

## Responses to comments/questions from 9.29.22 Community Meeting

### Lost Pet Reunification = Getting lost pets back home

1. Are animals being turned away?

No. They should not be. Intake remains the default option but we are trying to reduce the mass institutionalization of animals because shelters are scary, traumatic environments for animals. For healthy, friendly found pets, we do ask community members if they are willing to assist with getting them back home. If we can limit the number of healthy pets entering the shelter, then we can focus our limited resources on animals that actually need institutional intervention (i.e., sick and injured animals and those posing significant public safety concerns). If community members are unable to hold onto the pets, we take them in and try to get them into foster homes and then reunited, rehomed, or transferred as soon as possible. Found animals that are sick, injured, or posing public safety concerns are the most at-risk animals in need of institutional intervention and should be admitted to the shelter.

2. What are we asking finders to do?

We are asking people to be kind and neighborly. We are asking people to think of things from the pet's perspective. We are trying to engage the community in being part of solutions that are better for animals and people. Most lost pets are found within one mile of home. The following are the basic steps that we are asking finders to assist with when they encounter a friendly, healthy lost pet:

- a. Check for identification or chip
- b. Take a photo - post on social media, Petco Love Lost
- c. Canvass neighborhood, knock on doors
- d. Submit [Found Pet Report](#) to Rochester Animal Services
- e. Create Found Pet Flyers to hang in neighborhood

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1D3XgHHu2wpRcHQbze0Ztrmn4v2Wc4o2p>

Websites that will make the flyer for the pet owner:

[24 Pet Watch](#)

[Pawboost](#)

[Petco Love Lost](#)

[Find Toto](#)

3. What do we do with cats found outdoors? Should they come to the shelter if they are friendly?

Not necessarily. Certainly for friendly cats found outdoors who are truly lost or abandoned, reunification or adoption are the appropriate outcomes. Also, for weaned kittens found outside, adoption is the most appropriate pathway. However, for cats that are healthy and thriving in their outdoor homes, intake at a shelter is extremely traumatic and should only happen as part of spay/neuter, vaccinate, and return efforts. When healthy adult cats are

removed from outdoor populations, the result is a paradoxical increase in population as new cats move into the vacated area and breeding increases.

We use a Found Cat Questionnaire to guide us toward the appropriate pathway for the individual cat based on the information presented. We now route community cats through a return-to-field pathway that involves a short stay at the facility for vaccination and spay or neuter before being returned to their outdoor homes.

#### **Chart paper comments/questions:**

4. How do people get involved as Neighborhood Lost Pet Advocates?

We provided sign-up sheets at the meeting but anyone interested in helping get lost pets home should email us at [AnimalServices@cityofrochester.gov](mailto:AnimalServices@cityofrochester.gov) or call 585-428-7274 for more information.

5. How can people find out where microchip scanners are located?

Many people know that veterinary clinics have microchip scanners to aid in getting lost pets homes. Our Animal Control Officers carry them in their vehicles and we have scanners at the Animal Services Center on Verona Street. Additionally, we have also provided microchip scanners to several City offices and pet stores. Those microchip checkpoints are listed at <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/FoundAPet/>.

6. Can the workers who remove deceased animals from roads scan pets found?

The Animal Services team is working with Dept. of Environment Services - Special Services Division to improve this process and provide closure for pet owners whose pets have been found deceased on roadways.

7. Cats outside in winter

Here a couple of cold weather cat facts and supporting information provided by Kate Hurley, DVM, Program Director UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program and co-founder of the Million Cat Challenge and Million Pet Challenge:

- Cats have evolved to live in climates ranging from very hot to very cold climates, and native cats very similar to domestic cats can be found in Europe as far north as chilly Norway.
- A 2013 research paper documented no difference in feral cat abundance and latitude or January temperature (Blancher, P. (2013). "Estimated Number of Birds Killed by House Cats (Felis catus) in Canada." *Avian Conservation and Ecology* 8(2).)

Probably the most relevant information is the continued abundance of adult cats in good body condition presented to shelters during and after every winter, and the ongoing litters birthed by cats that by definition survived winter and bred in the spring – if the winters were truly too harsh for cat survival, there wouldn't be a free roaming cat population in colder climates.

