



## INTRODUCTION

# Consultant Report on the operations of Baltimore County Animal Services

*December 2024*

Baltimore County Animal Services (BCAS) is charged with enforcing animal laws, sheltering and returning lost pets to their owners, and promoting adoption and responsible pet ownership. Since its origination, BCAS has evolved to consistently reflect the community's needs. In 2013, legislation and funding provided for the modernization of operations and facilities for BCAS. In September 2023, Baltimore County issued a Request for Proposal for an experienced consultant to conduct a review of all existing services in the Division of Animal Services and to provide recommendations for process changes and enhancements. The review concluded with a final report detailing findings and recommendations. The accompanying document is the final report from the consultant, and the following are reflections on what BCAS has learned through this process and what is already changing.

The Baltimore County Division of Animal Services Review notes that BCAS is functioning well, is moving in the right direction, and highlights successful policies and procedures that should be used as a model for other shelters. Improvements in shelter and medical protocols over the past few years have made a positive impact on the pets in BCAS' care, and volunteer and staff feedback has identified opportunities to continue to strengthen relationships through improved communication.

The report also recommended the streamlining of online processes and making community resources available and accessible through additional locations throughout Baltimore County. Finally, average length of stay—increased by administrative holds—are highlighted as areas for improvement that would benefit all shelter animals.

Significant change is already underway at BCAS. The Department of Health has reorganized BCAS into its own bureau reporting directly to the deputy director, and hired a veterinarian with extensive leadership experience as bureau director. Under Department of Health leadership, BCAS is undergoing a thorough assessment of leadership for staff and volunteers, organizational effectiveness, current and future programs, capital improvement needs, legislative opportunities, collaborations with community partners, and alignment with public health standards. Regular communication through scheduled all-staff and department meetings, as well as quarterly newsletters has been instituted. Community outreach has improved via community pop-up adoption events as well as low or no-cost microchipping and rabies clinics occurring throughout the county beyond BCAS' physical facilities. Likewise, expansion of animal service officer interactions in the community has resulted in field-driven scheduling of services for residents in urgent need. BCAS has also increased opportunities to quickly return pets to their homes via community microchip scanning stations, hosted pet microchipping events, extended stray hold period, partnered with Petco Lost Love, and continues to work with community members. Regarding animal care, important adjustments are underway to continue to improve overall health and well-being. The behavior program is now upgraded and the team expanded, enhanced enrichment opportunities now exist for all shelter animals, and increased exercise and socialization opportunities for all adoptable dogs now exists. The recently implemented adoption process has provided a safe environment for both animals and prospective adopters, which has also coincided with increasing adoption rates year over year. Long-term administrative hold animals

are often now housed at a boarding facility or at nurturing foster homes until their final disposition is determined. Finally, BCAS' commitment to public safety and humane practices informs the use of humane euthanasia to alleviate unrelenting pain and suffering as well as prevents dangerous animals from ever harming the public.

Baltimore County Animal Services has benefited from its housing within the Health Department and as a result has a potential impact far beyond what is available in the private sector. This is an exciting time to be part of Baltimore County Animal Services, with so many improvements undergone and so many more to come. With the help of the consultant report and thoughtful community input, BCAS will undoubtedly be a beacon of community care for animals in the state of Maryland!

**For more information other than what has been included here, please contact BCAS at [hhs@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:hhs@baltimorecountymd.gov).**

## SUMMARY OF IMPROVEMENTS UNDERWAY

### Administration

- Reorganized into Bureau of Animal Services
- Hired Bureau Director that is a Veterinarian
- Conducting assessment and realignment under modern health standards

### Animal Care

- Improving animal care programs
- Assessing animal hold cases
- Expanding volunteer opportunities
- Increasing number of pet adoptions
- Continued ongoing best practices for the humane treatment of all animals

### Leadership

- Providing affordable, accountable leadership
- Improving communications

### Community Services

- Conducting Popup Adoption Events
- Providing microchipping and rabies clinics
- Improving all efforts for faster return of pets to homes
- Ongoing expansion of animal services to the community



