

#### 4.14.22 Forum Questions & Answers

##### Examination and Assessment of Animals

- What steps does RAS take to ensure found/surrendered pets are medically stable and not dangerous, prior to adopting /fostering them out?
  - Behavioral observations in the shelter are not predictive of future behaviors in a home environment
  - Animals are vaccinated upon intake
  - Initial Health Exams
  - Daily rounds by veterinarian Mon – Fri
  - Daily treatments for ill and injured
  - Medical and behavioral observations
  - Observations during dog walking and playgroups
  - Observations during feeding and cleaning
  - Observations during visitations with potential adopters
  
- Is there a quarantine period prior to adopting/fostering pets out to homes?
  - No. Foster homes are healthier environments for pets and are the preferred housing environment sought for most animals entering our care
  - All animals are vaccinated and examined
  - Delaying placement into homes increases shelter crowding, stress, illness, and behavioral deterioration

##### HASS and Community-Centered Services

- So is HASS still in the testing stages?
  - The elements of Human Animal Support Services are being systematically implemented by the 22 pilot organizations. There are specific programs and services that are being piloted and monitored.
  
- What new community programs are being proposed with this change?
  - The programs that can have the greatest impact on reducing unnecessary institutionalization of animals are the first priorities.
    - Lost Pet Reunification → First 48, Finder-to-Foster, Field Return-to-Home
    - Supported Self-Rehoming → Home-to-Home
    - Keeping Families Together & Pet Support → Safety Net Housing, Access to Vet Care, Pet Food/Supplies Pantries, Vaccination & ID clinics
    - Intake to Placement → Foster on deck, Adopter on deck, Transfer on deck
  
- You are saying that city residents who have ill pets and can't afford vet care can get veterinary care through the Verona St. shelter?
  - Yes. By reducing intakes to those animals most in need of intervention, we have been able to devote resources and time to also caring for owned animals for which a host of

systemic and geographical barriers may have prevented such care.

- Currently, how does RAS help pet owners and finders obtain the services they need?
  - Animal Services Officers offer information and supplies while responding to calls for service
  - The Outreach & Support team offer similar support via door-to-door neighborhood visits and from our facility including pet food and supply pantry events.
  - The Outreach and Support team works with our Clinic team to provide vaccination, microchip, and identification events.
  - We also provide veterinary care for wellness, sick visits, urgent, and emergency situations.
  - When finders of lost pets contact us, we ask if the animal appears healthy and friendly. If so, we ask finders if they are willing to assist with reunification. We explain that animals are far more likely to be reunited with their owners when kept within their neighborhoods compared to being brought to an animal shelter. We also offer supplies and assistance with printing flyers and posting found listings on our website, lost pet facial recognition tool, and on social channels.
  
- If a community member takes in a stray animal, as part of the HASS model, and the animal bites or attacks the finder, who is liable?
  - The Human Animal Support Services model includes Lost Pet Reunification as a core element. The specific programs involved include field returns to homes by Animal Services Officers, finder-assisted reunifications, and finder-to-foster scenarios.
  - People find lost pets all the time and hang flyers and post on social media. When we ask finders if they are willing to help get the friendly, healthy lost pet home, it is not a mandate. It is based on the willingness of the finder to increase the likelihood of reunification and without the stress and trauma associated with shelter intake.
  - Incidents of dog bites caused by lost dogs are rare. Greenville, South Carolina; Cabot, Arkansas; and other communities with finder-assisted reunification programs have not experienced any significant dog bites reported by finders.
  
- I think it's great that the shelter would like to help keep pets with families that wish to keep them, however the disconnect seems to be with people who no longer want the animal and are turned away when they try to turn them into the shelter.
  - Yes, there does seem to be some disconnect or confusion. We do not turn people away. Rather, we ask questions and explain why the pet is generally better remaining in its familiar home than being admitted to a strange and frightening shelter environment.
  - We let people know that we have an online tool to help them secure a new home for their pet and offer guidance with that process.
  - We also offer pet food, supplies, vaccinations, and medical care that may be necessary for supporting the pet until a new home is secured.
  
