

Town of Yucca Valley

TOWN COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

To: Honorable Mayor & Town Council
From: Shane Stueckle, Deputy Town Manager
 Curtis Yakimow, Town Manager
Date: April 30, 2025
Meeting Date: May 6, 2025

Subject: Animal Shelter 90 Day Operational Review, Update #2, Animal Shelter Specialist Position, Town Council Ad Hoc Committee, Volunteer and Foster Programs

Recommendation:

That the Town Council:

- Receive and files the Animal Shelter Operational Review, Update #2.
- Authorize the new position of Animal Shelter Specialist.
- Consider the establishment of a standing committee of two council members, and solicit public participation and input in the committee meetings.
- Direct staff to initiate programmatic operations for volunteers and animal foster efforts upon completion of staffing priorities.
- Review the identified Performance Factors and provide input and direction as desired.
- Direct staff to complete peer review of the draft Operational Review when complete.

Order of Procedure:

Request Staff Report
 Request Public Comment
 Council Discussion/Questions of Staff
 Motion/Second
 Discussion on Motion
 Call the Question

Prior Town Council Review:

At the April 1, 2025, Town Council meeting, the Town Council received the first Interim Update to the Shelters 90 Day Operational review.

At the March 4, 2025, Town Council meeting, the Town Council directed staff to complete an operational review of the Town's Animal Shelter operations. To keep the Town Council and the public informed during the operational review, Town staff will be providing interim updates on April 1, 2025, and May 6, 2025, with the final report submission planned for June 3, 2025.

At the February 18, 2025, Town Council meeting, the Town Council received public comments including concerns and observations regarding the Town's Animal Shelter operations. While the

comments were varied and diverse, some central themes revolved around the Shelter's animal intake processes, adoption availability notification process, canine adoption rates, canine euthanasia rates, community outreach and volunteer opportunities. Due to the item not being on the meeting agenda, Town Council was prohibited by State law from discussing the item.

Discussion:

The Town Council directed the Shelter Operational Review to be open to the public and transparent, and to be thorough in evaluating the Animal Shelter operations. Town Council direction also included that development of sustainable implementation be included with all recommended actions.

In this process, the Town developed a designed area on the Town's web page to inform the community about the 2025 Shelter Operational Review. Information contained in this area includes materials from the Operational Review as well as other pertinent data. Additional data is on the Animal Shelter section of the Town's web page.

Actions Taken to Date

Several steps have been taken to address Shelter operations since the Review process was initiated.

- Pet Saver, Adopt a Pet, Animal Shelter Facebook Pages are updated weekly. Shelter staffing at this time, especially with current staffing vacancies, cannot accommodate this function without additional resources. Information is updated every three to four days with the assistance of staff from Planning and Engineering/Public Works. Future software implementation will accomplish this function daily as part of the intake process.
- Expanded Use of Local Media and Social Media: Radio and newspaper marketing/advertising for the Shelter are underway, in addition to more active community communication through the Town's social media resources.
- Data verification and collection review of existing data sets and existing data processes.
- To date during the current review period, staff has received 23 requests for public records related to the Town's Animal Shelter operations. Staff continues to research and provide responsive records. Due to the volume and scope of the public records requests, this activity has required the participation of multiple Town departments. Staff continues to monitor, research and determine responses for those record requests still outstanding.
- Scheduling of Low Cost Spay/Neuter Event: In conjunction with Animal Action League, a spay neuter event will be held at the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter in June 2025. Dates and times will be announced in the future. This event is for Yucca Valley residents. Town staff are communicating with County representatives to encourage County to

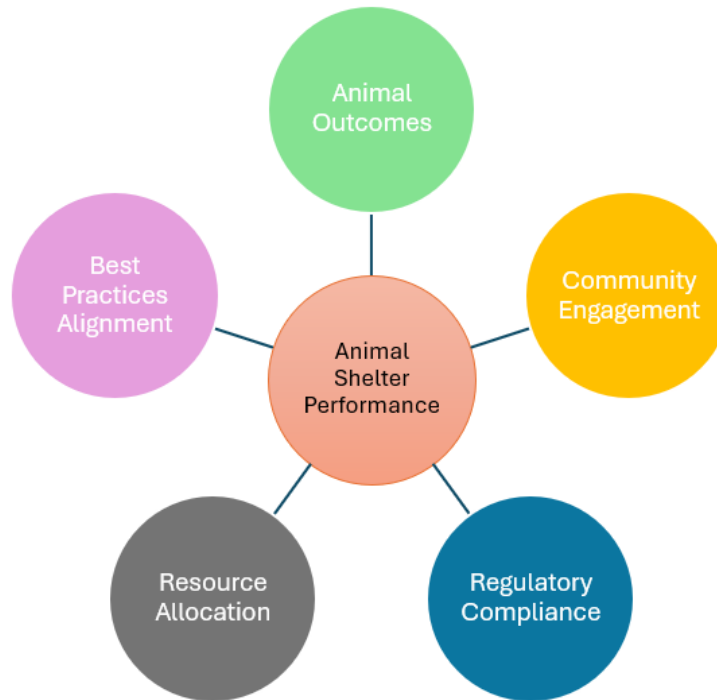
offer similar efforts for County residents in the Morongo Basin.

