation during daylight hours was noted to draw notice from the public. The “bone grinder”, used to break up remnant cremated bones and ashes, was noted to be

heard by public, staff and volunteers. The proximity of the crematory space to the general operations space, while convenient for operations, invites notice by volunteers and public.

While cremation is a reality for nearly any shelter or veterinary office which performs euthanasia, it is important to consider the public perception, as well as the monetary costs and the operations and staff impact, of operating an in house crematorium. The assessment team encourages the Board to have management perform a costing exercise and an operations planning exercise to determine if the crematory is both financially viable when compared to possible outside crematory services, or if there might be possibilities for less obvious times of operation for the sake of public perception.

Facility Recommendations:

- A general review of external appearance issues is recommended.
- A general plan to address minor “above line of sight” cleaning is recommended.
- A review of crematory operation and fiscal analysis is strongly recommended.
- Consider a consistent, high quality food source for housed animals rather than using a variety of donated food sources.

Shelter Personnel, Policy & Operations

It was generally observed that the operations and the policies employed in the organization’s service were comprehensive, detailed, and adhered to. However, policies involving animal adoption, transfer, organizational partnership, and behavioral and animal safety considerations appeared to the assessment team to be outmoded when compared to other organizations in the region and the general trends nationwide. The adoption process erects barriers and establishes multiple gatekeeping points along the process which allow multiple people to find fault with a potential adoption candidate. The extended time and process of adoptions, especially for low safety concern transactions such as cats, almost certainly causes persons desiring to adopt an animal to go to other agencies in the County. This assumption was supported by individuals present at the town hall meeting. The “by the book”, inflexible nature of the process is perceived



as unwelcoming to the general public. The assessment team noted an overall process approach in which the public is engaged from the standpoint of “this is how we do things” not, “how can we help you to adopt from us”.

The policies on outside rescue partnership for transfers of animals to other areas and/or organizations showed a similar rigidity. By forwarding animals to other adoption venues, transfers are increasingly the mode by which shelters are diminishing euthanasia. One Rockingham County cat adoption organization, Cat’s Cradle, reports to be bringing in hundreds of cats each year from other counties rather than receiving cats from RHSPCA. It was acknowledged by RHSPCA that it does not work with this group because it does not meet its transfer criteria. The transfer criteria include reviewing the facility location used by the agency for compliance with zoning regulations, which is the purview of the County and City. It may be appropriate for RHSPCA to notify the appropriate jurisdiction of the location of the facility, but the RHSPCA should focus on the operational policies of the agency in determining the appropriateness of a transfer.

Public safety concerns were cited by most staff for the stringency applied to behavioral assessments of animals. While safety is important, there was specific liability concern, such as insurance company demands, or a historical driver, such as a past history of dangerous dog placement. The behavioral assessment utilized by the staff was not directly observed by the assessment team. As the assessment was described to the team, it is likely that an over emphasis on a dog’s behaviors demonstrated in the shelter setting may result in a dog that is not be genuinely “dangerous” being euthanized. Behavioral decisions are certainly one of the toughest decisions for a shelter employee because of the potential risk from a poor choice to “pass” an animal. But combined with the RHSPCA’s limited transfer program activities, in which potentially problem dogs could be transferred to organizations with more willingness and capability to deal with potential behavioral issues, the overly strict behavioral assessment judgements are likely one cause of the higher than state average euthanasia rate for dogs.

Many of the policies and approaches at RHSPCA are dated approaches. Animal welfare organizations are evolving from being simply “the pound” to being more full-service animal shelters. RHSPCA, either through management or under the direction of the Board of Directors,

appears to the assessment team to be slow in adopting this new flexible model. Therefore, while the operations and management of the shelter are technically very good based on established policies and mission directives, the policies and directives are not as progressive as the majority of the animal welfare sector in the region.

The assessment team recognizes that these are very broad statements regarding “policy” in general. Unlike specific cleaning protocols, there are no set industry standards for these general policies relating to animal adoption, transfers, or behavior assessments and policies do vary widely throughout the industry. The assessment team recommends that the RHSPCA Board of Directors and staff evaluate the changes in animal welfare practices as these may provide significant opportunity to reduce the euthanasia rates at RHSPCA.

Rescue Partnerships

It is the opinion of the assessment team, based on interviews with staff and community representatives, that the partnerships and friendships with outside groups which do exist are effective and well cultivated; however, new partnerships are not actively sought out. As a result, only a portion of the work which could be done on behalf of the organization through partnerships is accomplished.

