

**CITY OF GREAT FALLS, MONTANA**  
**ANIMAL CONTROL/SHELTER**

**ABBREVIATED OPERATIONAL REVIEW**

**July 23-27, 2007**

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## **Introduction**

The following report is based on information that was obtained during a five day site visit to the Great Falls, MT, Animal Shelter. This five day period was an information gathering process that included personal observations of various procedures as well as conversations with staff and other interested parties. In advance of my visit, I was provided with copies of the existing Animal Control Ordinance, fee structure, statistical information, demographic information on the City of Great Falls, and other related materials.

In no way is this report intended to be comprehensive. This is an abbreviated report targeting the most obvious problems that exist. The primary purpose of this report is to outline areas that need improvement.

That said, it is important to note there are many good things happening for animals at the shelter and in Great Falls. I found staff's willingness to offer input, take suggestions, and participate in training to be remarkable and refreshing. And a strong interest in animal welfare was evident after meeting with and talking to representatives of various local animal organizations. There is a lot of energy, talent, and enthusiasm towards making Great Falls a great place for pets.

It is my hope this report will be used as a tool for improving certain aspects of the operation, facilitating a positive public image, enhancing the level of animal care, and offering a progressive approach to animal welfare issues in the community. It is not intended to place blame or judgment on any person or organization regarding existing or past practices that may or may not have contributed to identified areas of concern.

The recommendations outlined in the report can be used as a reference for measuring organizational improvement over time. It can also serve as a template for strategic planning within the animal welfare community. While some of the recommendations can be achieved rather quickly and with no or minimal fiscal impact, others will require long-term planning and budgetary consideration.

It is important to acknowledge how difficult operating an animal shelter/control program can be. There are almost always funding and staff shortages, true here, and constant day to day challenges that take up valuable time and resources. It is a sometimes physical job but always an emotional one. Over time, this takes its toll on even the most dedicated.

I would like to sincerely thank the Police Department for their invitation to visit the shelter and offer input on operational issues. It is apparent they are committed to improving the conditions for staff and the animals.

I am truly grateful to all of those who took time to meet with me during this five day period to help me gain a better understanding of the issues. Accolades to shelter staff and

Animal Control Officers who have the difficult task of caring for homeless and abandoned animals every day.

## **Background**

Historically, Animal Control and shelter personnel have been expected to fulfill many responsibilities with little or no training, limited budgets and staffing, and substandard facilities. Although demands for service and the need for additional programs continue to increase, budgets typically do not increase accordingly. This can result in an inadequate level of service to include slow response times in the field, poor sanitation practices, frequent disease outbreaks, negative public perception, etc.

During the past 10-15 years, Animal Control/sheltering has moved up the ladder in terms of importance in many communities nationwide. New state-of-the-art shelters are being built keeping service and animal care as first priority. Our society will no longer accept a minimal level of care or service.

It is important to note that the vast majority of Americans are very passionate about animals as is demonstrated by the fact that approximately 68% of Americans have at least one pet. Of that percentage, another 65% percent own two or more pets. Recent reports from the American Pet Products Manufacturing Association (APPMA) indicate that Americans spent over \$34 billion dollars on their pets in 2005. This was money spent on veterinary services, grooming, food, toys, purchase of pets, boarding, collars, bowls, leashes, etc. As a society we spend more on our pets than we do toys for our children or candy for our bellies.

It is logical to assume then that most pet owners in the U.S. are willing to spend what is needed to provide adequate care for their pets. Just as with many of societies problems, the majority of animal control and welfare issues are caused by the minority.

## **CRISIS MANAGEMENT VS. PREVENTION:**

There are an estimated 5,000-7,000 animal shelters nationwide that spend vast amounts of time, money, and other resources in order to house an estimated 6-8 million animals every year. Approximately half, 4 million of these animals will be euthanized perhaps making it the leading cause of death for companion animals in the U.S.

Many of these shelters also operate animal control programs or contract with organizations that do in order to impound animals running loose, respond to animal bites, cruelty complaints, etc. These programs are designed to address problems after they have occurred.

While both government and non-profits alike will spend money hand over fist on crisis management, I.e., sheltering, enforcement, etc., they are reluctant to spend much in the way of prevention. I continue to be amazed at how readily we as a society will throw money at adoptions, enforcement, and sheltering, but much less on spay/neuter, community outreach, education, and assistance programs.

Owned animal relinquishment is as high 25% in many shelters and in some cases as high as 50%. And once a particular animal has been given up, these owners will likely get another pet. Behavior “problems” contribute significantly to pet relinquishment yet how many communities provide behavior counseling to pet owners or people who adopt from the local shelter?

While prevention programs may not bring the level of instant gratification that other programs do, such as adoptions, in reality they are critical to the long term solution. I have heard adoptions referred to as the “crack cocaine” of animal welfare. Adoptions make us feel good, the more we do the more we want to do, and the cost of providing quality adoptions is very high, yet we are addicted. While adoption programs should be an important “part” of any shelter, any community that does not allocate significant resources to prevention will experience increases in shelter intake and euthanasia numbers as the human population grows.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Identify and develop prevention programs designed to reduce numbers of animals in the community, enhance the level of pet care and ownership responsibility, and reduce pet relinquishment.
2. Develop a strategic plan(s) to address the many animal welfare issues that exist in your community. This will require some collaboration among the various animal interests in order to be most effective. Individual organizations can have separate plans, however it is important to avoid duplicity or conflict with the goals/plans of other groups.

## **FACILITY:**

### **Facility:**

The existing animal shelter building was constructed in the early 1970’s. Given the amount of wear and tear it has endured over the past 35 or more years, the fact it is still standing is quite remarkable. The design and materials used for construction are typical of shelters built in that time period, however we have found that a multitude of problems occur as a result, perhaps the most important of which is not being able to effectively manage disease problems.

The Great Falls Animal Shelter is constructed primarily of masonry block and is approximately 4,500 square feet. The floors in all of the animal housing areas consist of unsealed concrete which cannot be effectively disinfected.

The drain in the dog housing area stretches the entire length of the kennels. On one side of the kennels, this drain trough is inside the kennels while on the other, it is on the

outside. Either design, especially having the drain inside the kennels, leads to inevitable cross contamination between kennels. When one animal gets sick, there is a huge potential for other animals to be exposed because of the design of the drainage system. These drain troughs are covered with metal grates that are very difficult to sanitize and can also serve as a source for harmful organisms. Proper sanitation of these drains and drain covers is paramount to disease control.

The absence of drain flushes makes it even more challenging to keep the drains properly sanitized. It also makes it much more likely that a drain clog will occur. Stagnant drains can also become a source for foul odors although that was not my observation during the five days I was at the shelter. It is important to note however, that the absence of odor does not equate the absence of harmful pathogens.

Further, the fact that dogs have to be housed on both sides of the double kennels also lends to disease spread. Ideally, each double sided kennel would house only one dog, a mother and litter, or two dogs that were brought in together. Using both sides results in more cross contamination because of the gap that exists between the wall and guillotine doors. It also makes the cleaning process much more labor intensive since animals must be removed from the area being cleaned. Ordinarily, the dog is put on one side of the kennel with the guillotine door closed while the other side is being disinfected. Once the disinfected side has been properly dried and replenished with bowls, etc., the dog is then moved into that area so the other side can be disinfected.

Ventilation is all but non-existent and most of the housing areas don't have windows that can be opened. Some movement of air was accomplished with overhead or exhaust fans. Also, I could detect some cool air coming into the general cat housing room. Having adequate air exchange is key to preventing and controlling the spread of disease. Most recent recommendations indicate that each animal housing area should have 15-20 fresh air exchanges every hour.