So while there are some cats and other free roaming animals that doubtless do suffer from extreme temperatures in the winter, the cats that people are able to find and trap/capture (even those that wander up to their doors mooching for handouts) very likely are not those cats – the odds that a cat would be an adult in good body condition and not suffering harm from the cold is a cat that is *about to* suffer harm from the cold, versus a cat that has some shelter worked out and has been surviving outside for some time, are pretty low unless there is specific knowledge that the cat has been recently abandoned, evicted from an indoor home, or had its shelter destroyed. Also of course you want to encourage people to bring in cats that are actually showing signs of suffering from injury related to the cold (or any other cause). But otherwise when people bring cats in from the cold, they may well be taking a cat from an environment to which it's adapted and putting it at greater risk, or even taking someone's pet that was out for a winter walk.

For people concerned about the welfare of cats in cold climates, probably the best thing to do is open lines of communication and make sure that people concerned about cats are aware of how to build a cozy shelter and most especially that folks have access to TNR services most of the time, as sterilization tends to improve body condition and equip cats to better tolerate the cold.

#### **Supported Self-Rehoming = Direct placement from one home to another**

1. Does this practice encourage pet abandonment?

No. We are not turning pets away. Rather we are trying to explore other healthier options for more positive outcomes. If pet owners are struggling, we can provide support. If keeping their pet temporarily is not an option, the pet comes into our care and we work on finding a new home or transferring it to a partner organization.

2. What if people are out of time and cannot keep their pet any longer?

The shelter remains a resource for owners seeking to turn over their pets. However, whenever possible, we try to support the pet remaining with the owner permanently or temporarily until placement can be secured in a new home.

3. Who screens the adopters if owners are interfacing directly with prospective adopters?

The current owners are directly involved in the process, which means that they can convey all of the likes and dislikes, and quirky personality traits of their pet. This involvement helps to ensure strong matches. Often, through this peer-to-peer adoption process, a safety is established should the new owner ever need support or assistance in taking care of the pet. Now there are at least two homes that love and care for that pet. We do have resources that we can provide owners to aid in their conversations with potential adopters.

#### **Chart paper comments/questions:**

- What about people who don't have internet access?

- We have kiosks available at the shelter where we can assist people, or they can sign themselves up here at the shelter. We also recommend use of libraries to access internet, set up a free email account, and register for Home-to-Home. However, the concept of self-rehoming is the same as classified ads for free puppies and kittens to good homes. The online tools can make it easier and we can provide support and resources to alleviate some of the stress related to finances.
- Is there any way to follow up post adoption?
  - We previously had a team of volunteers making post-adoption follow-up phone calls. We have had to discontinue that practice due to loss of the volunteers from that team. We would like to resume post-adoption support at some point and we are always actively recruiting more volunteers to get involved in our work. If you are interested in volunteering, visit our [website](#).
- Behaviorists for aggressive dogs.
  - There are few, if any, certified animal behaviorists in Rochester. However, we recently contracted with a local dog trainer to work with dogs demonstrating behavioral incompatibilities to prevent behavioral deterioration while in our care. We hope to be able to secure funding to recruit additional dog trainers to continue supporting shelter dogs in that way. We are also hoping to establish a program in which we can facilitate dog training for owned pets. More to come on that.
- Home-to-Home animals on the website.
  - There is a link to [Home-to-Home](#) on the RAS [website](#), but they do not get recorded into our shelter software as do all animals in our care, so they do not appear within the available animals scroll tool on our adoption pages.
- Why don't people know about supported self-rehoming?
  - We do not have a communications team and have been relying on partner organizations and volunteers to help spread awareness for years. However, we've recently created a new position that should be able to assist getting our messaging out and advertising things like supported self-rehoming.
- What about the cats?
  - We are still taking cats in that are sick or injured. Any other cat that may come into the shelter, we use a questionnaire to determine whether the shelter is the best place for the cat (Was it abandoned? Is it healthy and thriving? Is it a weaned kitten? etc.). If the cat comes in as an outdoor cat that is healthy and thriving, it will generally be on the short pathway for vaccination, spay or neuter, and return to the location from which it came. If information and observations suggest that the cat is likely a lost or abandoned indoor cat, the cat will be on the pathway for return to owners and then rehoming, if not reunited. Weaned kittens are always on the adoption pathway. Un-weaned kittens ideally remain with the mother cat until they can all come in. Mom will be vaccinated,

spayed, and returned to her outdoor home. The kittens will be on the adoption pathway or transferred to a local rescue organization. When the mother cat is known to have died or abandoned her litter, we place the un-weaned kittens with a partner organization or foster home to bottle-feed them until weaned to solid food.