- Scheduling of Special Adoption Events: Ongoing special adoption events have been, and will continue to be held, as part of encouraging and maximizing adoption of Shelter animals.
- Outreach to Rescue Groups: Following emails to approximately 600 animal rescue organizations asking them to partner with the Shelter, staff have been following up on each rescue group individually. To date, attempts to contact approximately 311 rescue groups have occurred. Only approximately six (6) or seven (7) of approximately 311 have expressed interest in partnering with the Town and have requested a Rescue Group Application.
- Animals at the Impound Kennel Available for Public Viewing: The Impound Kennel area has been opened for public viewing of impounded animals during normal public hours, 12:00 PM to 5:00 PM. (external/outside only).
- Volunteer Opportunities: Evaluation is underway for volunteer opportunities in accordance with Town policies. Staffing vacancies need to be addressed prior to any volunteer forces being brought on board.
- Foster Program Opportunities: Evaluation is underway for animal foster opportunities upon completion of staffing priorities.

Yucca Valley Animal Shelter Performance Indicators:

There are a number of factors that should be included in evaluating the overall effectiveness of the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter. The diagram below is one structure and set of factors that may be considered for that purpose.

YVAS Key Performance Factors



Resource allocation, animal outcomes, community engagement, regulatory compliance and best practices for public shelter operations are all primary indicators of public shelter performance. There may be other factors that the Town Council finds should be included.

Between the County and the Town, approximately \$1.0 million annually is expended operating the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter. As can be seen later in this report, in order to address and include what many consider best practices for public animal shelters, additional human capital and financial resources are necessary to implement those efforts. Without those additional resources, the best practices for public shelters will not be adequately addressed.

Community engagement can come in several forms. These can include volunteer programs, formation of a Town Council Ad Hoc committee to provide ongoing Council review moving forward as programs are implemented, development of new survey tools to evaluate customer satisfaction, as well as establishing a donor program for to assist in leveraging additional resources that enhance Shelter performance. Community engagement can also occur through educational opportunities, such as spay/neuter/vaccination clinics, as well as through modified adoption fees for seniors and veterans.

Regulatory compliance is discussed in this report, with policy discussion focused on shelter capacity management, what form that may take, and how that may affect overall shelter performance.

Community Engagement: One of the recommended actions is for Town Council consideration of forming a standing committee for ongoing Council evaluation of programmatic changes at the Shelter. The Town Council occasionally uses committees to address operational or similar issues. Staff would recommend that the ad hoc committee be established as a standing committee, agendaized, subject to the Brown Act, and actively seeking public participation.

As addressed in other areas of this Report, volunteer program operations are common at public animal shelters. The Town anticipates the use of volunteers in several functional areas, based upon proper staff structure and supervision in accordance with the Town's Volunteer Policy, attached to this staff report.

Expanded Shelter Adoption Opportunities: Expansion of shelter adoption opportunities is ongoing. The Shelters expanded presence on social media platforms is occurring weekly. Advertising the Shelter and adoptions on local radio and in the local newspaper provides an additional viewpoint for Shelter adoptions. Implementing foster programs, where the foster provides marketing for adoption of the animal will increase the Shelter's presence as well as freeing space in the Shelter.

Donor Outreach to Leverage Public Resources: Partnering with both individual and corporate donors can create advantages for Shelter program implementation. Both additional financial and material (food, bedding, etc) resources as well as marketing efforts can greatly assist in the success of Shelter operations. Efforts in this area will include identification of donor opportunities and solicitation of donors. Recognition of donors' contributions and acknowledging and celebrating those community contributions may assist in the growth of these resources.

Shelter Capacity Management:

The Town's Animal Shelter is an open-admission shelter that is required to provide intake of stray dogs regardless of age, health condition, pedigree, or level of aggression, and operates at the Town's newest-built public facility completed in 2014. As an example of the requirement for the intake of stray animals, in calendar year 2023, 61.15% of total dogs accepted at the shelter were either dropped off by dog owners or were left in the outdoor drop kennels by anonymous donors. Only 24.48% of total dogs were impounded by Animal Control Officers.

- **After Hours Drop Off Kennels:** One feature found at the Town's Shelter that is not present at many other public shelters are the outdoor drop-off kennels. Many dogs are taken in at the Shelter through these kennels. The Town is considering is reducing or eliminating these outdoor drop off kennels, reducing animal intakes and reducing euthanasia rates. An additional benefit would be the required in-person visit that a drop-off animal owner would be required to do. This would allow for Shelter staff to

engage with the animal owner to discuss animal characteristics, health, adoptability, and other factors. For found animals, it would provide an opportunity to learn more about where the animal was located, conditions, and other factors that may assist in successful return to owner status. It is anticipated that some of the animals that would be dropped off in these after hour kennels will be turned loose in Town, creating more calls for service for Animal Control field officers.

