

Town of Yucca Valley

TOWN COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

To: Honorable Mayor & Town Council
From: Curtis Yakimow, Town Manager
 Shane Stueckle, Deputy Town Manager
Date: May 28, 2025
Meeting Date: June 3, 2025

Subject: Animal Shelter Operational Review Draft Report

Recommendation:

That the Town Council

1. Receives and files the draft Operational Review of the Town's Animal Shelter operations.
2. Provides input and direction as desired.
3. Establishes a standing committee of the Town Council for Animal Care and Control and identify and appoint two council members to serve on the committee.
4. Direct staff to return to the Town Council with proposed budget amendments required to implement the immediate recommendations as directed by the Town Council.
5. Direct staff to propose and negotiate required changes to the existing Shelter Services agreement with the County to implement immediate recommendations as directed by the Town Council.

Prior Review

The Town Council directed an Operational Review of the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter on March 4, 2025. Update #1 was presented to the Town Council on April 1, 2025. Update #2 was presented to the Town Council on May 6, 2025.

Order of Procedure

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

Discussion

The Town Council directed Town management to conduct an Operational Review of shelter operations, policies, and practices, and return to the Town Council within 90 days.

Focused operational reviews can be helpful to confirm or correct statistics, affirm or clarify operational practices, evaluate procedures for consistency with industry best practices,

consider modifications that may improve desired outcomes, and provide communication and transparency to the public.

While the day-to-day operations of the Shelter are managed by the Town's Animal Care and Control Manager, the operational review was performed by the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Shelter operations fall within the Town's Community Development functions overseen by the Deputy Town Manager with terminal management responsibility under the Town Manager.

Given the Council's desire for timely reporting, the Review is intended to identify broad issues facing the Shelter. It is not designed to provide detailed analysis of each observation and assessment. The operational review was performed to yield the following outcomes:

- Shelter performance evaluation framework.
- Development of actionable recommendations for operational enhancements.
- Identification of broad areas for process improvement and efficiency gains.
- Optimization of resource allocation recommendations.
- Enhanced platforms for community engagement.
- Improved data driven decision making.

The draft report is included as an attachment to this staff report and provides an overall assessment of the Town's shelter operations. Much of the content has been presented in various forms to the Council as part of the interim updates. Final recommendations are included for the Council's review, discussions, and policy modifications. Upon completion of the draft Review, the Town Council directed staff to circulate the document for peer review.

Finally, animal shelter operations are ongoing and daily activities. A report given at a single point in time will not be sufficient for long-term policy and practice change. While specific recommendations are presented, meeting the Town Council's established performance factors will be a marathon, not a sprint. Successful implementation will require Town Council commitment, public engagement, professional collaboration, financial commitments, public education, and staff accountability.

Alternatives

None recommended.

Fiscal Impact

None with this item.

Attachments:

Draft Operational Review



Yucca Valley Animal Shelter

Operational Review

June 3, 2025

DRAFT



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Attachment: Draft Operational Review (6169 : Animal Shelter Operational Review Draft Report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Yucca Valley operates the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter (Shelter) providing services to the Town of Yucca Valley and to the surrounding unincorporated areas of San Bernardino County. In response to public comments raised regarding Shelter operations, the Town Council directed Town management staff to complete an operational review (Review) of the Town's Animal Shelter operations.

The intent of the review was to assess current Shelter operations and compare and contrast those observations with public comments and concerns, as well as with modern best practices for public animal shelters.

Many of the challenges and concerns facing the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter are not unique nor dissimilar to challenges facing shelter operations throughout California. Illegal breeding, irresponsible pet ownership, economic hardship, increase pet ownership costs and similar challenges are consistently impacting public and private animal shelters across the country with public shelters facing even greater strain due to mandates and regulations unique to publicly funded shelters.

Certain aspects of the Shelter's operation were identified as historically meeting or exceeding public shelter standards. Many other practices fell short in meeting common best practices used in modern public shelter operations and were aligned with public concerns.

Town management staff have identified numerous recommendations for immediate, intermediate, and long-term implementation. While not a panacea for every operational concern, when implemented, the recommendations will address the majority of public concerns and shortcomings of the Shelter operation.

In conclusion, Town management has identified both positive aspects of the current Shelter operation as well as shortcomings in the application of best practices. With a modest increase in financial investment, many of the shortcomings can be addressed in an accelerated timeframe.

While these immediate changes will aid the Shelter in delivering enhanced positive animal outcomes, significant challenges will remain with respect to animal intake, limited adoption absorption rates, capacity management, and euthanasia rates. Sustainable changes to those factors will require a community effort focused on responsible pet ownership, public assistance programs for spay/neuter/vet care, active rescue group participation in Shelter placements, and community education and participation.

INTRODUCTION

At the February 18, 2024, Town Council meeting, the Town Council received significant public comments including concerns and observations regarding shortfalls in the operation of the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter (Shelter). 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, best practices, and community engagement.

While the Town Council meeting of February 18 was the first meeting with substantial public comments, some in the community highlighted frustration with their prior efforts to engage with Shelter and the Town to highlight concerns and have an opportunity for meaningful dialog to improve observed shortfalls in Shelter operations.