# Baltimore County Division of Animal Services Review

May 2024



Carrie Ducote, MS  
Principal Consultant



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## Introduction

In September 2023, Baltimore County issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for “an independent consultant to provide a full review of all existing services in the Division of Animal Services and to provide recommendations for process changes and enhancements, in accordance with applicable standards and best practices, on the specific areas indicated in the scope of services.” The RFP included a thorough review of existing Division of Animal Services’ operations data, policies and procedures, soliciting input from internal and external stakeholders, and the submission of a final report “summarizing the findings and recommendations for improving performance, promoting transparency, providing accountability and handling procedural issues across the organization.” Additionally, the RFP called for specific recommendations in the following areas: administrative holds, public/private partnerships, additional location and billing/fees.

That contract was ultimately awarded to me, Carrie Ducote, MS Principal Consultant at Shelter Savvy, LLC. The project was launched in mid-April 2024, after the RFP was reposted one time and the purchase order was approved by the county council. I met with shelter and county leadership as well as members of the Animal Services Advisory Commission and Animal Hearing Board in early May. From May 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, I visited Animal Services’ locations in both Dundalk and Baldwin to complete the on-site shelter review. This document provides the findings and recommendations for improvements to the operations of the Division of Animal Services based on the information gathered.

Since every area of the shelter’s operations and future plans were investigated, outlining each recommendation at length would lead to a lengthy and likely indigestible document. Instead, this document includes the most apparent needed changes to bring the shelter in line with nationally recognized best practices in animal shelters followed by links to additional information on external sites

## About Baltimore County Animal Services (BCAS)

**Baltimore County  
Department of Health**  
Health Officer

**Baltimore County  
Department of Health**  
Bureau Director, Animal Services

**Baltimore County  
Department of Health**  
**Animal Services Division**  
Shelter Operations  
Field Operations  
Veterinary Services

Baltimore County Animal Services is a division within the Baltimore County Health Department, supervised by a Bureau Director who is a veterinarian. In addition, a Division Chief and Deputy Chief oversee the daily operations of over 50 paid staff and 100 active volunteers. BCAS has three departments: Field Operations, Shelter Operations and Veterinary Services. The Bureau Director is a veterinarian and reports up to the Health Officer in the county health department. Many decisions are made by the health department and passed down to BCAS.

The Field Operations department includes the Animal Services Officers (ASOs) responsible for enforcing the state and county animal ordinances, investigating cruelty claims, and picking up stray animals.

The Medical department includes two full time veterinarians (in addition to the Bureau Director) who perform all public and adoptable animal surgeries and provide treatments to any shelter animals.

The Shelter department is the largest and includes Rescue, Foster, TNR, Volunteer/Events, Behavior and temporary shelter attendants who do daily cleaning and feeding for all the animals in BCAS’ care. Adoptions and intakes are handled by the office attendants under this department.

## About Shelter Savvy

Carrie Ducote began her journey in animal welfare in 2007 as a volunteer at her local animal shelter, where she quickly developed a passion for the field. She spent four years as the Adoption Manager at the Atlanta Humane Society and one year as the Operations Manager at the Georgia SPCA. In 2015, Carrie joined Best Friends Animal Society, where she spent eight years consulting with shelter leadership across the country to reduce euthanasia rates.

She has completed on-site reviews at Horry County Animal Care Center in South Carolina, St. Lucie County Humane Society in Florida, and Hall County Animal Shelter in Georgia in addition to several other shelters nationally.