There are several cat housing rooms none of which are adequate. The rooms are small, poorly lit, and many of the cages are very small. I observed a few adult cats that barely had room to stand up and turn around due to the small size of their cages. Some of the cages do have perches for the cats and most of the cages, water bowls, and litter pans are stainless steel. This is ideal since stainless steel is non-porous and can be adequately disinfected.

One of the cat rooms, general cat housing, contained a variety of play items, scratching posts, beds, etc. While this is very good from the standpoint of relieving stress, some of these items cannot be effectively disinfected and can harbor harmful pathogens for long periods of time. It is important to remember that porous items can and will absorb harmful pathogens and can remain infective for up to a year, perhaps longer, depending on the particular organism.

In part due to limited staffing, efforts to clean were limited to the animal housing areas and the obvious targets for sanitation, i.e., cages, kennels, floors. Consequently, no effort had been made in what appeared to be a very long time to clean light fixtures, windows and sills, vents, ducts, office areas, etc. It is important to keep in mind that every area of

the shelter should be subject to routine sanitation in order to keep disease problems under control.

Lighting is also a huge problem in this shelter. Many of the lights were not working and the majority of light fixtures were uncovered leaving them exposed to moisture on a daily basis.

Proper segregation in this shelter is also very difficult. Due to its limited size and poor design, there is no effective way to separate incoming animals from those that are adoptable from those that are sick or exposed. To some extent, animals are just put wherever there is an empty cage or kennel. Again, this leads to an increased potential for disease outbreak and spread.

In summary, the existing shelter is outdated and in desperate need of replacement. It is my opinion that even with extensive renovation, the existing building is not salvageable as an animal shelter.

### **Handicapped Accessibility:**

This shelter is not designed to accommodate certain handicapped individuals. For example, due to the layout of the building, some areas would be very difficult to access and maneuver by someone in a wheelchair. Some areas would be completely inaccessible.

Further, there are no identified handicapped parking spaces. (Refer to Americans with Disabilities Act Regulations: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt.ada/adahom1.htm>)

### **Recommendations:**

1. Continue the effort on a local level to raise money for a new, well designed animal shelter.
2. Have the concrete floors in the existing shelter repaired and resealed.
3. Inasmuch as possible, start segregating incoming animals from those available for adoption and house sick or exposed animals from all others. Traffic into areas where sick/exposed animals are kept should be limited to shelter staff that must have access and the public who are looking for lost pets. The public should be accompanied by staff into these areas to ensure they are not touching animals and potentially spreading disease.
4. The light fixtures should be inspected, repaired as needed, and covers installed to protect them from the moisture.
5. All areas of the shelter should be included as part of the routine cleaning process to include hallways, offices, vehicles, equipment, door knobs, counter tops, desks, vents, windows, light fixtures etc. These areas should be disinfected as often as possible.
6. Purchase at least one bank, 12 cages, of larger stainless steel cat cages even if it means removing and not using some of the existing smaller cages. These cages should be used

for the adult cats that are too large for the smaller cages. The new cages should also have perches to allow the cats a place to get off the floor of the cage.

7. Have the ductwork throughout the building professionally cleaned and also determine whether repairs or improvements can be made to a/c system to increase air exchange/flow into animal housing areas.

8. During times of disease outbreak, remove and discard any porous items such as scratching posts, toys, etc. It is much easier and less expensive to replace these items or solicit donations from the community than to allow spread of disease by these objects.

9. Take steps to ensure access to the shelter by disabled individuals in keeping with ADA mandates.

### **SAFETY and HEALTH ISSUES/OSHA REGULATIONS:**

There are a number of safety issues that need to be addressed. Staff are not wearing any type of protective gear, except gloves, when using or coming into contact with disinfectants. Further, they are not taking steps to ensure that disinfectants are properly stored. I observed an open container of Virkon S sitting on top of a kennel and bottles of bleach sitting on a shelf next to pet food.

There were several containers around the shelter that were not identified as to the content. One such container was a bucket of Virkon S that was sitting outside of the building ready for use by Animal Control Officers to disinfect their vehicles. This bucket was being left outside over night.

On one occasion, staff used concentrated bleach from the bottle and poured it down the drain without any dilution. The odor was so intense it caused my eyes to water and breathing was difficult. One staff member had to leave the building to get fresh air. Bleach can be harmful to people and animals when it is used in an improper dilution.

I also observed a staff member standing on a very unstable table to reach areas that had to be sanitized. I was concerned the table was going to collapse. The legs were bending and swaying as she moved about on top of it. I voiced my concerns but I was told the table would be fine that is just “looked” like it was going to collapse.

Another health concern is the fact that many staff have not had rabies pre-exposure prophylaxis. While it is my understanding that some ACO's have had their vaccines, nobody has had a titer conducted to ensure proper immunity.

There are also a number of light fixtures that are not working. I know of 2 occasions where faulty fixtures have resulted in shelter fires. In one instance, the shelter burned to the ground and all of the animals died. Most of the lights are uncovered which subjects them to constant moisture during the cleaning process.

Ceiling tiles in animal housing areas are also routinely exposed to moisture. Some of them appear to be moldy and are stained. Certain molds can be harmful.

Another concern is that in some cases, spent needles are not being properly disposed of. I found a five-gallon bucket that was half full of spent needles sitting by the incinerator. The law requires that any biohazardous items be disposed of in an appropriate biohazardous container. I did observe such an appropriate biohazardous container in the triage room.

Also, much of the equipment at the shelter is either old or has not been properly maintained. I found a couple of control poles that malfunctioned. Malfunctioning equipment can pose serious risk to staff and animals.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop a comprehensive MSDS notebook and make sure all employees are aware of outlined safety precautions that must be taken. Provisions for appropriate safety equipment will need to be made including eye goggles, masks, aprons, gloves, etc. in accordance with MSDS recommendations and OSHA mandates. (several MSDS were provided in the initial information notebook during my visit)
2. Develop and implement written safety protocols, provide training for staff, and hold them accountable for following established guidelines.
3. Put up posters in an employee designated area informing them of Federal “Right to Know” laws pertaining to safety in the workplace.
4. Ensure that all containers are properly identified with regard to contents and concentration. Make sure that all disinfectants are stored away from heat, light, or food items. This should be a secure area that is not accessible by the public.
5. Use fluorescent tape or paint to indicate the presence of grates to help avoid tripping.
6. Ensure that staff are using disinfectants in keeping with proper dilution recommendations, not in a concentrated form. When it comes to effective sanitation, more is not better.
7. Provide training for staff on animal behavior, handling, and zoonosis. This will help avoid bites and exposure to infectious diseases.
8. Make rabies pre-exposure vaccines available to staff who come into contact with animals on a regular basis. This should be an option since there are certain adverse side effects that can occur from the vaccine. Staff who have received the initial prevention vaccines should have a rabies titer conducted every two years in accordance with CDC recommendations for Animal Control Officers and receive booster vaccinations as indicated. For the most current information on rabies pre-exposure protocols, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5309a1.htm>
9. Consult with the City Safety Officer to have an inspection of the shelter conducted in an effort to identify additional safety issues.
10. Consult with the local Health Department on how to best determine the presence of harmful molds in the building and pursue testing if necessary.

11. Provide ladders or step stools for staff to use in reaching high places that need to be cleaned. Remove or repair damaged furniture.
12. Install at least one eye wash station in the event an accident occurs where someone gets bleach or some other potentially harmful substance in his eye.
13. Provide a well-stocked first aid kit at the shelter and each Officer should have first aid kit on his/her Animal Control vehicle.
14. Conduct an inventory of all control poles, traps, nets, etc., as soon as possible. Existing equipment that is not in proper working order should either be repaired or replaced as soon as possible. Equipment inventory and evaluation should include AC vehicles and radios.