The issue of limited outside partnerships is supported by a rigid set of criteria where all factors are weighted equally. For example, any group accepting transfers must provide the personal information- including names and home addresses of staff and volunteer- to RHSPCA for all foster homes utilized. Is it possible that verifying that the State has approved an organization for sheltering is sufficient? This is one example of criteria that the RHSPCA Board should evaluate to potentially expand partnerships and provide more opportunity to save the lives of animals.

Another concern is that once a requirement is not able to be met, it is viewed as a terminal failure and not revisited. Thus, problems with partnerships from years ago are carried forward. Cat’s Cradle issues including the zoning example, as well as other potential rescue partners, seemed to fall in this area. Cat’s Cradle is a useful example because it is a local resource which currently brings in large numbers of cats from other counties since it is unable to partner

with RHSPCA.

Similarly, in interviews RHSPCA management noted its opposition to Trap/Neuter/Release/Return (TNR) efforts. A philosophical opposition to TNR may be fully reasonable, but RHSPCA has cast itself as an arbiter in deciding the legality of TNR, a role it has no responsibility take or authority to enforce. Rather than attempting to find common ground on which to find a way to avoid something no one wants- the high rate of euthanasia for cats- there was generally an explanation of why things wouldn't work. It should be noted that many at the public meeting expressed a similar "my way or the highway" or "they won't do everything I want so we won't try to get them to do anything" approach. The combination of parties being unwilling to engage in constructive dialogue ensures that no progress is made, even when there may be a viable middle ground.

The assessment team strongly recommends the Board and Management of RHSPCA to undertake a review of policies and "mission directives" including establishing more active community rescue partnerships, possible strategic TNR planning, the way behavioral assessments are conducted, and general adoption policies. Included as an attachment is a recent opinion letter from the office of Virginia's Attorney General that should be reviewed for its potential applicability for RHSPCA and the local community. Resources for these reviews which may provide both direction and a current industry view include Humane Society of the United States and American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals professional resources (many are available online), national and regional training conferences, and outside consulting support.

Behavior Assessments

The general attitude towards and explanation of the process of behavioral assessment was guarded and answers were carefully worded by all staff questioned. Dog behavior and/or temperament is assessed using a modified Assess-a-Pet (developed by Susan Sternberg) assessment tool. Temperament assessment in animal shelters is currently being debated among animal welfare professionals. Periodic internal review of this process is necessary to maintain integrity, but also to determine effectiveness and appropriateness for the organization. Staff did not seem to have a sense of the most current industry discussions regarding behavior



assessments, and the assessment team was concerned that results may be weighed too heavily when determining dog adoptability.

The team's perception was that the testing may on occasion be used to reinforce a previously reached conclusion to "pass" or "fail" an animal for adoption. There was a clear bias to hyper-safety (i.e. deciding any questionable behavior was ground for "failing" the assessment, leading to euthanasia), even when dogs may have been appropriate for transfer to another organization that has greater capability, time or resources to work with a dog. RHSPCA takes the position that if something was not determined to be appropriate under their regulations, it could not be appropriate under any other situation. Although the assessment team did not witness the behavior assessment process firsthand, it did interview staff on the process and it was expressed that there was a perception by some that the behavior assessments were used to justify prior decisions regarding the suitability for adoption of some animals. The assessment team recommends the RHSPCA Board examine the behavior assessment process, as well as the liability and safety factors which were stated to be primary concerns by multiple staff, in combination with the latest guidance from animal welfare publications to keep staff informed of the options available and the criteria that can be used to evaluate an animal.

Adoption Policies

The assessment noted that, despite the high euthanasia rate, especially for cats, RHSPCA has established many barriers to adoption. Policies which are intended to "protect" animals from bad adoptions, and to a lesser extent the public from adopted animals, are instead serving to keep the animals in the shelter where there is a high probability the animal will be euthanized (up to 75%).

The RHSPCA Board should consider revising its home ownership and lease checks, which were once common practice for shelters but are increasingly less relied upon as an indicator of success by sheltering organizations, and which delay adoption. Another requirement that should be reviewed is the delay experienced by persons with no prior verification of pet sterilization, even if there is no indication that the person would not comply with sterilization requirements. The Board should evaluate the current adoption questionnaire which is lengthy, and was described by staff as often being utilized in a "checkbox" fashion eliciting yes/no and potentially disqualifying answers, rather than as a tool for a more open ended, inquiring



adoption candidate interview.