**Foster-Centric Housing = Foster homes are the preferred living environment for most animals in our care**

**Intake to Placement = Identifying the shortest pathway to positive outcome with shortest shelter stay possible or without requiring shelter at all**

1. Why are more animals being housed in foster homes than previously?

Shelters are scary. Homes are not. Shelters are inherently frightening and unhealthy environments for animals. The unfamiliar people and animals, odors, noise, and social isolation cause stress, fear, anxiety, and trauma that can manifest as behavioral problems and increase disease susceptibility. Foster homes extend the shelter walls in a healthier, more comfortable setting where the pets get to show their true colors. Placement in foster homes, frees up space and resources for other at-risk animals in need of intervention.

2. If more pets are going into foster homes, why is the shelter asking finders and owners to hold onto animals they want to turn in?

We are not turning animals away. We are exploring other, healthier options to try to support better outcomes. Ideally, the only animals at the facility will be ones that need institutional intervention in the form of medical care or behavioral rehabilitation. If the person is unable to help with reunification or rehoming, the animal does come in.

3. Are animals rushed through the system; should the placements be screened more thoroughly?

Animals are not rushed through haphazardly but the more time animals spend in the shelter environment, the worse they are medically and behaviorally. Homes are almost always the preferred living environment unless medical intervention is necessary.

**Chart paper comments/questions:**

- If the burden is on the community, do you provide financial support?
  - Foster families are given everything they need in the form of supplies food and medical care.
- What is the percentage of rehomed fosters and what's an average time animals are fostered?
  - The live release rate for RAS is consistently around 90%. The rate is even higher for animals in foster care because animals with critical medical concerns and serious behavioral incompatibilities are not placed into foster homes. Animals are fostered an

average time of two weeks. Some outliers to this average time are heartworm dogs, which can take around six months to heal, and shy cats.

- How is the foster program promoted?
  - The program is promoted via social media, on our website, printed materials, and wherever we go.
- How many employees are at the shelter?
  - 23 full-time and 8 part-time, plus two employees of our nonprofit partners at VSAS
- What is the protocol for support after-hours and on the weekend?
  - Foster caregivers receive a manual with a “foster 911” list of what’s an emergency and not an emergency. If it’s an emergency, they then contact their foster team leader. At that point, the foster team leader would contact the first vet on the list. If they don’t answer, they go on to the second vet. If the second vet doesn’t answer, there are other options on the list. We are also in the early phases of a subscription for telehealth services, which would ensure vet triage for foster caregivers 24/7.
- If the shelter is full, why hasn’t there been communication from media like they do at Lollypop Farm?
  - We don’t have a press officer or communications director or designated person who’s working with the media on a consistent basis. Also, considering that we have been near, at, or over capacity all summer, we have to be judicious in our requests of the media. However, this question is helping us consider other ways we might adjust our call-to-action to be newsworthy and not repetitive. Additionally, if people are willing to assist us with communications, they should email us at [AnimalServices@cityofrochester.gov](mailto:AnimalServices@cityofrochester.gov) or call 585-428-7274 for more information.
- Would you consider taking animals on a field trip for the day?
  - This is a great idea and something we have on the list. We hope to be able to add doggy field trips to our programs when staff and resources permit.
- How do animals go from foster to being adopted (do foster caregivers need to show in their homes?)
  - Potential adopters go to the shelter to meet with the caregiver and the pets. We don’t send clients to foster caregivers’ homes.