### **ANIMAL VACCINATIONS:**

The shelter is currently vaccinating animals that are 8 weeks of age and older soon after arrival to the shelter but sometimes as many as 3 days after arrival. Required follow up vaccines for puppies and kittens are not being administered.

There are several different brands and types of vaccines currently being used at the shelter. Consequently, there is no standardization with regard to what specific diseases animals are being vaccinated against. Also, there was no bordetella (kennel cough) vaccine in the refrigerator during the time of my visit.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop written guidelines outlining vaccination protocols and make sure staff are properly trained on proper administration and record keeping practices.
2. Vaccinate animals that are 5 weeks of age and older upon entry to the shelter. Even a one day delay can result in increased risk of disease.
3. Cats and kittens should be vaccinated against Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calici, and Panleukopenia (FVRCP). Kittens should be vaccinated every 2 weeks until 16 weeks of age. A modified live virus (MLV) vaccine should be used and administered subcutaneously (under the skin).
4. Dogs and puppies should be vaccinated against Distemper, Adenovirus 2, Parainfluenza, and Parvo virus (DA2PP). Puppies should be vaccinated every two weeks until 16 weeks of age using an MLV administered subcutaneously.
5. Dogs and puppies should also be vaccinated against Bordetella Bronchiseptica (Kennel Cough) using an intranasal (in the nose) vaccine. This vaccination should be administered upon intake as well.
6. Dogs/puppies and cats/kittens should also be vaccinated against rabies. Rabies vaccine must be administered by a licensed veterinarian so provisions for having this done should be made prior to adopters taking possession of a new pet. Rabies vaccine can be administered to animals as young as 3 months. Any initial vaccine should be boosted at

one year and future vaccines given in accordance with veterinary recommendations and relevant laws.

### **CUSTOMER SERVICE:**

As in most shelters, there is a lot of work that needs to be done in an effort to provide excellent customer service. This is critical to shelters since they rely heavily on community support for many things including volunteers, donations, etc.

I spent a good deal of time listening to conversations staff had with the public and some of them were concerning. For example, one staff was very abrupt when a customer at the counter inquired about seeing the cats. His response was, “nope, can’t see the cats we are under quarantine.” Staff was sitting in a chair and after making this statement turned his back on the customer and started doing paperwork. The customer seemed confused. No effort was made to explain what the quarantine meant or how long it might be before cats could be viewed. This kind of treatment fosters a bad attitude towards the shelter and will hinder efforts to make this a professional organization.

Other things I observed included staff having inappropriate conversations, not work related, at the front counter and using inappropriate language. I also noted in the afternoons that staff tend to congregate in the office area while the animal housing areas are left unattended.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop and implement written guidelines on customer service and hold staff accountable for following them.
2. Provide training to staff on how to provide not just good customer service, but excellent customer service. Good is not good enough in an animal shelter that relies in large part on the goodwill of the public and when so much is at stake for the animals.
3. Establish a code of conduct for staff that should include prohibitions on the use of certain language while on the job as well as conversations that would be considered inappropriate.
4. Emphasize to staff the importance of always having someone in the animal housing areas to ensure that customers are assisted, animals are monitored, and spot cleaning is continual.

### **STAFFING:**

During my five days at the shelter I made a number of observations related to staffing levels. It is clear that during the morning hours in particular, staffing is inadequate to complete the cleaning routine and be ready to open to the public by noon without compromising best practices. There is one person to clean all of the cat housing areas and one to clean the dog kennels. Not only is this inadequate in terms of following established sanitation protocols, it can contribute to the spread of disease since the same staff are handling animals that are healthy, incoming, sick, exposed, etc. It is very difficult to

effectively manage disease in the shelter if one or two people have to be in contact with the entire animal population at the shelter on any given day.

During the afternoon, my observations were a bit different. As previously noted, staff tended to gather in the front office area leaving the animal housing areas without attendance. This made it difficult to determine what staff were actually needed at the front office. There is a definite need to have staff remain in their assigned areas inasmuch as possible in order to effectively care for the animals and serve the public. Due to current record keeping methods, most of which are done manually, there is some need for kennel staff to be in the front office to place paperwork in the appropriate notebooks.

I also rode with an Animal Control Officer part of one morning. During a two hour period this Officer received two calls, both for stray dogs that were contained by the complainant. These calls took about an hour in part due to the fact that the first complainant had released the dog and the second dog escaped the enclosure in which the complainant had placed him. Patrolling in an attempt to locate these animals was necessary which increased the amount of time spent on each call. A small amount of time was spent patrolling areas from which previous complaints had originated. The Officer returned to the shelter after two hours in the field.

When I inquired about the call load to this Officer I was told that it varies significantly. Some days are very busy and others are very slow with Mondays and Fridays generally being the busiest. It appeared, at least on this particular day, that other assignments could have been given this Officer such as licensing checks, additional patrols, etc. At the very least, Officers could use down time to clean and organize vehicles, equipment, etc.

Additionally, there is a lack of leadership at the shelter and in the field. Staff seemed ready and willing to do whatever asked of them but they were not getting direction on a consistent basis by someone at the shelter. This lack of direction resulted in an ineffective use of time in some cases and staff having to “figure out what to do” to make it through the day. It was not my belief that staff were intentionally wasting time but rather were just not able to find constructive ways to fill their time.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Use the formula posted on the National Animal Control Association website in order to determine the number of kennel staff needed. I made an estimate that you would need five full time staff in the kennels during hours the shelter is open and two on days it is closed using this formula based on an average 10 day holding period. However, it would be beneficial once the record keeping practices have been improved, to determine the “real” average holding period for an animal so that a more accurate number can be determined. (see discussion)
2. Based on my observations regarding the public visiting the shelter and the number of phone calls coming in, I estimate you need a minimum of two people at the counter during all hours the shelter is open to the public.

3. Based on my short experience in the field and conversations I had with Officers, I believe that for now, 4 full time ACO's is adequate given the square miles of the City, the ease of getting around the community, and the comments provided to me by the ACOs regarding workload. (see discussion).

4. Actively recruit for the position of Director of Operations keeping in mind that this person must possess very strong leadership skills. He/she must be able to bring staff together as a team rather than having an obvious separation between the various sections.

### **Discussion:**

While there is certainly no "magic pill" for determining how many staff are needed in the kennels, field, office, etc. there are a number of factors that must be considered in order to arrive at a logical answer regarding necessary staffing levels. In the field we must consider the number and types of complaints, the miles being covered by each Officer, traffic issues, etc. In the kennels we have to consider not only the number of animals being cared for, but how the shelter is designed, average holding periods, etc.

There are some basic formulas and guidelines that can be used in helping to determine necessary staffing levels. This information is posted on the National Animal Control Association website at [www.naca.org](http://www.naca.org) (this information was provided in the initial report)

The Florida Animal Control Association made a basic recommendation many years ago that there should be one ACO per 15,000-18,000 residents. Since Great Falls has an estimated population of 60,000, having 4 full time ACOs would be in keeping with this recommendation.

### **BUDGET/FEE SCHEDULES:**

The 2006 total operational budget for the Great Falls Animal Shelter inclusive of the Animal Control program was just over \$300,000.00. This included monies received from the City of Great Falls in the amount of \$115,000.00. The remainder of the budget was generated through various fees such as pet licensing, owner reclamations, adoptions, etc. It is my understanding there was a budgetary shortfall during the past two fiscal years.