At the March 4, 2025, Town Council meeting, the Town Council directed Town management staff to complete an operational review (Review) of the Town's Animal Shelter operations. To keep the Town Council and public informed during the operational review, the Council directed interim updates on April 1, 2025, and May 6, 2025, with the final draft operational review report due by June 3, 2025.

While the day-to-day operations of the Shelter are managed by the Town's Animal Care and Control Manager, the operational review was performed by the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Shelter operations fall within the Town's Community Development functions overseen by the Deputy Town Manager with terminal management responsibility under the Town Manager.

Given the Council's desire for timely reporting, the Review is intended to identify broad issues facing the Shelter. It is not designed to provide detailed analysis of each observation and assessment. The operational review was performed to yield the following outcomes:

- Shelter performance evaluation framework.
- Development of actionable recommendations for operational enhancements.
- Identification of broad areas for process improvement and efficiency gains.
- Optimization of resource allocation recommendations.
- Enhanced platforms for community engagement.
- Improved data driven decision making.

Upon completion of the draft Review, the Town Council directed staff to circulate the document for peer review. Once that process has been completed, the Report will be returned to the Town Council for final acceptance.

SHELTER BACKGROUND

Prior to the Town's incorporation, the County of San Bernardino provided Animal Control services, including both field and shelter services, to the Yucca Valley area. There were no field officers assigned full time to Yucca Valley specifically, and County field officers responded to calls for service based upon available resources and types of cases reported. On November 27, 1991, the Town incorporated and began providing Animal Control field services within the Town boundaries on July 1, 1992. Shelter services were provided under a contractual arrangement with the Hi-Dez Kennels through Mid-2006. In Mid-2006, Hi Dez Kennels was purchased by the Town, and the Town began operating shelter services at that time.

In November 2008, the Town entered into a Joint Powers Authority or JPA with San Bernardino County on a project for a replacement animal shelter serving both the Town area and the unincorporated County areas. The new facility was built and began operations in 2013.

While the Town's staffing of both field and shelter services has changed over the years, the following outlines the current staffing levels of the Shelter.

- 1 FT Animal Care and Control Manager
- 1 FT Administrative Assistant
- 3 FT Shelter Specialist / Animal Control Officer 1
- 1 FT Senior Shelter Specialist
- 2 PT Kennel Technicians

Based upon Town Council action at the Council meeting of May 6, 2025, the following position was added to the above staffing structure.

- 1FT Shelter Specialist

The Shelter **public hours are Tuesday through Saturday, from noon to 5PM**. Animal Control provides field coverage Monday through Friday from 8AM to 5PM. After these hours, field officers are on-call to respond to emergencies and priority calls, which are dispatched through the Sheriff's Department dispatch center.

The County of San Bernardino contracts with the Town for bringing animals to the Yucca Valley Shelter. The contract with the County provides for approximately fifty (50) percent of total Shelter funding. In addition, County Animal Control Field staff operate from the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter facility. County staff do not provide any shelter services to either Town or County residents.

Budgetary Background

For fiscal year 2013-2014, the Animal Shelter had a budget of \$564,136. This budget has increased to the fiscal year 2024-2025 budget of \$1,011,451. The table below outlines actual Shelter annual expenditures since 2014.

YV Animal Shelter Expenditures											
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Salaries	\$369,048	\$383,910	\$397,599	\$345,044	\$398,399	\$444,893	\$431,731	\$444,742	\$458,067	\$504,874	\$521,646
Operating Supplies	\$135,515	\$149,216	\$146,730	\$147,146	\$162,900	\$153,269	\$140,617	\$135,124	\$160,977	\$227,073	\$223,988
Administrative Overhead	\$59,573	\$63,147	\$69,500	\$71,585	\$73,733	\$75,945	\$78,220	\$80,570	\$80,570	\$85,294	\$91,690
Total	\$564,136	\$596,273	\$613,829	\$563,775	\$635,032	\$674,107	\$650,567	\$660,436	\$699,614	\$817,241	\$837,324
Annual Percent Increase (%)		5.70	2.94	(8.15)	12.64	6.15	(3.49)	1.52	5.93	16.81	2.46

Attachment: Draft Operational Review (6169 : Animal Shelter Operational Review Draft Report)

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & CONCERNS

Over the past six months, there has been significant public comment provided to the Town Council about Shelter operations. These comments included but were not limited to the following concerns:

- **Ineffective Use of Social Media:** Effective use of social media markets adoptable animals without the need to visit a shelter. These tools assist in maximizing live release rates and placing animals in their new forever homes and to assist in effective and timely return to owner efforts. Town operations lacked effective use of these platforms.
- **Lack of a Volunteer Program:** Volunteers are common resources at public open admission shelters. Volunteers can function as an extension of the Town staff in providing valuable services to the community. Town operations offered no such opportunities.
- **Lack of an Animal Foster Program:** Different forms of animal foster programs are common at public open admission shelters. Foster programs can function as an extension of shelter services, increasing live release rates while reducing total shelter population. No Town programs exist that support fostering opportunities.
- **Ineffective Use of Rescue Groups:** Effective use of rescue groups reduces shelter population and reduces shelter euthanasia rates. These tools aid in maximizing live release rates and placing animals in their new forever homes. Limited Town use of such groups.
- **High Euthanasia Rates & Euthanasia Without Sedation:** Euthanasia rates had increased at the Shelter to very high levels. Live release outcomes fell below public shelter averages.
- **Public Adoptable and Non-Adoptable Animals Information Available Online:** In addition to animals classified as available for public adoption, requests for photos and information on all animals at the Shelter were consistently voiced. Availability of this information may assist in lost animals being claimed, as well as with rescue groups identifying animals that they are interested in adopting.
- **Need For Extended Days/Hours of Operation:** Comments and concerns were expressed on the Shelter's public facing hours and the need to have added hours or days of public access.
- **Temperament Assessment:** Public comments requested implementation of outside temperament testing in determining the adoptability of animals prior to staff identifying animal classification.
- **Desire for Community Engagement:** Input was provided about the desire to have a platform for community engagement in Town animal welfare operations.

OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Services and Facilities

The Yucca Valley Animal Shelter provides shelter services for the Town as well as the surrounding unincorporated County areas. The County contracts with the Town to house animals brought to the shelter by County field officers, as well as for County field officers to operate from the Shelter. County personnel do not provide any Shelter services at the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter. Annual animal intake at the Shelter can vary significantly between years, ranging from approximately 1,100 to 1,400 total animals.

The Shelter has 59 dog runs, divided between what are termed the Impound and Adoptable Kennels. There are 33 dog runs in the Impound Kennel and 26 dog runs in the Adoptable Kennel. The Town has not established a “capacity population” for the Shelter. While designed to hold one dog in each run, multiple smaller dogs may be able to occupy one dog run, while a Great Dane, for example, would be housed in one run with no other dogs. As part of the outcome of this operational review, the Shelter will develop a “Shelter population” as a means of measuring daily capacity levels.

The Shelter has two cat rooms, one for adoptable cats and an isolation cat room for those that are ill. There are a total of 46 cat cages available.

A small room is available for other types of small animals brought to the Shelter such as birds, rabbits, Guinea pigs, tortoises and turtles, and other similar animals. An outdoor pig/chicken/other animal enclosure is available and used on a frequent basis. Large animals impounded by the Town are sheltered at private commercial facilities. These limited cases have involved horses, which the Town Shelter is not equipped to house. Laundry services, consisting mostly of blankets for the animals, are performed on site by Shelter staff.

The Shelter facility is approaching thirteen years of operation. The Shelter is consistently visited by thousands of visitors annually, with an average of slightly below 4,000 visitors yearly over the last five years. Daily operations have the kennels cleaned and animals fed by 10:30 a.m. daily, prior to opening for public access at noon Tuesday through Saturday. Consideration of the extension of public operating hours should occur upon completion of higher priority recommendations. **The Shelter staff does an excellent job of caring for the facility and keeping it clean for the animals and visitors alike.**

While modern, the Shelter lobby has remained relatively unchanged for the past 10 years. The lobby area should be updated to reflect a welcoming and encouraging motif and feel. This can be done independently or in conjunction with a broader Shelter branding effort that is coordinated and consistent throughout the Shelter’s operations.

Current staffing and operational budget levels constrain the ability to address desired programs, such as a foster program, a volunteer program, and in expanding adoption, spay/neuter and vaccination events, and dedicated special events for increasing live release rates and decreasing animal intake demand. These programs cannot be consistently implemented and run with existing staffing levels and budget.

County support and implementation of similar efforts in the areas of spay/neuter and vaccination programs in the unincorporated County area are also essential in long-term efforts to increase live return rates and reduce euthanasia rates at the Shelter.

Shelter Data Systems

As the Review began, many of the initial public and managerial requests for information from the Shelter centered around various forms of data. The requests for data took significant staffing efforts over longer than expected times. This was attributable to the Shelter's manual data entry and management systems currently deployed. As an example, data information cards are used for each animal within the Shelter. These cards are manually updated by staff for each of the various steps of animal movement and care during the animal's stay at the Shelter.

Consolidation and centralized input of the individual animal information cards may occur during the course of the month, with final reporting sometime by the end of the succeeding month. Therefore, the data systems currently in use do not allow for instantaneous or even day-to-day clarity on Shelter capacity, animal inventory, or animal management within the Shelter.

This approach to data management complicated all aspects of the operational review and is an archaic and outdated process for managing Shelter data. Further, the manual approach to data management lends itself to lower accuracy of reported data, and the need for frequent revision of reported data.

Shelter data and statistics need to be available daily and are best addressed through software system implementation which includes both Shelter and field service data needs. Shelter data and statistics are also essential for transparency and public information on Shelter operations.

Many optional tools and programs are available to automate data management systems to lend efficiency, accuracy, and timeliness to data management. **Acquisition and implementation of modern data tools should be among the highest high priorities for the Shelter.** Until this transition is complete, manual data transcribing will continue to be used as source data for the required information needed to successfully manage Shelter operations.