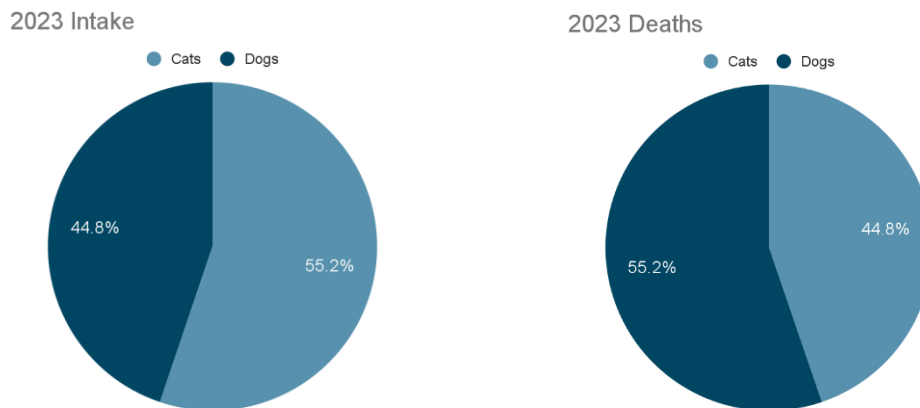
She holds a bachelor's degree in biology, a master's degree in anthrozoology and institutional certificates in animal services executive leadership and cat lifesaving from Southern Utah University.

Rafael Ortiz of BRAC Consulting Group, a subcontractor local to Baltimore, was engaged for the stakeholder input portion of the work. He has done similar data surveys and collections with other clients, including within the animal welfare space.

## Demographics

BCAS provides sheltering, enforcement and spay/neuter services to all of Baltimore County, 846,161 residents spanning 682 square miles. The Animal Services Division is under the Department of Health. The median household income is \$88,157 with 10.2% of the population living below the poverty line. The proposed FY 2025 annual budget for the Division of Animal Services is [\\$4.2 million](#). This is \$4.96 per capita spent on animal services, which is below neighboring counties Prince Georges (\$8.59) and Montgomery (\$7.33).

## Shelter Data



In 2023, BCAS took in 2,858 dogs and 3,518 cats for a total of 6,376 intakes excluding wildlife and pocket pets (rabbits, gerbils, birds, etc). For this assessment, I focused on cats and dogs.

The save rate\* for cats was 86% and the save rate for dogs was 78%. The nationally recognized benchmark is a 90% save rate for a no-kill shelter designation. Medically and behaviorally unsafe animals generally make up no more than 10% of the intakes and should be the only animals not leaving alive to achieve no-kill status.

Although dogs make up just 45% of the intakes, they account for 55% of the shelter deaths. Increasing owner surrenders and stray intakes with stagnant adoption and rescue rates has led to [decreased save rate](#) for dogs nationwide in recent years.

\*I am most comfortable with the save rate calculation which is (intakes – non-live outcomes) divided by intakes but others prefer to use the live release rate which is live outcomes divided by all outcomes. The difference in these calculations results in a different percentage based on which formula is being used. More details on the calculations [here](#).

## Accolades

Before diving into the results of the shelter review and specific recommendations, it is appropriate to take time to call out the specific policies and procedures that BCAS is doing well and should be used as a model for other shelters.

- **Open Adoptions:** BCAS has an open adoption policy and has removed barriers such as home checks and vet checks sometimes seen at other shelters. [Open adoption policies](#) increase adoptions and community relations. BCAS has already done 258 more dog and cat adoptions in the first six months of 2024 than they did during the first six months of 2023.
- **TNR Grant:** In 2023, The Maryland Department of Agriculture awarded BCAS a \$44,000 grant for free TNR of any feral cat in the county. This grant was successfully completed and now BCAS has been awarded \$48,000 for FY 2024.
- **Vaccinating on Intake:** BCAS began vaccinating each animal on intake in November 2023. This is industry wide best practice to reduce disease transmission and increase adoptability.
- **Communications:** A full time marketing and communication staff member recently came on-board and has been doing wonderful things with social media and press.
- **Scanning Stations:** The installation of 5 community microchip scanning stations puts Baltimore County on the forefront of empowering finders to identify and reunite strays themselves. They are the first jurisdiction in Maryland to implement this program and have been able to mentor shelters nationwide on implementing similar programs.
- **Additional Staff:** In FY 24, BCAS had 11 additional positions approved: Communication Specialist, Front Desk Office Assistant, Behavior Lead, Additional Animal Control Officer, Foster Coordinator, Assistant Medical Supervisor and one additional Shelter Attendant. Four additional positions are pending approval.
- **Social Services:** BCAS' partnership with Baltimore County Department of Social Services allows in-home social workers to share resource lists and connect BCAS with families in need of pet food.
- **Rabies Clinics:** Rabies clinics started up in spring 2023 for the first time since COVID. In 2023, 1,301 rabies vaccines were administered and 530 microchips were inserted during 10 community clinics.