- Do you train people how to introduce animals to other pets in the home?
  - We provide information about this in the adoption packets and send it home with adopters.
- Website is confusing
  - Yes, the website is challenging. The City of Rochester plans to switch to a new website in the coming months that we hope will be far more user-friendly. In the meantime, we are working on cleaning up our pages and ensuring that the content is up-to-date, informative, and functional.
- How long is the average time to foster an animal?
  - On average, two weeks
- How many foster families do you have currently?
  - 50 cats, 60-70 dogs
- What relationships do you have with area rescues?
  - We try to establish relations with as many area rescues as possible. There are currently over 60 partners on our transfer partner list. However, only a few are able to accept any significant number of animals because they are all struggling with capacity.
- Do you provide support money to foster caregivers?
  - We don't provide monetary support, but we provide supplies, food, and vet care
- What is the screening process for foster caregivers?
  - Once an application is received, we screen foster caregivers over the phone. We believe in the honesty and goodness of people.
- Why is there a backlog of animals that need fostering/shortage of fosters?
  - Every shelter throughout the country is dealing with this and it is not unique to Rochester. There was a nationwide push to get involved with animal shelters by fostering early in the pandemic. However, as shutdowns were lifted and people returned to workplaces, the interest in fostering pets has waned.
- Are you given supplies for your foster animals?

- Yes, we purchase and receive donated supplies that we give to foster families.
- What about old/sick animals? Are there concessions for getting them fostered?
  - The only way they go out to foster is if it's something we could treat in house, something that isn't extreme and that the foster caregiver can handle, i.e., heartworm. Old animals are listed for adoption, unless there are severe medical issues that need fostering.
- If more people know about the shelter status (whether it's full) or even if there is a shelter (many people don't know).
  - Yes, we want more publicity and are working on spreading awareness via website, social media, community events, neighborhood association meetings, and through forums like this meeting.
- Dog day out
  - This is a great idea and something we have on the list. We hope to be able to add this to our programs when staff and resources permit.

### **Keeping Families Together = Supporting the pet and family through crisis**

#### **Pet Support = Providing access to pet supplies and resources**

##### **1. Why are we providing pet food and vet care to people who cannot afford to take care of themselves?**

We believe that pet ownership is a basic human right. No one should be denied the love and companionship of that bond regardless of socio-economics. There are programs that provide support and resources to keep that relationship intact. We are providing some of those supportive services. It's just like other forms of support provided via social services.

##### **2. Why are you housing owned animals at the shelter if you are trying to limit the number of animals in the shelter?**

We implemented the safety net housing program when shelter intakes were down and resources were available to support that person-animal bond as the owner works through crisis. Ideally, those pets were being housed in foster homes and not at the shelter. That program is temporarily on hold because the shelter has been over capacity and safety net foster homes have dwindled.

##### **3. How are you connecting with people where they are?**



In 2016, we started our door-to-door outreach program where our team was visiting underserved neighborhoods to share information and resources while building relationships with community members. We continued that work until the onset of the pandemic when we shifted to call-ahead supply drop-offs and drive-up events for pet food and vaccinations. Throughout, we have continued to provide access to spay/neuter via our Pets for Life and voucher programs, although each have experienced some temporary interruptions due to staffing challenges at our partnering vet clinics. We are planning to resume door-to-door engagement once we can build a team of employees and volunteers sufficient to operate both pet resource center activities and neighborhood visits.

**Chart paper comments/questions:**

- Does your outreach go out to all the community?
  - We've done outreach to all of the 14605 area, which is Pets for Life focus area, which also includes 14621.
- How do people find out about resources?
  - People find out about our resources in various ways. Some of those include, but are not limited to: social media sharing, calling or walking into the shelter, and through word of mouth.
- When you get animals chipped are you automatically registering them?
  - Yes, we register animals as soon as possible into our database after chipping them
- Are there income guidelines?
  - There are no income guidelines.
- Is the program based on donations?
  - Yes, much of the supplies and food we provide at drive-up food events is donated. We also receive grants for pet support-related activities.
- It would be good to let the community know about the national and local vet shortage
  - We agree and we will explore ways to share that in our community messaging.
- Need more community outreach
  - We've recently hired a position that will help with community engagement and hope to grow this team over the next few years. However, a recurring limiting factor is access to veterinary care and spay/neuter. Our local veterinarians and clinic partners are

operating at capacity so we need to expand that network to better address the community needs.