- I am wondering on ways Lollypop and RAS can collaborate to increase our impact? What ways are we increasing community resources and access to care that is needed

- RAS collaborates with Lollypop Farm as one of the clinics for our Pets for Life program. We transport owned pets to and from Lollypop Farm for spay/neuter surgeries, vaccinations, and minor medical issues.
- As members of the Greater Rochester Animal Coalition, both RAS and Lollypop Farm support medical care for animals within the Coalition members' care, sterilization for community cats, and access to vaccinations and other veterinary care.
- When I think about why we started HASS it was because we just knew we needed to do something different, knowing that change is tremendously challenging and that we'd have to learn along the way. But when 98% of pet owners consider pets to be valued family members, we have to do better for animals and the people who love them. These kinds of forums are really important because we can learn where we need to do better.
- In asking the community to unlearn what they've always been told, what is in the works in terms of educating the public?
  - This community forum is part of a larger plan that will include additional meetings, media appearances, and written communications along with postings on our website and social channels, paid advertising, and public service announcements.
- There is a growing concern that RAS is using HASS as an excuse to NOT provide basic support such as an ACO officer on call after hours; not admitting owner surrenders; advising the public who finds a dog to keep it or let it loose.
  - RAS is still providing support but the form of that support may have changed.
  - ASOs are trying to reunite lost pets with owners. They spend more time in neighborhoods trying to find people who recognize or know the dog. ASO hours of operation and stand-by hours have not changed in the last several years.
  - We do admit owner surrenders when people are unable or unwilling to accept our support with the preferred direct rehoming process.
  - We ask finders of friendly, healthy dogs if they can assist with getting the lost dog home. We explain that most dogs are found within a few blocks of their homes and that reunification success is far greater when dogs are kept in the neighborhoods where found.

## Community Cats

- Why do you turn away kitties?
  - Visit [What To Do If You Find Stray Kittens](#)
  - Just because cats are outside does not mean that they need to be rescued. Animal Services continues to be available for indoor cats that are abandoned in houses or cats found sick, injured, or not thriving but intake of all healthy cats found outdoors is not what is recommended nor is it best for all animals and people involved. We believe that found kittens should be on a path to adoption - but even that does not mean taking them into the shelter. A kitten diversion program where we support the finder with medical care and an adoption outlet is a much healthier and better route for kittens.

Over the years, we have learned that we should do things differently that actually help people and animals in a better way. It is not about turning them away or ignoring them, it is about providing the actual support they need and solving the problem outside of the shelter.

- When we bring cats into the shelter, we are stressing them out, exposing them to infectious disease, sometimes making them sick. For the ones who get adopted or transferred to rescue groups, we are taking them away from a family who already cared for them and taking up a resource that could be used by a cat who truly needed a home (i.e., one whose owner died, cats abandoned in a home or at a vet clinic, those from a hoarding case, etc.). Ironically, when we adopt out a cat who was basically taken from its outdoor home and was doing fine, the cat is most likely going into a new household, which will often also let the cat outside and the cycle continues (about half of American cat guardians let their cats outside).
- What are you doing for the out of control feral cat population in the city of Rochester? Funding is being provided and generously donated for care and altering. I'm wondering what is being done to help.
  - RAS has continued to provide spay/neuter surgeries for community cats throughout the pandemic.
  - Through our participation in the Greater Rochester Animal Coalition, we continue to support spay/neuter for community cats at Lollypop Farm.
  - We are in the process of securing a veterinary team to provide spay/neuter surgeries for community cats during monthly clinics at the Animal Services Center.
- Please address your community cat mentality. Telling people to keep a cat that they found that is homeless, injured, hungry and/or stray or feral and it may find its way home; go door-to-door to find owner, put up fliers...people who find a cat and can't keep it, need help from their local shelter and you are not helping them.
  - We are helping but the help is coming in new forms. We have always told people to bring stray and unwanted pets to shelters. That is the model that originated in the mid-nineteenth century and was not intended to save lives of pets.
  - The term community cats is a broad category of outdoor, free-roaming cats that includes feral cats that are not socialized to humans, previously owned cats that were lost or abandoned and now live outdoors, and loosely owned/cared for cats that have been socialized with people.
  - When people contact us about outdoor cats, we ask a series of questions as part of our triage process to determine the best pathway for the cats. Sick and injured cats should be taken to a vet or brought into the shelter. Kittens should be left with nursing mothers until they are weaned. If there is no mother, we try to place kittens in foster homes for bottle-feeding. If weaned, kittens are brought to the shelter and placed into foster homes until permanent homes are found.
  - Friendly, healthy, adult cats may not need intervention. We attempt to distinguish lost pet cats from community cats by asking questions about the cats' physical appearance

and behaviors. The guidance that we provide for a lost cat includes posting fliers and found cat reports and having the cat scanned for a microchip.