When a shelter has few animals and can pick and choose its adoptive homes, more stringent barriers may be defensible as not leading to unnecessary euthanasia. At RHSPCA, the lengthy adoption screening requirements may lead to euthanasia by slowing the process, delaying adoption, and discouraging potential adoptive families that go to other adoption resources. In a very practical sense, the policies and practices that RHSPCA employs are increasing the risk of euthanasia for an animal in its care, rather than risking the chance of a failed adoption, or transfer to another group with differing policies . This may be a legal and rational (or rationalized) decision to make, but it is increasingly out of step with community opinion nationwide and within Virginia.

The assessment team urges the RHSPCA Board of Directors to review and reconsider all adoption and transfer policies with the goal of diminishing preventable barriers to swift and reasonably safe adoptions.

Shelter Personnel and Operations Recommendations:

- Regular training in the areas of management, customer service, euthanasia by injection, and compassion fatigue is encouraged.
- RHSPCA Board of Directors and management should regularly review policies for rescue and other partnerships, what are the purpose and goals of the partnerships, and how the goals should direct partnerships. Any revisions should be presented to RHSPCA Board for consideration and approval.
- RHSPCA Board of Director and management should review policies governing adoption and use of outside partnerships to facilitate the possibility of increased positive animal outcomes. Any revisions should be presented to RHSPCA Board for consideration and approval.
- RHSPCA Board of Directors and management should conduct a comprehensive review of

behavior assessments, their use, the positive, negative, intended and unintended consequences of the current program, and the liability and safety issues surrounding them, to be presented to RHSPCA Board for consideration and approval.

- RHSPCA Board of Directors and management should review adoption, intake, and other similar policies to potentially simplify and streamline client interaction. The goal would be to find a middle ground between the desire to protect the public from animals that are not adoptable and the threat to animals for euthanasia resulting from the inability of the animal to exit the shelter. Any revisions should be presented to RHSPCA Board for consideration and approval.

Technology and Outreach

In the area of technology and outreach, RHSPCA Animal Shelter is significantly behind the curve when compared to best practices within the industry. This deficiency is somewhat recognized by management and staff, and is largely an issue of lack of experience among staff. RHSPCA is a paper organization operating in a digital world. Many of the complaints lodged by negative leaning community activists may be traced back to a lack of social media and other electronic outreach capability, both due to a lack of community outreach efforts and as a byproduct of the community being unaware of the positive and forward thinking things RHSPCA is doing.

It must be noted that in the midst of this assessment RHSPCA has notably been in mid-process of addressing some of these concerns. It recently hired a professional development/advancement manager with significant experience, and notable marketing/PR experience. This staff member has already begun the process of developing and implementing an advancement plan for the organization. This provides for an excellent opportunity for RHSPCA, but it has significant ground to make up as other community animal welfare groups are better established.

Electronic Newsletter/Web Presence

While there is a place for its paper newsletter, particularly for older demographics, RHSPCA notably lacks an electronic newsletter. In 2016, this is a missed opportunity to connect with the broader community in an easy, effective, user friendly, and inexpensive way. Electronic newsletters allow for easy sharing of news and information, event promotion, adoption stories with supporters and the public and among supporters with a click of a button. They drive press interest and they are close to instantaneous, allowing for rapid response to issues of concern. They provide a regular and constant reminder of the activities and relevance to RHSPCA in the community. RHSPCA should institute practices to gain email addresses from community members in order to expand its membership and to better communicate with the community.

The assessment team recommends that RHSPCA obtain the help and assistance of an individual or business with experience in creating and designing electronic newsletters to assist in the development of the initial templates to ensure a professional and modern look. RHSPCA's current internet presence is dated in appearance. A dated appearance does not create the perception desired by a progressive organization.

RHSPCA should consider soliciting volunteers to assist in creating a small number of standard templates (i.e. adoption, event, and general news templates) and to train staff on creating and distributing, list management, and proper scheduling. Most of the major e- newsletter companies also have valuable tutorials available to clients. The cost of these services is low, from only a few hundred dollars annually. The assessment team suggests a *weekly* distribution target as a goal.