Shelter Staffing Structure

Identified in the background section earlier in the Review, the Shelter staffing structure has been in place for approximately the past ten years. While able to meet the basic operational needs of the Shelter, the staffing structure does not provide sufficient bandwidth or redundancy for effective operations.

The Town's Animal Care and Control services are operated at minimal staffing levels, following Town budget reductions in fiscal year 2012-2013. Those changes resulted in the elimination of dedicated field officers while combining field functions with Shelter employees' daily operations. With the minimal staffing levels, any extended absence from the work environment by one employee results in difficulty in delivering quality day-to-day services.

This staffing structure weakness is most acute when evaluating and implementing Best Practices. With primarily limited part-time shelter technicians responsible for daily feeding and cleaning, these core functions are often left to the Animal Shelter Specialist / Animal Care and Control Officer positions during times of high volume or normal staff absences. While highly cost effective, this approach limits the use of Animal Shelter Specialist/ACO positions to implement best practice initiative or policy modifications.

Activities such as social media management, data management and analysis, volunteer program supervision, or other best practice efforts are deprioritized when the available staff needs to perform basic daily tasks including feeding and cleaning.

The Town Council recently authorized the addition of an Animal Shelter Specialist who would be assigned solely to Shelter operations and implementation of Shelter best practices as directed.

Additional changes in the Shelter staffing structure will likely need to occur as various policy changes are recommended for implementation by the Town Council. Effective volunteer programs, foster programs, social media management and other initiatives require dedicated staff. Changes in the staffing structure will lead to significant cost impacts on the Shelter budget and will require Council consideration as part of the routine review of Town-wide operation and demands.

Equally important is to ensure that both new and existing Shelter staff receive proper training and certification programs as identified in formal job descriptions. Such training can often be postponed during times of high demand. A proper level of Shelter staffing will ensure sufficient bandwidth to implement required and recommended staff training.

Best Practices Implementations

Volunteers

Volunteer programs at public animal shelters are highly common. Volunteers can fill many distinct roles at shelters, and shelters use volunteers in varied and different capacities. This report recommends the implementation of volunteer programs. It is expected that volunteer programs and functions will continue to evolve as new programs are implemented.

Foster Programs

Shelter foster programs can take several different forms, from fostering only young or sick animals, to foster programs functioning as an extension of shelter services in adopting straight to the community. Foster programs help reduce shelter populations and increase adoption successes. San Bernardino County Animal Control announced a foster program in May of 2025. This report recommends the implementation of foster programs over time.

Social Media Management

The use of social media to communicate animals available is an important part of increasing positive animal outcomes. All of the Town's standard social media platforms will be used to market shelter animals and activities, in addition to other platforms such as Pet Finder and Adopt-A-Pet, and related platforms.

Public Outreach Events

Vaccination clinics and Spay/Neuter/Chip clinics are common tools used by animal control agencies for outreach to animal owners, in an effort to reduce animal shelter intake populations and to reduce the number of unwanted animals in their communities. This report recommends the addition of these services into the annual operational budget. Other examples of events could include mobile animal adoption events, animal appearances at special events, and coordination with other Town events with active attendance.

Shelter Population Management

Shelter population management is a critical part of public shelter best practices. Spay/Neuter clinics, vaccination and microchip clinics, strategically managing owner relinquishments and after-hours drop off kennels, rescue group outreach and coordination, and Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) cat programs all impact Shelter animal population. While the Town has not historically used such programs on a regular basis, integration of these efforts are required for effective Shelter population management.

Animal Outcomes

Best management practices for shelters are designed to result in maximizing the live release rate in the combined areas of:

- Adoptions
- Return to Owner
- Transfer to Rescue
- Transfer to Shelter

The intended results of all recommended actions are to maximum the live release rate for the Shelter through all available tools and tied to those resources authorized by the Town Council for program implementation. In addition, programs designed to keep animals out of the Shelter to begin with, are also critical for positive animal outcomes.

The chart below identifies the Shelter’s historical animal outcome for Dogs over the past 12 years.

YEAR	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
TOTAL DOG INTAKE	969	1009	950	775	705	906	925	896	1144	1323	1235	1669
Adopted	18.19%	20.83%	18.00%	20.20%	21.80%	30.00%	31.70%	35.80%	30.10%	23.80%	32.00%	33.90%
RTO	15.75%	20.54%	21.40%	29.90%	30.40%	31.50%	23.60%	23.30%	22.00%	20.00%	21.00%	25.80%
Euthanasia	53.76%	46.44%	43.00%	26.20%	22.20%	22.20%	28.80%	24.10%	26.10%	33.90%	41.00%	32.40%
Dead Animals	4.98%	2.25%	5.80%	6.10%	7.20%	5.80%	7.50%	8.50%	7.20%	6.20%	5.00%	5.80%
Died in Kennel	1.73%	1.59%	0.80%	0.70%	0.40%	0.80%	0.10%	0.70%	0.80%	0.50%	1.00%	0.50%
Escaped/Stolen	0.10%	0.09%	0.00%	0.30%	0.30%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.20%	0.10%	0.00%	0.20%
O/req Euthanasia	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.30%	2.20%	1.80%	3.70%	4.70%	0.00%	1.40%
Quarantine	1.42%	1.41%	2.60%	2.40%	3.40%	2.40%	1.40%	0.70%	0.30%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Trans Rescue	1.02%	5.44%	5.70%	11.40%	3.70%	3.60%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Trans Shelter	3.05%	1.41%	2.60%	2.90%	10.70%	0.60%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Transferred	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.60%	5.20%	9.30%	10.80%	0.00%	0.00%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Attachment: Draft Operational Review (6169 : Animal Shelter Operational Review Draft Report)