- Known community cats should be trapped, vaccinated, sterilized, and returned to the location.
- Cats believed to be lost based on physical appearance and behavior, can be scanned for microchips and vaccinated by RAS and then returned to the location with the finder as we work together to find the owner. We provide and encourage use of paper collars as a means of communication between finder and owners or other neighbors caring for the cat. Visit our [Found a Pet](#) page on City website.
- Only about 3% of found cats brought to the shelter are reclaimed by owners.
- Lost pet cats are more likely to be found by owners or return home on their own when left in neighborhoods where found.
- Community cats is a real concern to me. As a city resident who sees the suffering first hand, I can tell you cats would much rather be in a home. Fighting for food, dealing with the elements and cruel people is no life. As a former volunteer we worked very hard socializing and comforting and getting cats adopted and I feel like we were pushed out and the cats were left high and dry.
  - Although many outdoor cats are friendly and suitable for indoor homes, removing them from neighborhoods often leads to a paradoxical increase as new cats move into vacated spaces and reproduction increases. Additionally, such removal has the effect of transplanting cats from impoverished neighborhoods to more affluent ones.
  - Indoor cats that become lost or abandoned may need intervention to help get them back home or into new homes.
- Please share the info on how community cats can have a voice.
  - RAS is seeking individuals and organizations interested in forming a Cat Council to meet on a quarterly basis to ensure that concerns related to outdoor cats are addressed and communication lines are open.
  - 501c3 groups can seek to join the Greater Rochester Animal Coalition. There is currently one member organization that is focused exclusively on community cats.
- Community Cats have a huge need in the City of Rochester as well! Great topic to discuss and I'm also wondering on ways we can expand community resources regarding community cats.
  - RAS is working with a group of trappers who do trap-neuter-return throughout the city.
  - We are recruiting veterinary personnel for monthly spay/neuter clinics at RAS.
  - The same group is also partnering with at least one R-Center on running a series of monthly MASH-style clinics with a visiting vet team.
- So if the cats need to be returned to the neighborhoods they are located in. can RAS start providing winter shelters (huts) and food needed to feed them?
  - Yes. We had one such shelter built for us this winter and began asking for community members to donate cat huts and/or supplies to build them.
  - We have a link on our website to a video showing how to construct a winter shelter for cats.
  - We plan to ask for assistance from scout troops and other volunteer groups in constructing more cat huts next winter.

## Customer Service

- Why when you call RAS there is never a human answering the phone? There is always a recording?
  - There are two phone lines that are typically answered by 2-3 people assigned to client services at the front desk. The initial greeting is automated to attempt to route some calls directly to specific programs. If the call rings continuously, that indicates that the client services team are dealing with other clients and will respond to voice messages at their earliest opportunity.
  
- Why can't RAS help people who have tried for a couple of years to get someone to stop animal abuse at a known address in the South Wedge? It has been reported to several law enforcement places (police, Law Enforcement at Lollypop and Animal Control) why can't RAS do something about this?
  - Rochester Animal Services does not have legal authority to respond to, investigate, or prosecute animal cruelty incidents. That requires police or peach officer powers.
  - We refer incidents to RPD and Lollypop Farm's Law Enforcement Division when we encounter evidence of possible cruelty.
  - At Animal Services, we believe that people are inherently good, not malicious, and are doing their best with limited resources. If you are concerned that a pet owner may be in need of support and access to pet wellness services, contact our Outreach & Support Coordinator at 428-6738. If you have evidence of intentional physical abuse such as dog fighting, cock fighting, or other physical abuse of an animal, call 911 or the Humane Society of Greater Rochester's anonymous hotline (223-6500).
  
- Since we are now planning prior to intake and pushing owners to self-rehome, are frontline employees that are handling these calls qualified and able to properly educate and guide those trying to surrender? Shelters are busy, bustling places and I wonder if people feel that they've been educated and empowered to rehome or if they feel they've just been brushed off.
  - Our team is receiving ongoing training and guidance on customer service, triage, trauma-informed care, and case management.
  - Shelters are often busy and hectic but we strive to make our interactions less transactional and more impactful by addressing concerns in a holistic manner.
  