When combined with easy improvements to the RHSPCA website and other electronic capabilities, an e-newsletter can be a particularly powerful tool. As noted earlier, RHSPCA's website is dated. Strong consideration should be given to updating the website, in combination with an e-newsletter. The RHSPCA electronic presence should have a standard appearance to create a branding for the shelter. Website redesign is relatively affordable (a few thousand dollars or less), and is also an opportunity for a qualified and properly vetted volunteer or supporting company to assist the RHSPCA.



The current RHSPCA website is somewhat representative of other aspects of operations noted in this assessment. While the FAQ page is comprehensive and extremely detailed- literally 11,000+ words- other pages have only a few sentences. Rules, regulations, requirements, and prohibitions are all well covered throughout, but the portions which focus on the “intent” of the organization- to connect happy people and animals- and the “needs” of the organization- cultivating donors, volunteers, and donors- need more emphasis. The assessment team recommends a complete redesign of the website. This process should include a review of other shelter websites to obtain suggestions and improvements for community engagement and education.

The website should also include options for online giving and contact information. Currently, all giving options require a paper based transaction. Web giving forms are easy, secure, and give donors an immediate means of supporting RHSPCA. Contacts information currently consists of email links to individuals employed at RHSPCA. While the inconvenience of clicking an email link is not huge, web forms are utilized increasingly, and allow for easy forwarding to multiple employees for oversight purposes and provide a consistent record of contact. Web donation and contact forms should be incorporated into RHSPCA’s redesigned website.

A concerted effort should be made to obtain voluntary email contact information via every single transaction at the organization. Every form- adoption, intake, donation, and event should include an email contact request.

The staff contacts noted on the website should be updated to reflect the new development/ advancement position and direct donor, advancement, press, and other appropriate inquires directly to this position.

Media Presence

One frequent comment from the public meeting was a perception that RHSPCA did not have a strong local media presence. This is understandable and not uncommon for organizations with limited staffing resources, like RHSPCA. The addition of the new development/ advancement



professional offers an opportunity to improve upon this the current level of media outreach. A public relations/media outreach calendar should be developed to ensure press releases are submitted on a regular basis. Regular monthly press releases should be submitted in appropriate format to all local media (TV, daily and weekly print, web outlets), with additional releases issued based on timely current events. For example, the recent historic snowfall provided an opportunity for RHSPCA to engage the community in safe pet messaging.

Proactive Community & Advocate Outreach

No one, at any of the stakeholder meetings or during RHSPCA staff and management interviews, offered a positive view of the state of RHSPCA relations with the broader animal advocacy/rescue community. The general consensus, both inside and out of RHSPCA, was that there were those they worked with, and everyone else. There was significant disagreement on why this was the case and who was “to blame” but there was little or no disagreement that there was an unhealthy relationship between many of the major players in the local animal welfare community and RHSPCA, and there is a serious lack of trust by both.

Partnership, communication, and outreach, among likeminded people and organizations and those with widely divergent views, are critical to success in modern animal welfare efforts. They are among the primary reasons for the decline of euthanasia in many shelters nationwide. Successful partnerships require trust and mutual respect, however, and those appear to be lacking among many members of the animal welfare community in Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg.

The assessment team strongly encourages a serious effort by all parties to set aside past differences and make a concerted and proactive effort to identify areas of cooperation. As noted previously, RHSPCA has tended to conduct relationships based on its views being perceived as the only valid considerations and the starting- and ending point- for any partnership. It is equally clear from many of the loudest complainants at the public meeting that there are many who will not accept anything less than complete surrender and contrition from RHSPCA on every topic of disagreement. As long as this is the case on both sides, there will be no improvement in the relationship between RHSPCA and those with a different vision

in the greater Rockingham and Harrisonburg community.

Changing this dynamic falls, somewhat unfairly, almost entirely on RHSPCA. If it chooses to revise its policies and approaches after considering national trends and best practice options, it will likely increase its partnerships and outreach. It is very possible that those in the community who object to any or all practices of RHSPCA will not be satisfied. That will be unfortunate but it will support everyone's goal of saving more animals than are able to be saved today.

Technology and Outreach Recommendations

- Create an electronic newsletter with a common look with internet presence to create a brand, include multiple templates and develop a distribution plan and calendar.
- Redesign the current RHSPCA website. Modernize to include web forms and web donation capability.
- Create and implement a media contact/press release calendar.
- Proactively evaluate and improve outreach and partnership efforts.