Based on recommendations by the Humane Society of the United States, funding levels for animal shelter/control programs should be \$4.00-\$7.00 per capita per year and even though recent funding levels fell within this range, it was clearly insufficient. (see discussion) It is important to note this is for a basic program and may not include community outreach, education, volunteer, foster, pet owner assistance, community spay/neuter programs, etc., all of which are critical to long term solutions. (refer to the ICMA publication for more information on community animal control programs)

Since the current estimated population of Great Falls is 60,000, this would mean that a level of funding of \$240,000-\$420,000 would be appropriate for these basic services. However, due to the age of the facility and constant maintenance and sanitation challenges in addition to having outdated animal control vehicles and other equipment,

lack of staff training, etc., it is my opinion that funding should be closer to the \$7.00 per capita range or \$420,000.

It remains to be seen where this funding will come from and what organization will ultimately be responsible for the operation of the shelter and animal control programs. However, the level of funding offered by the City has not met even the minimal recommendation for funding of \$240,000 per year. Since animal control, from a public safety standpoint, is truly a government responsibility, it stands to reason that this minimal level of funding should be provided by government.

That said, it is also appropriate to expect that City and County government entities would each provide funding based on a per capita rate. Based on the 2000 Census Report for Cascade County, the population was just over 80,000. (see appendix 1)

Assuming there has not been a dramatic change in population for the City or County during the past 7 years, we can discern from this a County population, exclusive of the City of Great Falls, to be approximately 20,000. Consequently, the minimal level of funding provided by the County towards the cost of the Animal Control/Shelter programs should be \$80,000 annually minus the salary of the existing ACO position already funded by the County. Total funding for this position including all benefits is approximately \$30,000 leaving a balance of \$50,000 per year. (see discussion) The combined government totals at a minimal level of funding based on a per capita rate of \$4.00 would be \$290,000.00. Assuming a total operational budget of \$420,000, this would leave \$130,000 left to be generated through adoptions, reclamations, licensing, fundraising, and donor development and would become the responsibility of the oversight organization.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Regardless of who is operating the shelter/animal control program in the future, an absolute minimal level of funding should be \$420,000.
2. The City and County provide funding at the \$4.00 per capita rate if a non-profit group assumes operation responsibilities. If the City assumes long term responsibility for the operation of the shelter and Animal Control program, the entire \$420,000 amount would become their responsibility.
3. If a non-profit group becomes responsible for the operation of the shelter and/or Animal Control program, efforts should be made to fundraise and develop a donor base in order to supplement City/County funding and revenues generated from adoptions, licensing etc.

### **Discussion:**

If there has been any change in population in the City or County, adjustments must be made accordingly.

Also, please note that the cost of the AC vehicle, fuel, and maintenance were not deducted from the estimated amount the County should pay. I had no information on this and did not want to over/under estimate these amounts.

**Fee structure:**

On July 1, 2007, the below fee schedule became effective.

**Registration/licensing fees: Altered: Unaltered:**

1 year \$15.00 \$30.00

Lifetime 75.00 150.00

**Impoundment Fees:**

1<sup>st</sup> impound/registered \$20.00 \$40.00

1<sup>st</sup> impound/not registered 40.00 80.00

2<sup>nd</sup> impound/registered 30.00 60.00

2<sup>nd</sup> impound/not registered 60.00 120.00

3<sup>rd</sup> impound and above/registered 40.00 80.00

3<sup>rd</sup> impound and above/not reg. 100.00 200.00

**Deposits:**

Rabies: \$15.00 \$30.00

Dog: N/A \$100.00

Cat: N/A 15.00

Adoption s/n: N/A 200.00

**Vaccination Fee:**

Parvo/distemper \$40.00 80.00

**Boarding Fee (per day) Altered: Unaltered:**

Dog \$15.00 \$30.00

Cat 15.00 30.00

**Multiple animal permit: 1 year: Lifetime:**

6 or fewer total animals \$25.00 \$50.00

7 or more total animals 50.00 100.00

**Multiple Animal Hobby Breeder Permit:**

\$300.00 per year

### **Senior Citizens: (over 65)**

½ price on all registration, multiple animal permits, and multiple hobby breeder permits.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Eliminate the lifetime unaltered registration fee. Licensing differentials are put into place to serve as incentive for owners of unaltered/intact pets to have them spayed/neutered. A provision for a lifetime registration removes that yearly incentive.
2. Revise the ordinance to include provisions for mandating that pets be spayed/neutered upon 3<sup>rd</sup> impoundment prior to return to the owner. The cost of such s/n should be the responsibility of the owner. A number of ordinances now have such requirements.
3. Establish a spay/neuter fund whereby as portion of registration, boarding, and reclamation fees collected for unaltered animals is used to subsidize a local voucher program. (see below discussion for explanation of voucher program)
4. Discontinue Senior discounts for any unaltered animal, most especially multiple animal hobby breeders. (see below discussion for further explanation)
5. Discontinue the \$200.00 adoption s/n fee and instead charge an adoption fee that is not refundable. This fee should cover a significant portion of the actual cost of caring for the animal, vaccinations, spay/neuter, etc. (See discussion below)

### **Discussion:**

Voucher programs are becoming more and more common place and can be a great way to ensure that more animals in your community are spayed/neutered. Essentially, veterinarians are given the option of whether to participate in the program or not. Each participating veterinarian would then agree a set price for spay/neuter (s/n) services.

This agreed upon amount is paid by a fund set up for this purpose. The fee is usually somewhat less than would typically be charged to an individual client. Vouchers are issued to pet owners who cannot afford the cost of a typical spay/neuter and it is usually required they show some evidence of limited income. The owner then pays a voucher co-pay, usually \$10.00-20.00, to the vet when the animal is picked up after surgery. The veterinarian bills, usually on a monthly basis, the organization that controls the s/n fund for payment for services rendered based on the previously agreed upon price.

It stands to reason that pet owners who have intact pets should subsidize the cost of such programs. By using portions of fees imposed on the owners of these animals, not only do these owners contribute to the cause, but they now may have access to low cost s/n.

While it is certainly appropriate to give Senior citizens a discount when they act responsibly with their pets, I cannot support offering discounts when anyone, Senior citizen or otherwise, may be contributing to the problems we are trying to combat. Offering Senior citizen discounts for intact animals and breeders is not appropriate in

winning the battle against pet overpopulation and all the many problems that go along with it.

I am concerned that requiring a \$200.00 deposit on adoptions to ensure spay/neuter of the adopted animal may result in a marked reduction in the number of adoptions. Even though this money will be refunded, it is still quite high for most people. Also considering the fact that they have to pay a non-refundable fee of \$85.00 on top of the \$200.00 deposit, it is likely that people will resort to getting pets from other sources such as a neighbor, newspaper ads, etc.

Instead of requiring this deposit, arrangements should be made for animals to be s/n prior to adopters taking possession of their new pet. This can be accomplished a number of ways but the most logical, at least for now, would be to have a volunteer transport animals to a local vet for s/n and have the adopter pick the animal up.

### **ANIMAL CARE:**

As in many shelters, this was an area that I found to have both positive and negative aspects. While staff made a concerted effort to assess animals upon intake and record this information using an "Animal Health Check" form, no real training had been provided on how to properly evaluate an animal. For the most part, staff training consisted of "on the job" learning from previous employees whose training was also limited. Consequently, the legitimacy of any findings is questionable.

The "Health Check" form allows staff to record information about any abnormal findings as well as vaccination and deworming history. This form is provided to adopters to give to their veterinarian and will become part of the pet's medical record. This is a very positive approach towards encouraging the public in getting the animal established with a local veterinarian.