- Members of the public are NOT trained for servicing or for providing help to strays.
  - Strays are simply lost pets that may need some support in finding their way home. No special training is required to be neighborly and knock on a few doors, hang fliers, and post a found pet report. RAS can provide guidance and resources to aid finders in getting found pets home.
  - When people encounter pets that appear sick, injured, or that are displaying aggressive behaviors, contacting RAS is recommended.
  
- I run a Community Pet Food Pantry. We survive strictly on donations. We make multiple pleas on social media for donations of pet food. We are on the road making deliveries weekly. 90 % of our patrons are asking for help with food due to economic struggle. 90% of them don't drive. We are the only pantry to provide this service. I am told quite frequently by those needing food

that they have call Rochester Animal Services for help only to be told they need to pick up. Some are disabled or have other reasons for inability to get to 184 Verona St. That's where we come in. We are incredibly busy. How can the shelter help these folks?

- RAS receives sporadic donations of damaged bags of pet food. When our inventory exceeds our capacity for disseminating to community members, we provide food to other food pantries.
- We are working on securing storage facilities that will enable us to accept larger donations of pet food, which should enable us to better meet the needs of community both directly and in cooperation with other organizations.
- I heard the outreach is door-to-door. I'm hearing otherwise. Perhaps the shelter can share some of their food supply with us so we don't have to beg for assistance every other week.
  - Our Outreach and Support Program began in 2016 with door-to-door neighborhood visits. It continued in that format until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when we shifted to call-ahead deliveries of pet supplies, drive-up food pantries, and curbside vaccination clinics. Our plans include resuming door-to-door efforts while maintaining pet resource center functions.
  - We do share food with other organizations whenever we are able.

### **Top Concerns**

- Access to vet care
- The need for community programs
- People unable to afford vet care. Our voucher program has a huge back log
- We have had a decrease in access due to changes with the recent purchase of MVA.....
- Expanding outreach programs!
- A main concern is that many rescue groups don't want to work with RAS due to the animals not being assessed properly, past treatment of rescues by employees.
  - We are working on rebuilding relationships with local rescue groups. I'd welcome them to share their concerns with me and our Transfer Coordinator.
  - I also encourage local rescue organizations to consider joining the Greater Rochester Animal Coalition to ensure that their voices are represented and that they may benefit from the sharing of resources and collaborative projects.
- We need a spay-neuter clinic that serves all in the community, separate from the RAS clinic, or more partnerships with vets in the area. Why doesn't VSAS fundraise for a spay-neuter clinic?
  - Yes, this is a critical area of need for which we have been advocating for many years.
  - Increasing our community's capacity for spay and neuter has been one of the primary initiatives for the Greater Rochester Animal Coalition. The Coalition has funded spay-neuter surgeries at Lollypop Farm and has approved funding weekend clinics at RAS.
  - RAS and Lollypop Farm have spoken with Pathway Vets, Cornell Vet College, Rochester Community Animal Clinic, and Open Door Vet Collective about various options for establishing additional facilities for spay-neuter services.
  - In addition to securing facilities, there are additional limiting factors that also must be addressed. There is a national shortage of veterinarians and veterinary technicians. Therefore, any effort to increase spay-neuter capacity must also include plans and funding for recruitment and retention of veterinary personnel.

- Verona Street Animal Society was established to support the mission of Rochester Animal Services. The funds raised by VSAS support veterinary care, enrichment, diagnostic testing, and foster care for animals entering the City shelter. VSAS funds also enable RAS to provide support to keep pets with their families. Allocating funds toward a clinic would mean loss of funding for some or all of these other areas. However, the future community animal resource center could include a larger clinic to better support community needs. A future capital campaign led by VSAS will be instrumental in bringing that vision to fruition.
- How can RAS and Lollypop collaborate in ways? Can we invest more in community programs, safety net, and divergent programs? Will the City of Rochester invest in these programs as well?
  - RAS collaborates with Lollypop Farm as one of our clinic partners for our Pets for Life outreach and support program.
  - RAS provides accessible vet care for City residents as part of our operational budget
  - RAS obtains external funding from VSAS and foundation partners (grants) to provide spay/neuter, vaccinations, ID tags, microchips, pet food, pet supplies, and other resources to pet owners in underserved neighborhoods.
  - RAS started its Pet Safety Net temporary housing program for pets of people in crisis in April 2021.
  - RAS will continue exploring ways to expand our collaboration with Lollypop Farm and other local organizations both in animal welfare and human services arenas.
- I'd like to see Lollypop expand our outreach programming and staffing to support this. I know we have the ability to collaborate and I'd love to speak more about that.
  - We can't speak for Lollypop Farm, but we agree that additional support is needed for RAS outreach programming and staffing.
- Is the City planning on doing a mass community outreach - such as a survey to obtain the needs of the community and what each household is experiencing with the animal issues and needs?
  - Yes. RAS conducted a survey in conjunction with its brand development project last fall. That survey was primarily taken by employees, volunteers, and adopters. We have built a few different surveys that we plan to launch soon to get more feedback on needs from community members.
- And I'd love to see Lollypop invest in additional outreach and field resources to support RAS to provide non-judgmental and trauma-informed care for city residents
  - The RAS team received trauma-informed care training last month.
  - We do partner with Lollypop Farm on various endeavors related to pet support and we will continue exploring future expansion of such partnerships.
- I'm curious why the City doesn't put some money into a new shelter to make it a less stressful place for animals that cannot be fostered. Larger runs with outdoor access, better