Community Engagement

Departments within the Town of Yucca Valley regularly provide updates to the Town Council and the community. The Town's Animal Care and Control department provided annual updates and outcome data to the Town Council as an agendized department presentation over the past five years. Public engagement during these presentations has historically been light with few, if any, public participants providing input or comment. The Town's last update was provided in June 2024, with one public comment. Additionally, the Town received very few formal comments through the Town Clerk, Town Council or Town Management offices.

Since March of 2025, community members have been significantly vocal in concerns about the Shelter. The community members represent a cross-section of residents in and outside of Town limits. Given the regional nature of the Shelter, residents from outside of Town limits have a vested interest in the operation of the Shelter as it is the shelter of services for the unincorporated areas surrounding Yucca Valley.

With no formal method of engagement or other pathways for providing input on Shelter operations, community members have used the standard Town Council meeting as a platform to share concerns. This approach is well-suited to identify broad issues of concern, but less effective in providing collaborative dialog and problem solving.

The recommended path for effective community engagement is the establishment of a regular standing committee of the Town Council dedicated to Shelter operations. In this format, two council members would be assigned to a standing committee that would hold regular meetings to discuss Shelter operations, practices, and potential modifications. The meetings would be agendized, subject to the Brown Act, and allow for ample public engagement on various issues. It is envisioned that the meetings would be structured in a workshop setting to encourage community participation, dialog, and input from subject matter experts. Recommendations from the standing committee would be brought forward to the full Town Council for consideration as appropriate.

Standardized Assessment Factors

In reviewing Shelter operations, it became clear that there were no established performance factors that provided clear guidance in evaluating Shelter performance. The lack of performance factors leads to differing levels of assessment, with some assessing performance based only on budgetary resources, some assessing only regulatory compliance, and others assessing only animal outcomes.

This disjointed approach inevitably leads to frustration. Clearly, key Shelter performance factors were necessary to establish a consistent and comprehensive basis from which to evaluate Shelter effectiveness and performance.

The Town Council identified and reviewed the establishment of Key Performance Factors described in detail later in this Review.

Shelter Capacity & Intake Management

With over 1,000 dogs coming into the Shelter on an annual basis, it is clear that both Shelter capacity and animal intake will remain a significant issue. In looking at intake data on a per capita basis, the Shelter intake numbers far exceed those from almost all shelters in the region, regardless of type. Without a reduction in Shelter intake, long-term meaningful reductions in euthanasia will be challenging. For example, the per capital rate of intake at the Shelter in 2023 was 33 dogs per 1,000 residents. Comparing that to the intake at the Rancho Cucamonga Shelter of 9 dogs per 1,000 residents highlights the challenges facing the Shelter. Given the rural nature of the service area, community adoption absorption rates are limited and likely to reach a saturation point affecting future local adoption numbers.

Overcrowding of the Shelter leads to many known challenges including:

- Increased stress levels of impounded animals
- Higher rates of disease
- Lower quality of life for impounded animals
- Animal behavior concerns
- Shelter environmental challenges

Tracking and understanding the flow of animals into the Shelter will be critical in developing effective Shelter programs. While Town impounds are a normal activity at the Shelter, the majority of intake occurs through Owner turn-in and through use of the Shelter's after hours drop off kennels.

After Hours Drop Off Kennels

As one of the only shelters in the Inland Empire offering after hours drop off kennels, the Shelter receives approximately one-third of the annual dog intakes through this feature. Information received with the dropped-off animal is often missing or incomplete. This process complicates animal care, increases length of stay, increases associated costs, and impacts the likelihood of adoption. Further, the geographic source of the animal is unlikely to be known.

Owner Relinquishment

The Shelter accommodates owner turn-in animals on a regular basis and generally without regard to Shelter capacity. With the Shelter typically running at or exceeding designed capacity, this practice increases the difficulty in effective capacity management. Alternatives for further analysis should include a review of owner turn-in programs including scheduled turn-ins, owner assistance, and foster care.

Length of stay

A primary objective of the Shelter should include a focus on reducing the length of stay within the Shelter. The longer the animal stays in the Shelter environment, the more difficult it is to accomplish a successful and effective live release. Additionally, the animals experiencing longer stays within the Shelter are subject to greater exposure to the negative impacts associated with shelter overcrowding.

SHELTER PERFORMANCE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Establishing clear performance factors is recommended to provide the Town Council and public with standards that can be evaluated on an objective basis, whether for budgetary performance, regulatory compliance, staff evaluation, or alignment with desired outcomes.