### **Index card comments/questions**

- The shelter is full. Why hasn't it been on TV news?
  - There are seasonal fluctuations with animals entering the shelter and the warmest months are always the busiest. We do work with our media partners to help us let the community know when we were full, but we can't do that on a weekly basis. We try to restrict our pleas by way of the media when times are direst. We try concentrate on getting animals into foster care and to transfer rescue partners on a regular basis instead.
- Why isn't there a pet of the week and why isn't VSAS promoting it on their Facebook?
  - We put the pet of week promotion on hold during the first two years of the pandemic and are working to get it reinstated. We've begun connecting with our media partners on resuming this.
- Doggie Day Out, like the Niagara SPCA
  - This is a great idea and something we have on the list. We hope to be able to add this to our programs when staff and resources permit.
- What can be the protocol for any animal in foster care that becomes sick during the weekend or overnight hours, so that animal gets care in a timely manner?
  - Foster care givers receive a manual with a "foster 911" list of what's an emergency and not an emergency. If it's an emergency, they then contact their foster team leader. At that point, the foster team leader would contact the first vet on the list. If the they don't answer, they go on to the second vet. If the second vet doesn't answer, there are other options on the list.
- Vet care for fosters?
  - For routine general vet care examinations and treatments are provided by the clinic team.
- Employees should keep website updated on animals in foster care; post on various Facebook pages
  - We're working on engaging our foster caregivers on being involved in the process for marketing the animals for adoption. Their observations and relationship with the pets is vital to showcasing those unique personalities and quirks. Plus, the foster caregivers can

get great photos and videos.

- Shelters asking people to foster. Do we help financially?
  - We don't provide money per se, but we provide supplies, food, pet medical care.
- Is there a communication with the RCSD to go into the classroom to teach students the difference between a pet and a working dog? How to care for a pet?
  - We don't have a specific resource/program that goes into schools and talks about pets as service animals/working animals, but we do get invited to talk to schools about what we do and general tips and guidelines.
- Are we familiar with "A Horses Friend", a career development program by Matthew Doward? The RCSD used the program as a special education program. Do you see this type of exposure for city children as important?
  - We've heard of the program but are not directly involved in it. We are supportive of the philosophy of it.
- Why aren't backyard breeders gone after more aggressively since they are the source of many mistreated and neglected animals?
  - There's not a specific local ordinance that restricts pet owners from breeding their dogs. NY state agriculture and markets regulates pet dealers – visit their site for more information.
- Was totally appreciative of the fact that when my dog was injured I was able to bring him to Verona St. to be seen and treated for free.
  - We're so glad we could support! The human-animal bond is what we are all about.
- Each table the common thread: not enough vets, not enough space, not enough staff, programs on hold ☹
  - Some of it is funding. Some of it is what's happening throughout the country. Adoptions have slowed. Fostering has waned. We share your frustrations. We're struggling too, but we remain committed to finding community-based solutions to these community challenges.
- How many animals can the shelter hold before becoming at capacity?
  - There isn't a set number, but if there are more than 35 dogs and 35 cats in the building, we are over-capacity. We try to place animals in foster care, reunite them with owners,

get them adopted, or transfer them on a daily basis. When we start to approach capacity we intensify these efforts.

- If it is a matter of urgency for aggressive animals, how will that be addressed if the shelter is at capacity?
  - When dog owners are seeking to give up their dogs for issues related to aggression, we take them in and gather as much information as possible about the dog's history.
  - We refer to the Dunbar Bite Scale and consider the severity of bites to humans when deciding on pathways for such dogs.
  - For dogs with a documented history of aggression towards people or other animals, we try to find partner organizations with the expertise and resources to provide behavior modification. However, when that is not possible, such dogs may be euthanized.
  
- Let the public know about the food handouts on Fridays
- - We created a flyer that has been sent out through city distribution and DRHS and our own social media channels. We also have it on display, and as flyers in our lobby.
  