Animal Care and Handling

Animal care and handling was not noted by the assessment team to be of particular concern. Animals were observed to be well cared for, received appropriate care, where in safe and sanitary housing, and appeared under limited amounts of stress. RHSPCA felt it had adequate local veterinary support, but it and attendees at most stakeholder meetings noted that a staff veterinarian would be desirable and valuable. The current facility could likely support a staff veterinarian based on space available with some minimal retrofitting. The animal population would provide adequate work for a part time to full time veterinarian, especially if pre-adoption sterilization was considered. This would also speed up the turnaround time for adoptions and address one of the concerns sometimes utilized as a barrier to adoption and rescue by staff.

A staff veterinarian would come with added costs. Veterinarians are increasingly moving into



the non-profit sector but require appropriate compensation based on local market rates. Proper medical and surgical facilities would need to be provided, and facility renovations may be required. Veterinarians also require support staff with skills beyond what are generally available among general shelter staff. This support ratio is generally one to two or more support staff per veterinarian, depending on the level of service being provided. If public services are considered, a detailed plan must be developed to determine what additional resources are required, what level of services, pricing structure, target market etc.

Costs for these options would vary widely but it is reasonable to expect a minimum \$50,000 capital outlay, and approximate minimum total annual staffing and additional operational costs of \$200,000.

Animal Care and Handling Recommendations

- Investigate staff veterinary options and prepare pricing structure and operations plan for future planning purposes.

Trap/Neuter/Release/Return(TNR)

The issue of TNR was brought up repeatedly in all stakeholder group interviews. It is locally controversial and there is wide disagreement on the desirability and legality of the practice. TNR programs generally involve the trapping, sterilization and release of free roaming cats, generally but not exclusively feral, in an effort to diminish the number of cats euthanized in shelters and roaming the community. TNR programs are increasingly being adopted nationwide and can prove effective if properly implemented, monitored, and supported by members of the community and either endorsed or tolerated by governmental agencies.

While the issues of TNR are beyond the scope of this assessment, the assessment team wishes to note that there was a willingness to consider possible TNR approaches to decrease the amount of cat euthanasia faced at RHSPCA as it relates to trapped cats. There was also widespread expression of all of the reasons TNR was not being accepted by various parties. These reasons ranged from the practical means and mechanisms by which programs could be conducted and funded successfully, to the issue of varying desirability within the agricultural communities of

Rockingham County, the “humane ethics” of free roaming cats, whether the various organizations which would work together would be willing partners, and, perhaps most importantly the legality of TNR programs in Virginia.

The legality of TNR programs appears to relate to whether it is a local government managing and funding the program, which is apparently expressly illegal, or whether it is a private group or individual managing a program. Although there are varying opinions, it is clear that there are active and open TNR programs operating throughout Virginia at this time, with Fairfax County providing on a notable example. If there is a desire to find a means of undertaking an effective TNR program, there are certainly models which could be reviewed. Residents, animal welfare organizations, TNR advocates, and governmental entities would need to work together to determine the means, structure, and acceptable and appropriate locales of such a program. In the assessment team’s view this is not an intractable issue in Rockingham County.

Conclusions

Assessments such as this are often undertaken to answer the question, “Is this a good organization which is functioning well?” This assessment has been requested to answer this one question from two different perspectives.

One perspective is the question of whether the RHSPCA appears to be operating within the requirements of applicable law, the understanding of its contractual obligations with the County and City, are animals well cared for, are the programs and policies well defined and adhered to, and are the staff qualified and capable? The answer to that question is, yes.

There is no doubt that RHSPCA is a high functioning animal shelter. Its programs and policies are well developed and well implemented. The animals receive excellent care while being sheltered. It serves as a faithful partner to be local government contractors. It performs adoptions, it takes in animals. Its staff is committed, caring and appropriately trained. The shortcomings it demonstrates- incipient staff stress, incidental maintenance issues, etc.- are not unexpected in even the very best animal shelters. Its operations, mission approach, and policies are all defensible and not bizarre or out of line with many in the animal sheltering world.



Based on this line of approach, there was nothing seen by the assessment team which should cause the funders of this assessment- Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg- to question the quality of service being provided by RHSPCA under its contract.

On the other hand, a different perspective for the question, “Is this a good organization which is functioning well?”, was requested by the funders of the assessment as well. Is RSPCA doing everything it can reasonably do, are constituents unreasonable to expect more from its contract service provider, and is RHSPCA keeping pace with best practice approaches to animal sheltering? The answer from this perspective is, no.