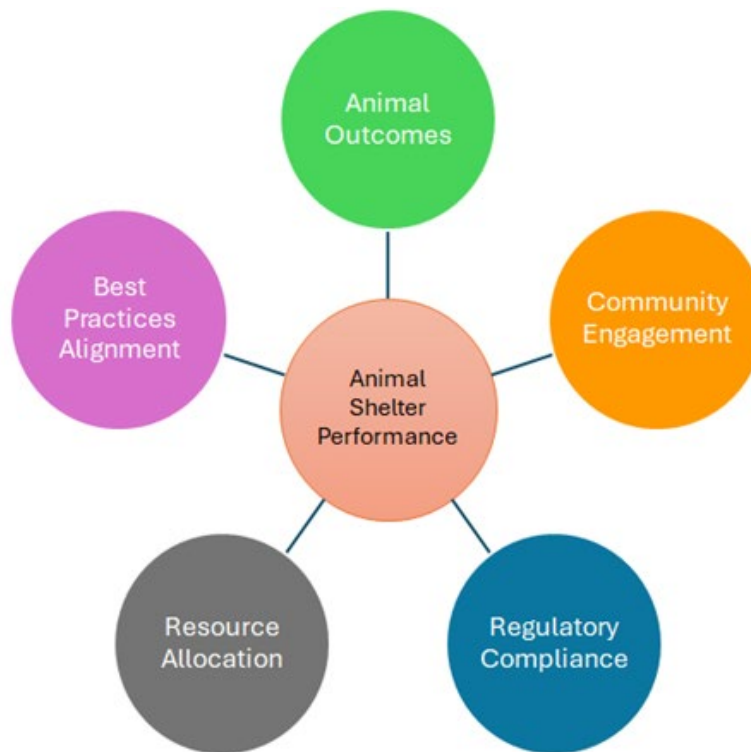
It is important to recognize that there are many factors that must be considered in shelter performance, and there is a relational dimension that determines overall performance.

To put this in practical application, it would not be appropriate to evaluate shelter performance only on one to two factors. This review, and the public input the Town Council has received, has proven just that. While the Shelter may have been performing well with resource allocation and regulatory compliance, that is not sufficient. Community engagement, live release rates, animal outcomes, and modern best practices were lessor priorities.

Similarly, evaluating the shelter only on animal outcomes does not recognize the limited resources of a taxpayer funded operation. Clearly then, a combination of primary factors must be identified and established as the baseline for evaluating shelter efficiency.

The Town Council identified five key performance factors for use in Shelter performance evaluation. Each factor represents a key component in the overall success of the Shelter. The various actions that have been identified through this operational review will generally fall within one of the key performance factors. This framework will also aid the public in understanding how Shelter performance will be evaluated.

Key Performance Factors



The Town Council identified the relationship between the various performance factors with the intention to provide a relational framework that reflects the multiple dynamics influencing overall Shelter performance. The factors are not intended to be absolutely proportional as operational, physical, or financial constraints may impose a ceiling on any given factor. Rather the intent is to efficiently categorize goals and initiatives in a framework that is roughly proportional while providing flexibility to shift emphasis among the factors as needs and resources are identified.

Key Performance Factors

1. **Regulatory Compliance** – Identifies the success of the Shelter in meeting state, county, and local regulations for a publicly run shelter. Regulatory Compliance establishes the baseline requirements and standards of operation.
2. **Best Practices Alignment** – Identifies a higher-level of standards that are specific to the Shelter. These standards may be derived from additional sources outside of regulatory compliance, and will provide guidance through policy covering many varied aspects of Shelter operations.

3. **Community Engagement** – Recognizes the value of engagement with the public and industry experts in the development of Shelter practices and policies, and the routine review of Shelter outcomes. Established factor to ensure a forum for collaborative engagement between policy makers, staff, and the public in a routinely scheduled workshop format.
4. **Animal Outcomes** – Provides for an objective factor that is data driven and reflective of actual operational outcomes. Further identifies the baseline data set that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of Shelter operations and longer-term impacts of operational changes in policies or practices.
5. **Resource Allocation** – Identifies the objective impacts of Shelter operations on public resources. Establishes metrics by which to evaluate changes in practices, policies, or standards within the overarching resources and priorities of Town operations.

This framework is the basis for organizing and presenting the various actions, steps, goals, and objectives that have been named through the Review recommendations. Each of the recommendations will fall within one of the performance factors, helping identify which overall performance factor the recommendations are intended to bolster.

As the overarching framework for Shelter performance evaluation, this framework is recommended to be one of the initial discussion items for any standing committee to allow for expanded public input.

CONCLUSION

Many of the challenges and concerns facing the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter are not unique nor dissimilar to challenges facing shelter operations throughout California. Illegal breeding, irresponsible pet ownership, economic hardship, increased pet ownership costs and similar challenges are consistently impacting public and private animal shelters across the country with public shelters facing even greater strain due to mandates and regulations unique to publicly funded shelters.