I must commend staff on the fact they do monitor food and water intake of the animals. This is certainly something that is needed but rarely done. Proper food and water intake is critical to an animal's well being and must be monitored closely. I was highly impressed by the fact this was being done.

Further, a "Medical Sheet" is used to record information about medications given to particular animals. It allows for the name of the medication and the times when they have been administered as well as the initials of the person giving the meds, the animal ID number, and the cage number. These records are kept in a notebook in the front office.

Current provisions for veterinary care are minimal and consist of a very brief visit by a local veterinarian each morning. There is no system in place for reporting sick animals to the veterinarian. Consequently, he conducts a brief walk-through in an effort to identify problems.

After the morning visit, there are no provisions for veterinary care during the day or night should a situation occur that would require veterinary care or expertise. When I asked one Officer what he would do if he picked up an injured animal during the night, he said, "I don't know."

Additionally, the food that is provided is a concoction of donations from local stores such as Walmart and citizens. The food is mixed together as needed and animals fed from the latest batch of mixed food. Unfortunately, this is not the best approach to ensuring a good nutritional program or controlling potential diet related problems such as diarrhea.

And finally, I was provided with a copy of the “Animal Care Standards” (see appendix 2) that are evidently given to pet owners in the community regarding minimal acceptable levels of care for their pets. After reviewing these standards, it appears the shelter is not complying with all of the recommendations made to the public to include:

1. Provisions for adequate space. (some cats are too big for their cages)
2. Provisions for adequate exercise. (most animal are confined to their cages with the exception of a few dogs that get walked by volunteers or cats in the general housing area.)

### **Recommendations:**

1. Provide training to staff on how to evaluate animal health
2. Establish procedures for reporting suspected sick or injured animals to the veterinarian to ensure these animals are examined during the morning visit.
3. Make provisions for suspected sick or injured animals to be examined and treated by a veterinarian as soon as possible to include provisions for night time emergencies. (see discussion)
4. Provide a consistent, quality diet to sheltered animals. This will save money in the long run and will also reduce diarrhea in housed animals. (see discussion)
5. Purchase larger cages as needed for adult cats
6. During slow times, have staff walk dogs as needed and record information on exercise animals have received.
7. Use the UC Davis Shelter Medicine website, [www.sheltermedicine.com](http://www.sheltermedicine.com), as a resource of information regarding animal care, vaccination and sanitation protocols. (see discussion)

### **Discussion:**

Hill’s Science Diet has a Shelter Feeding Program whereby qualifying shelters receive all food free of charge but do have to pay all shipping costs. (see appendix 3)

The City may want to entertain the possibility of contracting for services with a local veterinarian to include the option of bringing sick/injured animals to the clinic during the day/night as necessary. A request for proposals could be sent to all local vets giving each of them equal opportunity to offer these services for an agreed upon fee. The City may want to place a maximum amount that can be spent on any individual animal in an effort to control costs.

I consulted with Dr. Catherine Mullin regarding shelter sanitation and vaccination protocols. She is a wonderful resource and can offer expert advice on any aspect of sheltering or animal care. Her email address is [chmullin@ucdavis.edu](mailto:chmullin@ucdavis.edu).

### **TRAINING:**

Current staff have had very limited training for the jobs they are required to perform. This results in costly mistakes, safety issues, frustration on the part of staff and the public, and a less professional organization. It also places staff in an unfair situation by expecting them to perform well in a job they have not been trained for. Further, it is difficult to hold staff accountable for errors that are made.

I asked a number of staff what training they had received for their respective jobs and all of them indicated they learned from someone at the shelter. None had any formal training for the jobs they were doing.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Provisions for the following training need to be made as soon as possible.

All staff:

Animal behavior

Animal handling

Use of Equipment

Disease Recognition and Zoonosis

Euthanasia Certification

Animal health assessment

Additional training on shelter health protocols/sanitation

Stress management/compassion fatigue

Customer service

Use of computer software

Animal and human first aid

ACO's will also need to attend the National Animal Control Association's levels I, II, and III, as soon as possible. Level III includes euthanasia and chemical capture certification. (information on the NACA training schedule was provided during my visit)

## **SHELTER SANITATION:**

Following proper sanitation practices are key to disease control. Keeping a shelter properly disinfected is a constant process. There is a much more to it than just hosing bleach into a kennel and rinsing it out once a day. Many factors must be considered including what disinfectants to use and when, proper dilutions, contact time, when to use soap and degreasers, how to apply them, when to rinse, etc. We also must consider what needs to be sanitized. We are not only concerned with the kennels and cages used to house the animals, but also hallways, doors, windows, vents, offices, door knobs, equipment, animal control vehicles and perhaps most importantly, the people who work in the shelter.

Although staff are doing a good job of day to day cleaning, there have been some obvious longstanding oversights regarding proper sanitation practices. Some areas have not been cleaned in what appears to be quite a long time including vents, light fixtures, walls in some areas, countertops, doors and door knobs, equipment, animal control vehicles, etc. Furthermore, staff have not been taking proper precautions when handling animals, thereby potentially spreading disease. Keep in mind this is through no fault of their own but mostly due to a lack of training and resources necessary in following proper procedures.

Having poor sanitation procedures can be worse than no cleaning at all as “bad” practices can actually spread disease. For example, using a dilute bleach solution to mop floors but not changing it when it gets dirty can be detrimental. Organic material will deactivate bleach rendering it useless as a disinfectant. Once this occurs, the mop can actually be spreading disease rather than killing harmful organisms.

During my time at the shelter, I developed written guidelines for staff to follow regarding proper sanitation. (See appendix 6) I also conducted a 1.5 hour training session on proper sanitation. Copies of the procedures were made available to staff as well as support documentation on certain diseases such as parvo and panleukopenia. (see appendix 4)

### **Recommendations:**

1. In light of recent disease problems and the overall condition of the shelter, I recommend an A-Z cleaning of the entire building to include proper disinfecting of all cages, kennels, halls, wall, offices, vents, light fixture, ducts, desks, counters, lockers, equipment, vehicles, dog walking areas, etc. This may take some time, several days, doing one section at a time.

Cages will need to be moved away from walls, all items picked up and either put on shelves or if they are not being used, discarded.

Storage areas need to be organized and items that are not being used should be discarded.

2. All food should be stored away from chemicals and kept covered. Open containers of food, or bowls of food sitting in prepped cages can collect harmful organisms. It is best to provide food and water as animals are placed into a cage or kennel rather than having those items already there.

3. Provide oversight to ensure staff are following established procedures.
4. Provide sufficient staffing resources to ensure procedures can be followed without having to cut corners for the sake of saving time.
5. Make sure all new staff are trained on proper sanitation practices and given a copy of established procedures.

### **EUTHANASIA:**

Euthanasia is arguably the most difficult aspect of animal sheltering/control. It carries with it a tremendous burden of emotional stress and legal liability. Euthanasia is frequently the source of staff conflict, public castigation, and moral conflict.

Consequently, it is absolutely imperative that staff who perform euthanasia be properly and thoroughly trained. Administering euthanasia requires a high level of skill and compassion and must never be performed by staff who are not confident and knowledgeable.

Even staff who have successfully completed an approved euthanasia certification course should work under the direction and guidance of someone who has appropriately performed euthanasia for a period of time. One or two days training for someone who has never administered injections before is not adequate to ensure proficiency. It takes time and practice to develop the level of skill required to minimize stress and discomfort to the animal.

Further, it is my understanding that a local veterinarian who had performed euthanasia on an animal at the shelter did so using an intracardiac injection without any prior sedation. According to staff, this resulted in an unpleasant death for the animal.