This assessment is notably short on many specific recommendations for shelter operations because the shelter operates extremely well, as noted repeatedly. The recommendations it does make, tend to be short on words but long on work. RHSPCA can change its approach to sheltering to use best practices and save more animals. Vocal community advocates can change their approach and adopt a tone and words being used which will not further alienate and isolate RHSPCA, and recognize the very good work it has done and continues to do.

RHSPCA is not embracing some best practice approaches to animal sheltering which have been shown to work to save more animals. But they are making a conscious organizational choice to be an extremely good and high functioning organization with deeply held beliefs- and the result is that these approaches may have fewer positive outcomes than others might.

The assessment team finds itself in a quandary in that it can understand and agree with nearly all arguments from all sides and cannot necessarily identify a smoking gun which makes any one party the “bad guy” in the Harrisonburg-Rockingham County animal welfare community. The shelter is undeniably well run. But it undeniably opts not to do some things which could make it well run *and* be more successful at live outcomes. Advocates are correct that other shelters in the Commonwealth and region have accomplished greater strides in increasing positive outcomes for animals and decreasing euthanasia, but are equally wrong not to acknowledge differences in circumstances which aid in those strides and to claim that the RHSPCA is poorly run, staffed by horrible uncaring people, and widely below the standards of peer shelters. Local government is pointed at as being either the cause or the barrier to improvements, but they are clearly open to

new ideas and options.

The broad and general issue of “community outreach” casts a long shadow on all operations. The lack of a community presence via technology and the internet, the lack of a robust volunteer program, and limited client communications and staff interaction, all help make other shortfalls more prominent. However, it is not reasonable, in the opinion of the assessment team, to expect staff to manage standard operations with a noted lack of resources and also undertake community outreach efforts which are a skilled task normally managed by staff trained in this particular area of expertise.

The final major issue which was apparent both within the shelter and without is the current contentious discourse between the organization and some members of the community over a variety of issues. This conflict has fallen into a somewhat cliché and typical form: A well intentioned staff feels it is being attacked unreasonably by outsiders who demand changes which are either not possible or not reasonable, as well as some which are perfectly possible and reasonable. Staff and management disengage because of the lack of options in some demands, lack of credit for real achievements or changes, and lack of apparent understanding of real barriers, leading to the outside voices growing louder, demanding more and offering less conciliation and trust. Many animal shelters have fallen, sometimes irreversibly, into this trap.

Based on the assessment team’s review, it believes RHSPCA achieves a great deal with the limited resources it has, but could potentially achieve significantly more its Board modifies some of its policies. However, it is also clear that many vocal members of the community fail to recognize that the vitriolic style of discourse not only is not helpful but it empowers RHSPCA to hunker down. If even a slight détente can be obtained, real goals can be achieved within identified, realistic expectations and community support will be obtained- even if there is disagreement in some areas. Given this, the assessment team feels significant, meaningful, and rapid improvements to animal outcomes can be achieved.

Appendix I: Combined Recommendations

Facility Recommendations:

- A general review of external appearance issues is recommended.
- A general plan to address minor “above line of sight” cleaning is recommended.
- A review of crematory operation and fiscal analysis is strongly recommended.
- Consider a consistent, high quality food source for housed animals rather than using a variety of donated food sources.

Shelter Personnel and Operations Recommendations:

- Regular training in the areas of management, customer service, euthanasia by injection, and compassion fatigue is encouraged.
- RHSPCA Board of Directors and management should regularly review policies for rescue and other partnerships, what are the purpose and goals of the partnerships, and how the goals should direct partnerships. Any revisions should be presented to RHSPCA Board for consideration and approval.
- RHSPCA Board of Directors and management should review policies governing adoption and use of outside partnerships to facilitate the possibility of increased positive animal outcomes. Any revisions should be presented to RHSPCA Board for consideration and approval.
- RHSPCA Board of Directors and management should conduct a comprehensive review of behavior assessments, their use, the positive, negative, intended and unintended consequences of the current program, and the liability and safety issues surrounding them, to be presented to RHSPCA Board for consideration and approval.
- RHSPCA Board of Directors and management should review adoption, intake, and other similar policies to potentially simplify and streamline client interaction. The goal would

be to find a middle ground between the desire to protect the public from animals that are not adoptable and the threat to animals for euthanasia resulting from the inability of the animal to exit the shelter. Any revisions should be presented to RHSPCA Board for consideration and approval.