For this Review, Town management engaged in a comprehensive assessment of Animal Shelter operations to understand the policies and practices being followed in day-to-day operations. These policies and practices were then compared and contrasted to current best practices used by many public shelters today. Finally, current policies and practices were evaluated in light of stated public concerns shared with the Town.

Certain aspects of the Shelter's operation were identified as historically meeting or exceeding public shelter standards including:

- ❖ Resource Utilization
- ❖ Facility Conditions
- ❖ Budgetary Impacts upon aggregate Town Operations
- ❖ Meeting of Contractual Obligations
- ❖ Regulatory Compliance

Many other practices fell short in meeting some of the common best practices used in modern public shelter operations and were aligned with public concerns. These observations have been identified in the Assessments/Observations section of this Review and discussed at a summary level.

Addressing the identified shortcomings requires clear and actionable steps. These steps cover a broad spectrum of actions and impacts on the organization. Some have been implemented already. Some are readily implementable with minimal impact on Shelter or Town operations. Others will require increased levels of investment from the Town Council through policy direction.

Many of the recommendations will require added research and analysis as they will necessitate higher levels of financial investment than currently exists in the Shelter operation today. The Town Council will need appropriate information, alternatives, and recommendations that consider Town wide operational impacts prior to investment decisions. Involving the Town Council's standing committee in providing added input on such recommendations would allow for expanded review and community input prior to final determination on the various recommendations.

On a positive note, many of the recommendations have already or can be implemented at once with minimal investment. Some of these recommendations, when functional, will add value to the operation and can free up resources for alternate deployment.

Town management staff have identified numerous recommendations for immediate, intermediate, and long-term implementation. Categorized using the Key Performance Factors, these recommendations are presented for Council consideration. While not a panacea for every operational concern, when implemented, the recommendations will address the majority of public concerns and identified shortcomings of the Shelter operation.

Each recommendation is identified, described, and assigned a priority and ideal timeframe for implementation. Lastly, the recommendation includes a general description of the level of financial investment required.

In conclusion, Town management has identified both positive aspects of the current Shelter operation as well as shortcomings in the application of best practices. With a modest increase in financial investment, many of the shortcomings can be addressed in an accelerated timeframe. **While these immediate changes will aid the Shelter in delivering enhanced positive animal outcomes, significant challenges will remain with respect to animal intake, limited adoption absorption rates, capacity management, and euthanasia rates. Sustainable changes to those factors will require a community effort focused on responsible pet ownership, public assistance programs for spay/neuter/vet care, active rescue group participation in Shelter placements, and community education.**

REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Factor – Categorized within one of five Key Performance Factors

- Community Engagement
- Regulatory Compliance
- Resource Allocation
- Best Practices Alignment
- Animal Outcomes

Recommendation – Summarized course of action

Description – Practical application of the Recommendation

Priority – Assigned priority on a scale of 1 (Highest) to 3 (Lowest)

Cost – Rough magnitude of fiscal impact on a scale of \$\$\$ (Highest) to \$ (Lowest)

Timeline – Anticipated timeline or critical path needed for implementation

Community Engagement

Factor	#	Recommendation	Description	Priority	Cost	Timeline
Community Engagement	1	Form Town Council Standing Committee	Establish Town Council Standing Committee to implement ongoing communication opportunities with the community.	1	\$	Form Committee June 202 meeting approximately
Community Engagement	2	Review Town Volunteer Policy and Program	Ensure Town Policy adequately addresses volunteer needs and opportunities for the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter.	1	\$	June /July, 2025
Community Engagement	3	Establish Volunteer Positions and recruit for those Volunteer Positions	Ensure priority volunteer positions meet the Shelter's operational needs and that the appropriate staffing and supervision structure exists for those volunteers.	1	\$\$	August/September 2025
Community Engagement	4	Establish Donor and Donor Recognition Program	Develop outreach for financial and service donors and ensure proper recognition of all donors.	2	\$	Jan 2026
Community Engagement	5	Implement Spay Neuter Vaccination Clinics	Sponsor and coordinate spay neuter chip events throughout the year to support public education and responsible animal ownership.	2	\$\$\$	Summer 2025
Community Engagement	6	San Bernardino County Animal Control Coordination	Encourage San Bernardino County to hold spay neuter vaccination clinics for the unincorporated Morongo Basin Area.	2	\$	June 2025 and ongoing
Community Engagement	7	Maximize customer feedback on Shelter customer service levels and performance.	Modify customer service form to continually receive customer feedback on Shelter performance.	2	\$	October 2025
Community Engagement	8	Review Animal Care and Control Fees for Services	Consider adjusting adoption fees for seniors, veterans, and for animals that have been at the Shelter for 60 or more days.	2	\$\$	Summer/fall 2025
Community Engagement	9	Expand use of local media to market adoptable animals	Radio station and newspaper advertisements encouraging adoption of Shelter animals.	1	\$\$\$	May 2025 and ongoing

Attachment: Draft Operational Review (6169 : Animal Shelter Operational Review Draft Report)