- What is the protocol for follow-up on pets with aggressive history?
  - For dogs with a documented history of aggression towards people or other animals, we try to find partner organizations with the expertise and resources to provide behavior modification. However, when that is not possible, such dogs may be euthanized.
  - In terms of our assessments, we consider all observations, notes, and documented history from the time the dog comes to us until the moment it leaves. This includes input from owners and finders when they turn dogs over to us and observations from employees and volunteers during the admission process, daily cleaning and feeding, daily walks and dog playgroups, meet-and-greet visits with potential adopters, and examinations and treatments. We share this comprehensive body of information with clients during the adoption process.
  - Formal behavior evaluations are no longer recommended within the animal shelter industry. We do not rely on a battery exam because they lack predictive value, set up many dogs for failure, and give the false impression to adopters that there will be no behavioral concerns. How dogs behave at the stressful animal shelter or while being poked, prodded, and goaded to react is not predictive of how dogs will behave in another setting. Instead of spending hours on ineffective evaluations, it is recommended that shelters spend more time allowing dogs to interact with people and dogs in more natural ways outside of the shelter walls walking and playing. These are the three articles that have helped justify our move away from battery exams.
    - [https://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/research\\_library/summary-analysis-no-better-than-flipping-a-coin-reconsidering-canine-behavior-evaluations-in-animal-shelters/](https://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/research_library/summary-analysis-no-better-than-flipping-a-coin-reconsidering-canine-behavior-evaluations-in-animal-shelters/)

- [https://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/research\\_library/what-is-the-evidence-for-reliability-and-validity-of-behavior-evaluations-for-shelter-dogs-a-prequel-to-no-better-than-flipping-a-coin/](https://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/research_library/what-is-the-evidence-for-reliability-and-validity-of-behavior-evaluations-for-shelter-dogs-a-prequel-to-no-better-than-flipping-a-coin/)
    - [https://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/research\\_library/saving-normal-a-new-look-at-behavioral-incompatibilities-and-dog-relinquishment-to-shelters/](https://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/research_library/saving-normal-a-new-look-at-behavioral-incompatibilities-and-dog-relinquishment-to-shelters/)
  - State law explicitly prohibits breed-specific regulations so we address each dog as an individual. Also, physical characteristics are not tied to dog behavior.
- FELV and FIV+ Cats:
  - Lollypop can help take these cats in
  - Mylene doesn't need to take them all (perplexed as to what this comment means)
    - Thanks we've been in touch with Lollypop. RAS adopts out FeLV and FIV cats but we'll make sure Lollypop Farm is notified when we have those cats for transfer.
- What is the success rate of Home-to-Home?
  - The rate is limited right now partly because we don't have a designated position to provide the oversight and follow-up. Our hope is to grow our team particularly in these core program areas so that we can better serve the community's needs.
- How can you approve foster families without home visits?
  - As with our adoption process, we believe in the goodness of people and do not want to impose barriers that we know are harmful to animals. Through the onboarding process, our foster team provides information, support, and resources to set foster caregivers up for success. Many lead to adoptions into those same homes.
- What kind of background and home checks are done for "free adoption" events?
  - We practice open, conversational adoptions designed to set the adopter up for success. The shelter industry has moved away from applications and screening processes that were designed to disqualify potential adopters. We believe in the inherent goodness of people and we trust that they have the best of intentions. Imposing barriers causes animals to stay in shelters longer and often reduces the likelihood of adoption.
- Has spay/neuter program been started up again? I get calls daily from people desperate to get their animals fixed before they get pregnant again.
  - We have continued to support spay and neuter surgeries for pets through our Pets for Life Program, which is focused on 14605 and 14621. Our spay/neuter voucher program

has been on hold awaiting finalization of the contract with the Rochester Community Animal Clinic. We anticipate that program resuming within the next few weeks.

- Please put one scanner in the Port of Rochester and libraries
  - Great suggestion. We will connect with the appropriate parties and try to make that happen.
  
- RAS vs. VSAS
  - Rochester Animal Services (RAS) is the City of Rochester's municipal animal care and control organization. It serves Rochester's people and animals to create safe neighborhoods, support the human-animal bond, and save and enhance lives. VSAS is a d/b/a for Friends of the Verona Street Animal Shelter, Inc. a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that supports the City's animal shelter, veterinary clinic, and field services operations with fundraising and promotions much as the Seneca Park Zoo Society supports the County's zoo.