This method of administration is in conflict with recommendations outlined in the 2000 American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Panel Report on Euthanasia. It is also contrary to recommendations set forth by several national animal welfare organizations that recommend when giving intracardiac (IC) injections, animals should be heavily sedated or unconscious first. These groups include the Humane Society of the United States, National Animal Control Association, and the American Humane Association.

The Montana Board of Veterinary Medicine recently passed laws that require each facility that will perform euthanasia to be an approved euthanasia facility. The Board also requires that each person who will perform euthanasia to pass an approved euthanasia course and to be certified by the Board.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The process to get staff certified in euthanasia should be started immediately as well as getting or making sure the shelter is a certified euthanasia facility. (Information and forms regarding these certification requirements as set forth by the Montana Board of Veterinary Medicine were provided during my initial visit)

2. Any veterinarian that is used in the interim should be required to follow the recommendations outlined in the 2000 AVMA Panel Report on Euthanasia regarding euthanasia by injection, in particular making sure that animals that are given an intracardiac injection are heavily sedated or unconscious prior to administration of the IC injection. (A copy of the 2000 AVMA report and other support documentation was provided during my visit)
3. Have a sufficient number of staff certified to ensure this responsibility can be rotated among staff and so that the process is not interrupted when staff are sick, on vacation, etc.
4. Provide compassion fatigue training to all staff who perform euthanasia as needed.
5. Develop guidelines for the actual euthanasia process to include how euthanasia decisions are made.
6. Make provisions for staff to receive continued assistance with euthanasia even after certification to ensure safety and proficiency.

### **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES:**

There is a glaring absence of written guidelines at the shelter. I was provided with some information on sanitation protocols, certain forms used at the shelter, and animal care guidelines provided to pet owners. Beyond that, I was not able to locate anything.

It is important to have established, written procedures (guidelines) in place for the many facets of animal sheltering and control that exist. While there is virtually no way to address every possible scenario that can occur, it is important to address the day to day operations and situations that staff will encounter. These guidelines must be updated regularly to reflect changes in policies or protocols. An outdated manual can be worse than no manual at all.

The primary purpose of having an SOP manual is to outline proper procedures for staff to follow given available resources. It gives them direction when a supervisor is not available or a situation occurs that is new to them. It is a source of reference for new employees and can serve as an important learning tool. It also serves as a means to hold staff accountable when deviations from these guidelines occur.

The HSUS offers an SOP template which you have already been provided via computer email. It outlines many areas that should be included in any manual. While this task can be daunting, it is important to providing consistent and appropriate care to the animals and service to the community.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Assign the task of developing and implementing SOP's to the Director of Operations once hired.
2. Get input from staff before finalizing guidelines

3. Prioritize procedures so that most critical issues are addressed initially, leaving those that are less significant for later. (see discussion)
4. Make sure that established procedures are in keeping with accepted animal care practices and laws pertaining to animal care, euthanasia, vaccinations, etc.
5. Make sure staff have necessary training
6. Provide necessary resources in terms of staff, equipment, etc.

### **Discussion:**

The most pressing issues that should be addressed in the SOP manual include: euthanasia, adoption, intake/impoundment, vaccination, lost and found, customer service, animal handling and care, use and maintenance of equipment, code of conduct, health assessment, reporting sick/injured animals, medical treatment, record keeping, computer usage, prioritizing complaints in the field, bite and cruelty cases, radio communications, vehicle maintenance, trapping, and accounting practices. Addressing these topics would be a great start to a comprehensive SOP manual.

### **RECORD KEEPING/COMPUTER INFORMATION:**

The current method of keeping records is somewhat outdated. Although the shelter does use an animal shelter software program, ARK, it is not being used to its full potential. Some information such as licensing, intake, and medical information is being stored in the system while other important information such as complaints is not. Much of the record keeping is done manually making it both labor intensive and difficult to track. Also, there is no routine backup being performed on the computer system at the shelter.

There are a number of notebooks kept at the front counter in which various forms and information is kept including treatment, health assessment, daily inventory information, animal impoundment records, etc. (see appendix 5 for copies of these forms with noted recommended changes)

No records are actually attached to kennels or cages. Animals are identified by means of a paper collar that has an intake number recorded on it. I did notice a few animals not wearing these collars and also a few where the information had been smeared and was illegible. Males receive a blue collar and females are identified by pink collars.

Most of the forms that are being used at the shelter are acceptable although some of them could be worded more clearly and be more professionally designed. I did not spend a lot of time on this particular issue so it does deserve closer scrutiny to ensure accuracy and convey professionalism.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Have the City IT person review the ARK program and train staff on how to make better use of it. As much information as possible should be input into the system and reports generated from entered data. (see discussion)

2. Run a back up of the system daily if possible.
3. Gradually reduce the amount of paperwork in the shelter so that staff become accustomed to use of the computer and the information that can be both input and generated from the system.
4. Start placing a copy of each animal's paperwork on the cage/kennel. This will help avoid misidentification of animals which can easily occur under the present method of identification. Collars should continue to be used as well.
5. Establish a routine for certain reports to be generated. For example, an animal inventory report should be generated daily and checked against the inventory in the shelter to ensure that all animals are accounted for. Other reports may only need to be generated monthly, such as intake, adoption, and euthanasia statistics.

### **Discussion:**

There are several animal shelter/animal control management software programs available. Any useful program will have provisions for inputting data related to both shelter and field activities. The program should allow for data entry related to animal intake (to include a complete description of the animal, address of impoundment, ownership information if known, etc.) medical care, complaints, action taken, disposition, behavior, food/water intake, etc. (Information on other software programs was provided during my visit.)

### **DRESS CODE:**

It is important that all shelter and field staff project a high level of professionalism in order to foster respect and support from the public. While the Animal Control Officers of Great Falls wear official uniforms and name tags, the staff at the shelter do not. It is impossible to distinguish shelter staff from the public.

Staff were observed wearing stained t-shirts, shorts, and low cut blouses, none of which are acceptable when dealing with the public. There are also some safety issues associated with wearing shorts in an animal shelter.

While I certainly understand and appreciate the "dirty" work having to be done every day at the shelter and that fact that nobody wants to ruin good attire, there are some ways around this problem.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Establish a written dress code for all staff and ensure compliance. Prohibit staff from wearing shorts, stained or worn clothing, or suggestive clothing to work.
2. Provide professional looking uniforms for office and kennel staff. This can be a polo type shirt and slacks or something similar or even a quality t-shirt and slacks. (see discussion)
3. Provide name tags for all staff and require them to be worn at all times while at work.

### **Discussion:**

Staff who are responsible for cleaning kennels and cages can wear old clothing, t-shirts, etc. when doing the morning cleaning and before the shelter opens to the public. However, once the shelter is open, staff should be in proper uniform. If they have to spot clean during open hours, aprons and rubber boots can be worn to protect clothing.

### **LOST AND FOUND:**

According to 2006 intake and outcome reports I received, a total of 3,599 dogs/puppies, cats/kittens, were received at the shelter. Of those 3,599 animals, 699 were redeemed by their owners. This is slightly over a 19% reclamation rate, higher than most municipal shelters. Dogs were the most often reclaimed pet with 42% being returned to the owner. Kittens were the least often to be reclaimed at a mere 1%.

The shelter does have a lost and found notice board located in the front office. However, it was not apparent this board was being checked every day against the animal inventory at the shelter. Most of the notices were fairly recent.

Further, nobody at the shelter was making an effort to review lost/found ads in the local newspaper to see if animals at the shelter might fit the description of animals reported lost. There is also the potential for matching lost animals with found animals in the paper as well.