Regulatory Compliance

Factor	#	Recommendation	Description	Priority	Cost	Timeline
Regulatory Compliance	1	Implement state mandated holding periods	Ensure compliance with mandatory holding periods for known owned and non owned animals.	1	\$	Immediate ongoing
Regulatory Compliance	2	Make animals available for public adoption pursuant to California law.	Ensure compliance with State laws for defining adoptable animal including Food and AG Code 17005 and Penal Code 599d.	1	\$	Immediate ongoing
Regulatory Compliance	3	Use all resources available to contact owners of shelter animals with owner identification.	Ensure compliance with state law in all efforts to contact known animal owners.	1	\$	Immediate ongoing
Regulatory Compliance	4	Local regulation review	Evaluate local regulations for potential modifications that will support Shelter operations and Key Performance Factors.	3	\$	FY 2025-26

Resource Allocation

Factor	#	Recommendation	Description	Priority	Cost	Timeline
Resource Allocation	1	Amend FY 2025-26 Budget to address staffing needs identified through the 90 Day Operational Review	Make recommendations to the Town Council for necessary funds to implement programmatic changes.	1	\$\$\$	June - Aug 2025
Resource Allocation	2	Review staffing levels 6 to 9 months following implementation.	To consider further staffing modifications if necessary.	1	\$\$	Jan thru Jun 2026
Resource Allocation	3	Amend FY 2025-26 Budget to address operational needs identified through the Review	Volunteers Program, Foster Program, Spay Neuter Vaccination Clinics, Software Purchase, training and implementation.	1	\$\$\$	June - Aug 2025
Resource Allocation	4	Amend FY 2025-26 Budget to address local and social media needs	Expand use of local and social media to increase live outcome rates.	1	\$\$	Immediate ongoing
Resource Allocation	5	Consider future budget amendments if necessary to implement further operational change	Monitor data and statistics in evaluating modified program implementation and effectiveness.	3	\$\$	Jan thru Jun 2026
Resource Allocation	6	Consider expanding operational hours for public access to the Shelter	Evaluate an expansion of the operating hours for public access to the Shelter based on visitation data, resident surveys, best practices, and fiscal resource requirements.	2	\$\$\$	FY 2026-27

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Best Practices

Factor	#	Recommendation	Description	Priority	Cost	Timeline
Best Practices Alignment	1	Review, purchase and initiate new field and shelter software	Implement modern data systems for shelter management and public information.	1	\$\$	June through Dec 2021
Best Practices Alignment	2	Ensure daily online information for all animals at the Yucca Valley Animal Shelter	Implement modern data systems that provide information on public adoptable, lost, and non public adoptable animals that is updated daily.	1	\$	Jan 2021
Best Practices Alignment	3	Establish and implement Foster Program that function as an extension of the Shelter.	Implement foster programs that function as an extension of shelter services where animals may even be adopted directly from fosters.	1	\$\$	Jan 2021
Best Practices Alignment	4	Establish and implement Volunteer Program.	Ensure priority volunteer positions meet the Shelter's operational needs and that the appropriate staffing and supervision structure exists for those volunteers.	1	\$	August-September
Best Practices Alignment	5	Provide professional training opportunities for Shelter staff	Ensure necessary certifications and professional animal shelter and control training for staff.	1	\$	Ongoing
Best Practices Alignment	6	Implement Spay Neuter Vaccination Clinics	Sponsor and coordinate spay neuter chip events throughout the year to support public education and responsible animal ownership.	2	\$\$\$	Ongoing

Animal Outcomes

Factor	#	Recommendation	Description	Priority	Cost	Timeline
Animal Outcomes	1	Maximize Animal Adoption Rates	Use all available tools including adoption fees, foster programs, community education, and special adoption events to maximize adoption rates.	1	\$\$	June 2021 and ongoing
Animal Outcomes	2	Minimize Animal Euthanasia Rates	Use all available tools to transition animals from the shelter to forever homes through adoption, return to owner, transfer to rescue and other shelters, and through education and outreach to the community.	1	\$\$\$	June 2021 and ongoing
Animal Outcomes	3	Maximize Rescue Group Outreach, Coordination and Adoption.	Ensure ongoing outreach to add animal rescue organizations to the Town's approved list, and distribute data daily on available rescue group animals	1	\$\$	June 2021 and ongoing
Animal Outcomes	4	Maximize Spay Neuter Clinics for Town Residents	Sponsor and coordinate spay neuter chip events throughout the year to support public education and responsible animal ownership	1	\$\$\$	Summer 2021
Animal Outcomes	5	Encourage and Coordinate County Animal Control Spay Neuter Clinics in the Unincorporated County Area	Encourage San Bernardino County to hold spay neuter vaccination clinics for the unincorporated Morongo Basin Area.	1	\$	Summer 2021
Animal Outcomes	6	Maximize Return to owner efforts where possible.	Through compliance with state law and maximizing use of shelter population data, use social media to maximize availability of lost and owned pets to be returned to their owners. Coordination with other social media resources	1	\$	June through December 2021
Animal Outcomes	7	Public Education	Evaluate best practices for public education programs and initiatives to highlight responsible pet ownership, pitfalls of illegal breeding, importance of spay/neuter programs and similar campaigns.	1	\$\$	Oct - Dec 2021

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