- **Owner Surrender:** **State** law does not mandate public shelters to accept owner surrendered animals. The state law is specific to “stray” animals. A number of public shelters today have adopted operational standards where owner surrenders are not allowed at any time, as well as not allowed when the shelter is at a specific capacity level. This reduces crowding in shelters and as a result reduces euthanasia rates. Staff continues to evaluate this concept in some form to assist with capacity management, and allow for improved conditions during shelter stays as well as potentially less days in shelter.
- **Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR):**
Many public shelters have implemented TNR programs to reduce cat intake at their shelters and as a result, reducing euthanasia rates. Many animal control operations are no longer capturing feral cats, and are not accepting cat surrenders. The Town’s Shelter Partner, San Bernardino County, has adopted a similar program, as many public shelters do today. An attachment to this report describes the City of Rancho Cucamonga’s TNR program, as just one example.

Community Education and Resources for Responsible Pet Ownership: A number of educational opportunities exist. These can occur through expanded adoption events where additional information on animal care can be provided; spay neuter education and assistance programs can include educational components, which those participants can share with other individuals. Foster outreach through social media can also expand educational materials through those fosters partnering with the Town to expand adoption efforts. Further, the Town may partner with non-profit organizations that focus on responsible pet ownership and assisting such owners in areas of need.

Staffing Evaluation: Current staffing as approved in the adopted Budget includes the following full and part positions. The structure includes six (6) full-time positions and two (2) part-time positions.

- 1 FT: Animal Care and Control Manager - Filled
- 1 FT: Administrative Assistant III - Filled
- 1 FT: Senior Shelter Specialist - Vacant
- 3 FT: Animal Control Officer 1/Animal Shelter Specialist – 2 Filled, 1 Vacant
- 2 PT: Kennel Technicians – 1 Filled, 1 Vacant

Not included in the adopted budget are:

4 PT: Kennel Technician emergency hires, and that recruitment process is underway.

The three (3) FT ACO1/Animal Shelter Specialist positions are “hybrid” positions with Animal Control Officer field service responsibilities, as well as in participating in the after-hours emergency on call services that the Town’s Animal Control program provides. The Town has no personnel dedicated to only Animal Control field services. All field calls remove one or more staff from Animal Shelter functions. Elimination of field officers was implemented in approximately 2012/ 2013 as part of the Town’s budgetary control measures.

The current budgeted structure allows for the operation of the shelter at basic levels but does not provide the ability to implement what are considered best practices for shelters.

The addition of the proposed Animal Shelter Specialist position will provide daily support for adoption programs, maintenance of social media/Pet Finder/Adopt A Pet adoption resources and coordination and contact with rescue organizations.

The Senior Shelter Specialist position would supervise volunteers, as this position and the Animal Care and Control Manager position are the only two positions with supervision responsibilities at the Shelter.

Staff anticipates that at mid-year budget review, in January/February 2026, a likely recommendation will include increasing the two (2) regular part time positions to four (4) regular part time positions. That will be a continual evaluation process as the Town implements changes at the Shelter.

Summary:

A number of changes are underway and/or have been implemented to date. These are in the areas of data collection and verification, social media and availability of adoptable animals; use of local media for marketing and increasing animal adoption opportunities; increased special adoption events and lowered adoption fees; rescue group outreach in attempts to increase the number of rescue group partners; animals at the Impound Kennel can be viewed daily during open hours; and volunteer and foster program opportunities are being evaluated and prepared for implementation. The Operation Review web page provides critical information on this process.

Next Steps:

Town staff is scheduled to provide the completed Operational Review at the June 3, 2025 Town Council Meeting. The Town Council may consider directing a peer review of the operational review assessment. Finally, the Council will be required to approve and proceed with the contract amendment processes updating the contract between the Town and County for Shelter operations.

Fiscal Impact

For the 2025-2026 Fiscal Year, the following budget changes are anticipated. These may be modified based upon the Town Council action at the June 3, 2025, Town Council meeting. All recommended and requested modifications will be included in the upcoming 2025-2026 FY budget amendment resolution presented to the Council in June 2025.

Full Time Animal Shelter Specialist:	\$70,000
4-Emergency Hire Temp Part Time	\$55,000
Spay Neuter Vaccination Clinics	\$12,000 to \$16,000
Radio/Newspaper Marketing/Advertising:	\$15,000 to \$20,000
Shelter/Field/License Software	\$1,000 to \$45,000
Off-Site Staff Training and Certifications:	\$10,000
Volunteer Operational Supplies:	\$5,500
Staff/Volunteer Computer/Workstations:	\$6,500

Estimated Animal Shelter Operational Budget Changes over current fiscal year: \$175,000 to \$228,000

- Attachments:**
- 2023 Community Survey Final Presentation
 - 2023 Community Survey Report '23 Final
 - 2025-03-04 Town Council - Full Minutes-1676
 - 04 01 2025 DRAFT TC Minutes
 - Rancho ACS- TNR Program
 - FY 202426 Strategic Plan and Presentation