acoustics...etc. The city has used taxpayer money in the past for upgrading the Port of Rochester/ Parcel 5/ other improvements, but never RAS

- We are working toward that future animal resource center that you describe. However, it's not that the RAS facility is worse than most shelters. Rather, we're saying that shelters, in general, are scary, stressful environments that exacerbate illness and behavioral deterioration.
- From Kristen Hassen : Yes, all shelters are scary and hard places even the most beautiful; Because animals are companions by definition they're meant to be with us, not in cages alone
- RAS is in the process of securing a contract with a shelter design team to conduct a facility evaluation, programming and conceptual design project. This project will provide justification and recommendations for improving the existing shelter or constructing a new one.
- I don't think RAS is worse than most shelters, I'm just concerned that no improvements have been made to the shelter for over 20 years.
  - We have replaced cat housing units, added portals to cat housing, and replaced the HVAC system, among other improvements but yes, we are in need to a new facility
- I don't believe our city has the resources for what you are talking about. The rescues have to do what you are describing so we, as rescues and TNR groups need more support.
- What ways are our local government officials working to address breed discrimination for renters?
  - As a member of the [New York State Animal Protection Federation](#), RAS supported legislation to ban breed discrimination in homeowner's insurance. The next step will be renter's insurance. Contact [libbypost@nysapf.org](mailto:libbypost@nysapf.org) to advocate for this type of legislation.
  - RAS posts resources on the City website to aid in finding [pet-inclusive housing](#) including considerations for property managers.
- Will RAS help people to rehome their pets by posting them on the RAS webpage? This is a great idea since many people needing to rehome do not have the online capability needed to rehome a pet.
  - Yes, RAS provides an online tool for owners to post their pets using [Home-to-Home](#).
- Agreed that animals are not meant to be in cages alone, however, people that need to quickly surrender an animal need to be able place to do so.
  - From Kristen Hassen : Agree, when it's working well the shelter can help urgent cases more quickly because they have fewer pets entering
  - From Shelly Simmons: We have a good process for assessing this for owners. We take a case worker approach to find out reasons, timeline, if a need is urgent or if it is something that can wait - a few days, a few weeks, etc. Every situation is assessed and a plan is created just for the pet and the pet owner.

- I'm confused because I called to help an elder neighbor surrender a pet and I offered to foster the pet. I was told that RAS couldn't help me. I have the pet now and worked to get him fixed. Is there a program to help me get him fixed.
  - Both our Pets for Life and Spay/Neuter Voucher Programs are aimed at removing financial barriers to pet sterilization. The Pets for Life program is limited to the 14605 zip code, which was identified through a community assessment when that program began. For all other zip codes, we provide vouchers which can be redeemed at the Rochester Community Animal Clinic (RCAC) for no-cost or \$1 spay/neuter surgeries. Both programs are limited by the staffing and associated surgical volumes at the partner clinics.
  - The voucher program has been on hold for the past couple months due to vet staffing challenges at RCAC.
  
- Kristen, I'm not talking about beautifying the shelter. As a NYS licensed Vet Tech with 17 years' experience and having also euthanized many animals - I understand. I'm talking about making it less stressful for the pets who HAVE to be there. There are many ways - similar to dog day cares.
  
- Where did the HASS model get its name?
  - Human Animal Support Services (HASS)
  - It's more than just animal work
  - We are supporting the human-animal bond
  
- Can we have Dr. Pizano's contact info?
  - [drpizano@teamshelterusa.com](mailto:drpizano@teamshelterusa.com)