The City of Great Falls has a licensing requirement for both dogs and cats which is a real positive in terms of getting pets back home. However, not much is being done in terms of enforcement or education to increase the number of animals that are licensed. No information was provided on how many animals are already licensed in Great Falls even though this information is being entered into the database.

Licensing is set on a calendar year which all but eliminates the need for sending out reminders. However, there should be public service announcements and other public notices used to prompt pet owners on the need for renewal each year.

It is also my understanding that Cascade County does not have licensing requirements for dogs or cats. That results in more animals having to be impounded and fewer of them being reclaimed by their owners. It also eliminates any potential revenue that can be generated from a licensing program.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Assign the task of comparing lost/found ads to shelter inventory daily and also comparing lost/found ads on the board at the shelter and in the local newspaper.
2. Assign Animal Control Officers the task of licensing canvassing during down time or consider hiring one ACO for the sole purpose of canvassing. The amount of revenue generated should easily pay for this position and will help some animals avoid a trip to the shelter also reducing operational costs.

3. Make sure that staff record identification information on any impounded animal and start immediately trying to contact the owner. This information should be written on all associated paperwork as well as input into the computer. It is highly embarrassing to have identified animals at the shelter and nobody making an effort to contact the owner. This may also create liability issues.

4. Encourage the County to pass licensing requirements such as those already in place in Great Falls.

**Discussion:**

Due to the fact that data entry associated with licensing can become quite labor intensive, some organizations have outsourced this work. One such company is called Pet Data, [www.petdata.com](http://www.petdata.com). (information on Pet Data is provided as appendix 6)

**VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS:**

Currently, the Great Falls Animal Shelter has a very limited volunteer program that consists primarily of a couple of people who come on occasion to walk dogs. Having a viable, active volunteer program can make a huge difference in terms of the level and types of service that can be provided both to the animals and community. However, volunteers should not be used as a substitute for paid staff except on very rare occasions. Since volunteers are not relying on the job as a source of income, it is much more likely they will simply not show up for a scheduled shift or quit without notice. That is not to say there are not those volunteers who feel a great sense of dedication to the shelter and are always in attendance.

Volunteer programs, if done well, can make a huge positive difference. Volunteer programs done badly can become a nightmare that will consume huge amounts of paid staff's time to manage.

Many shelters tend to limit the activities in which volunteers can participate. Typically, volunteers are used to walk or groom dogs, answer phones, file, perform data entry etc. In reality, a volunteer can be trained to do pretty much anything staff is doing. However, it is important to have guidelines for conduct and performance for volunteers just as you have for paid staff. They too must be held accountable and when appropriate, relieved from volunteer status.

Another important component of a successful volunteer program is finding creative ways to acknowledge the hard work and contributions volunteers have made. Since they are not getting paid, there has to be some mechanism in place for recognizing their efforts. This is critical to keeping good volunteers.

Further, it is important to have written job descriptions for volunteers as well as schedules and orientation. Some shelter even conduct interviews to determine if a person would make a good volunteer and if so in what capacity. Just as it is important to have staff working in the position most suited for their skills, interest, and training, so it is with volunteers.

The shelter does have a volunteer application already in use. While it is a good start, it does need some revision. (see appendix 7)

### **Recommendations:**

1. Write a job description for a Volunteer Coordinator. Recruit for and hire a volunteer coordinator. This can be a paid position or in rare cases, a volunteer position. Finding the right person for this position is critical to the success or failure of the volunteer program.
2. Develop written job descriptions for each volunteer position
3. Plan on using volunteers for many different positions and don't limit them to just walking and grooming dogs, etc.
4. Develop an internal volunteer training program. This program should be consistent with training that is provided to staff to ensure consistency in following established procedures and guidelines.
5. Volunteers should be required to submit an application. Each application should be reviewed by the volunteer coordinator and some organizations conduct interviews with potential volunteers.
6. Hold volunteers accountable much in the same way you hold staff accountable.
7. Develop an effective volunteer recognition program
8. Make suggested changes to existing volunteer application
9. Obtain a copy of the HSUS volunteer manual from Dave Pauli, [dpauli@hsus.org](mailto:dpauli@hsus.org) or Betsy McFarland, [bmcfarland@hsus.org](mailto:bmcfarland@hsus.org)

### **HUMANE SOCIETY/ANIMAL CONTROL/SHELTER MODELS**

During my visit, I met with representatives from various local organizations regarding the shelter and Animal Control programs. While I was able to glean important information from each group, it is not my role to make specific recommendations regarding who should or should not operate the animal shelter/control programs. That must be decided on a local level.

What I can offer is insight into various models for operating these programs and some organizations to contact in order to gain more knowledge of the pros and cons of each model. There is no standardization regarding how humane societies, animal control programs and animal shelters operate. Consequently, there is no right or wrong way of setting up these programs and services. However, it is important to keep in mind the various resources of any organization and how that relates to their ability to perform certain functions.

### **Background:**

Historically, the responsibility of providing animal control services has fallen on local government, Cities and Counties. Since the primary focus of animal control is public safety, and to a lesser extent, animal welfare, it stands to reason this would be a government function. And since you can't have an enforcement program without also having a place to house impounded animals, the operation of at least a basic animal shelter also falls within the purview of local government. (see discussion)

However, since most communities have a passion for animals, they don't want just the basics. They want proactive adoption, education, spay/neuter, and community outreach programs as well. Oftentimes, this goes beyond what local government is willing or able to fund. Consequently, it is not uncommon to find Humane Societies or other non-profit animal welfare groups operating animal shelters and to a lesser extent animal control services.

Many shelters that are Humane Society operated may not actually provide Animal Control services but will contract with various municipalities and/or the County to house animals that are impounded by City/County Animal Control Officers. These shelters are typically owned and operated by the HS.

### **Models:**

1. Local government provides for animal control enforcement and limited funding towards the operation of an animal shelter. A local Humane Society or other animal non-profit group operates the shelter, through contract with local government, and provides an extension of services. All of the funding for animal control and a portion of the operation costs for the shelter come from local government. Costs for additional services must be generated by the non-profit via fundraising and donor development efforts.
2. Local government provides for animal control enforcement and sheltering within the community. This can be a County or City operated shelter but funds from both local governments are used to provide field and sheltering services.

The local Humane Society operates a separate shelter so that adoption efforts can be supplemented and other programs provided including humane education, spay/neuter, etc. Animals from the animal control shelter would be transferred to the humane society as time and space become limited.

Under this model, local government and humane society representatives must work collaboratively in order to compliment each other and the services provided for the animals and community. This model does not work in communities where animal control and humane societies have an adversarial relationship. Instead of working together towards a common goal, they end up competing with each other.

3. Local government assumes all responsibility for providing animal control and sheltering services within the community to include an effective adoption program. The local Humane Society would focus on prevention programs such as spay/neuter, legislation, public education, behavioral help lines and assistance programs, etc. and would not be involved in the operation of any animal shelter. It is important that any City

or County that uses the services of the shelter, pay their fare share of the cost. This is most often addressed via a contract for services with an associated fee schedule.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Each organization that has or will play a role in animal control/welfare/sheltering in Great Falls must seriously evaluate their given resources. It is also important for each organization to develop a strategic plan to include in detail where they want to be in one two, three, ten years, etc., and steps on how to get there.
2. Inasmuch as possible, organizations need to pool resources in order to have the most significant positive impact. Each organization should operate with transparency to the public and in their interactions with each other.
3. After each organization has decided what role they can/want to play, this needs to be communicated openly and clearly to other vested parties understanding that flexibility is important. There may be more than one group that wants to assume operation of the shelter or there may be none. Hopefully, these issues can be addressed collectively in order to arrive at the best solution.