Technology and Outreach Recommendations

- Create an electronic newsletter with a common look with internet presence to create a brand, include multiple templates and develop a distribution plan and calendar.
- Redesign the current RHSPCA website. Modernize to include web forms and web donation capability.
- Create and implement a media contact/press release calendar.
- Proactively evaluate and improve outreach and partnership efforts.

Animal Care and Handling Recommendations

- Investigate staff veterinary options and prepare pricing structure and operations plan for future planning purposes.

Appendix II: Project Consultants

KAREL MINOR, *Chief Executive Officer*: Karel has over twenty years of professional experience in the animal welfare sector. He has brought his skills in non-profit management and organization transformation to numerous animal welfare and environmental organizations. He has served in a wide variety of positions ranging from executive leadership to operations, education, and fundraising and development.

Minor served as past president of the board of the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team, past member of Humane Society of the United States' Companion Animal Advisory Committee, currently serves as a board member of Federated Humane Societies of Pennsylvania, and other state and national committees and advisory boards. Minor is a regular presenter and trainer at state, regional, and national animal welfare conferences. In addition to his role at AWMS, Karel is the President & CEO of Humane Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania's largest network of animal welfare organizations and non-profit, nationally accredited, veterinary hospitals.

DAMON MARCH, *Chief Operating Officer*: For more than twenty years, Damon March has specialized in animal welfare and non-profit corporate operations. He has been responsible for the oversight, management and transformational improvement of many animal welfare organizations. March is an expert in executing successful startup or turnaround operations plans and is skilled at rapidly bridging the gap between the current capabilities and aspirations of any organization. Damon is a nationally recognized expert in Euthanasia by Injection (EBI) training, one of only a handful accepted by Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to provided nationally accredited EBI training for HSUS, and regularly presents nationally on animal welfare issues.

Appendix III: Virginia Attorney General's Office TNR Opinion Letter



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Attorney General

Mark R. Herring
Attorney General

900 East Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
804-786-2071
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Virginia Relay Services
800-828-1120
7-1-1

May 4, 2015

Mr. Rob Blizard
Executive Director, Norfolk SPCA
916 Ballentine Boulevard
Norfolk, Virginia 23504

Re: Your letter of April 16, 2015

Dear Mr. Blizard:

I received your letter dated April 16, 2015 (attached) forwarding a November 14, 2013 letter ("the Thomas letter") (attached) from the Opinions Counsel to Attorney General Cuccinelli, Mr. Norman Thomas, stating that the Norfolk SPCA's operation of a Trap, Neuter, Return ("TNR") program subjects the SPCA to criminal prosecution under Virginia Code § 3.2-6504 (Abandonment of animals). The Thomas letter relies upon language in a 2013 official Attorney General's Opinion, 2013 Op. Va. Att'y Gen. No. 12-100 ("the 2013 Opinion"), in reaching its conclusion. You have requested that this office retract and correct the Thomas letter because that letter is based upon an incorrect reading of the 2013 Opinion.

Upon review of the Thomas letter, the 2013 Opinion, and relevant law, I concur that the Thomas letter's conclusion is based upon an inaccurate reading of the 2013 Opinion. The language in the 2013 Opinion relied upon by the Thomas letter has limited applicability to the release of cats under certain circumstances *by a locality*. The Norfolk SPCA is a private, independent, non-profit organization. It conducts its neutering program with private funding in order to better its community by humanely reducing the number of homeless cats and vaccinating as many cats against rabies as possible. You have also represented that while the Norfolk SPCA does neuter cats that are brought to it by citizens, it neither traps nor releases them. For those reasons, the 2013 Opinion is not applicable to the Norfolk SPCA, nor is it applicable any private entity conducting TNR programs. By this letter, the Thomas letter is retracted.

Thank you for calling my attention to this matter, and for the compassionate good work that the Norfolk SPCA continues to do. Please do not hesitate to contact me in the future if I may be of additional assistance.

Mr. Rob Blizard
May 4, 2015
Page 2

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Timothy Oksman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

G. Timothy Oksman
Opinions Counsel

Cc: Gregory D. Underwood, Esq., Norfolk Commonwealth's Attorney
800 E. City Hall Avenue, Suite 600, Norfolk, VA 23510

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Lynne C. Rhode, Esq.
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Animal Law Unit Director/Senior Asst. Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General