### **Discussion:**

There are a number of departments under which Animal Control can be appropriately placed within local government. While many are under the Police or Sheriff's Department, others have been placed under Public Health and Safety, Community Services, etc. Unfortunately, there are many inappropriate places for Animal Control including Sanitation, Public Works, etc.

The models presented above are not intended to be inclusive of all options. Again, there is no standardization so anything is possible. These are intended to serve as common examples of how these programs are set up.

And any strategic plan must accurately portray the strengths and weaknesses of the organization as well as primary interests and priorities. An honest assessment of past performance is necessary in order to develop a workable strategic plan.

It is important to keep in mind that operating an animal shelter is very time and resource consuming and can detract from prevention efforts. Putting out the day to day fires that are common becomes physically and mentally exhausting. Having a desire to operate a quality animal shelter is not sufficient for doing so. It takes considerable resources, knowledge, skill, tact, and determination to make it happen.

And finally, it is all too common to see the vast majority of resources going into operating the shelter and little, if any, going into solving the real problems. Having an effective animal welfare plan for the community and ultimately seeing a decline in animal intake and euthanasia requires that considerable attention be given to prevention type programs.

### **MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS:**

It is my understanding that current relationships with the media are somewhat limited although a recent public service announcement was made to promote the shelter. I thought the psa was perfect in that it really pulled on the heartstrings of anyone watching. It made me want to run to the shelter and adopt the featured puppy.

It is important to the health of any animal organization to establish a positive rapport with the community including the media community. The best way to accomplish this is to approach them before they approach you, even when bad things happen. Rather than waiting until there is a moment of crisis and have the media coming to you for comment, I find the best way to get media on your side is to give them the story. That is not to say you have to hunt down the local reporter every time a mistake is made, but it does mean you need to be proactive and not reactive in your dealings with them. This will go a long way towards fostering a healthy, positive relationship.

Most shelters rely on the local news channel or paper to help promote animals for adoption, a pet of the week for example. Some shelters are fortunate enough to have local public service announcements aired to promote adoptions, spay/neuter, or other facets of responsible pet ownership. However, there are other ways you can use the media to your advantage.

For example, what do you do when there is a disease problem at the shelter? Impose quarantine but do nothing to inform the public of the potential risk to their pets? Do you help coordinate and promote vaccination clinics to prevent certain diseases? Do you let local veterinarians know about your situation and ask for suggestions? While there are always two sides to consider when dealing with the media, your side vs. how the media will present the information, it is important to do your part in sharing information.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Introduce yourself to someone from the various media sources in your community. Try to find someone who has an interest in animal welfare if possible. Ask if they can be contacted if needed in the future.
2. Ask for media assistance in promoting adoptions, spay/neuter, responsible pet ownership, licensing, vaccinations, how to avoid dog bites, etc. Perhaps you can coordinate with local veterinarians public service announcements on rabies and other vaccinations and help coordinate local vaccination clinics.
3. Approach the media when there is a problem, especially when you know they will inevitably be approaching you. Be open and honest in your dealings with the media and general public and admit and take responsibility for mistakes. It is also important to outline safeguards that will be put into place to keep these same mistakes from reoccurring. (see discussion)

### **Discussion:**

When making a decision about whether to contact the media, several things must be considered. Do we have a good relationship with this reporter? Or have we gotten misrepresented in the past? Is this news worthy? What good will come of letting the

public know? What negative repercussions could this have on the shelter/adoptions/public trust either way?

Unfortunately, when you do decide to get the media involved, there are no guarantees of the outcome. It is always a calculated risk and answering the above questions will help you make the best decision.

Ultimately, by taking a positive, proactive stance in your community regarding animal and public safety issues, you will have more credibility when problems occur.

### **ADOPTIONS:**

Adoptions are an important component of any animal shelter. While it not only saves valuable life, it also promotes positive public relations and serves as a source of income for the shelter. As with most aspects of animal sheltering, there is no standardization regarding adoption procedures, fees, etc. It is up to the individual organization to develop and establish protocols that work for them given the size and needs of the community, the number and types of animals received, etc.

While it is reasonable to have some expectations of the adopting public, it is my opinion that some shelters have gone too far in their requirements to adopt a pet. We have gone full spectrum in the span of 20 years in having no requirements, other than a signature and a small fee, to having requirements that exceed reason. It is important to be practical and reasonable in our expectations of potential adopters otherwise they will simply get a pet elsewhere. And we must consider the fact that if they do get a pet from a neighbor or “free to good home” ad, the likelihood of the animal being spayed/neutered, vaccinated, etc. is very slim. Getting pets in this manner only perpetuates the cycle of pet overpopulation by ensuring outlets for them.

It is also reasonable for the adopter to have expectations regarding the pet they adopt. Shelters should do as much as possible to ensure the health of animals they offer for adoption understanding there are never any guarantees. Having sound vaccination, sanitation, segregation, and health screening practices are all reasonable steps to take.

In addition to taking steps towards keeping animals physically healthy, efforts should be made to avoid making animals that are known to be aggressive or dangerous available to the public. This would include animals that have a history of biting or trying to bite. Animals should not be excluded from adoption based on breed but rather the behavior of the individual animal.

As part of the behavior assessment of any animal, it is important to get as much background information as possible for owners who relinquish their pets. The shelter already has both a cat and dog personality profile report to be completed by owners. This is a great start towards determining adoptability of a particular animal. (see discussion and appendix 8)

In more recent years, many shelters have resorted to more complex ways of evaluating behavior in animals in order to determine adoptability. While these methods can prove to be valuable, they can also be very time consuming and labor intensive. Until such time as

something more formal can be developed, staff need to make notes regarding behaviors they observe, especially if they are cause for concern.

The Great Falls Animal Shelter has adoption applications already in place, one for cats and one for dogs. With the exception of a few typographical errors and minor clarifications, the applications are pretty good. (see appendix 9 )However, how the information is interpreted is what is most important.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Review existing applications and make noted corrections/changes.
2. Establish guidelines for how the information will be interpreted and used. What will result in an adoption denial? Conditional denial? Approval? It is important to be consistent and not show partiality or bias towards any potential adopter. It is equally important to be reasonable. (see discussion)
3. Review animal profile forms and make necessary changes/corrections. (see discussion)
4. Incorporate adoption guidelines into the SOP manual and ensure that staff are aware of properly trained on protocols
5. Hold staff accountable for following guidelines.

### **Discussion:**

Developing guidelines for whether to approve or deny a potential adoption doesn't have to be difficult. By sticking to the basics, these guidelines can be easy to develop and follow. The list below contains a few things that would be reasonable expectations for adopters.

1. Must have landlord approval when renting and appropriate deposits must be paid.
2. Must not have been convicted of animal cruelty.
3. Must be 18 years of age or older.
4. Must agree to provide the animal with proper food, water, shelter, exercise, socialization, and veterinary care.
5. Must agree to comply with all laws pertaining to animal care and ownership.
6. Adult family members must agree on the acquisition of a new pet.
7. Cannot have relinquished a pet to the animal shelter within the past 6 months.
8. Cannot have had a citation issued by Animal Control within the past 6 months.

Keep in mind that you can add or remove any of the above recommendations. These are only intended to be examples of guidelines you can implement.

The dog and cat animal profile forms appear to have been written by different authors. While each has merit, neither is comprehensive and there are inconsistencies in the information being obtained. The questions need to be merged into one document with a few varying questions to address differences in species