## Defining the Opportunity

A common theme heard in the initial meetings and during the on-site visit and survey results was that leadership has historically had high turnover rates leading to frequent policy changes and confusion over the goal and mission of the division. The current Chief, [Carrie McCloskey](#), is fairly new to her role but has been with the division for several years in other roles. The team trusts her and sees her as working for their best interests. With stable, committed leadership in place, BCAS is poised to make sustainable progress towards implementing best practices to elevate animal care and lifesaving.

## Stakeholder Survey

The original RFP lists the following requirement: *Solicit input from internal and external stakeholders regarding existing policies/procedures and recommendations for future improvements. The Baltimore County Animal Services Commission is a required stakeholder in which to seek input.*

An anonymous online survey was created and emailed by subcontractor, BRAC Consulting Group. The survey was sent on May 20th to 213 email addresses including all BCAS staff, Advisory Commission & Hearing Board members as well as a selection of volunteers, fosters, community cat caregivers and rescue groups.

We received 94 responses, a 44% response rate, which is higher than the 30% average for emailed surveys. This is an indication that the respondents were eager to share their opinions in this format.

*Survey results have been summarized by Rafael Ortiz of BRAC Consulting Group:*

In an attempt to increase response rate, the survey was kept short and included just three questions listed below with summarized responses:

- **What is BCAS doing well?** Respondents frequently mentioned BCAS' success in providing medical care for animals and getting animals into new homes. There was consistent praise of the social media channels, community outreach, including events, pop-up adoption locations, and the "Cuddle Shuttle." The rescue coordinator's efforts in finding placements for animals were also praised.
- **What does BCAS need to improve?** The most common theme for improvement was related to staffing and volunteer management; staff turnover, extended hiring periods, lack of communication, inconsistent policies and procedures, a need for more volunteers and additional training for fosters. There were also concerns about favoritism and cliques among staff, which could be impacting morale and collaboration. Several respondents suggested improvements in dog care, including more walks, increased behavior staff, and better kennel cleaning.
- **Do you feel valued for your contribution?** Some respondents felt undervalued and unheard, particularly by higher-ups in the organization. There were also mentions of a need for better communication between staff and volunteers, as well as more appreciation for the work that volunteers do. Some self-described volunteers felt appreciated only by the volunteer coordinators and some staff members, but not necessarily by senior leadership. Despite some negative experiences, many respondents expressed a sense of purpose in their work, highlighting the positive impact they have on the animals and the community.

The survey results paint a picture of an organization that is doing good work in medical care and community outreach but is facing challenges in staffing, volunteer management, and internal communication. While many individuals feel valued for their contributions, there is a clear need for improved communication and recognition, particularly from senior leadership. Addressing these issues could significantly improve morale, collaboration, and overall effectiveness of BCAS.

## Administrative Holds

The original RFP lists the following requirement: *Animals that are received as part of a seizure involving subsequent criminal charges need to be held at the Animal Services facility until the case has been processed through the court system. This is frequently a long process. The consultant must develop a strategic plan to*



*address the needs and welfare of animals processed through the court system. Provide best practices for animals on Administrative hold.*

In 2023, BCAS seized a total of 207 live animals in 91 cases prosecuted for cruelty/neglect at the state level. When animals are seized, the owner is notified and has 10 days to file a replevin to request their animals back.

Of the 207 animals seized:

- 117 animals had no replevin filed, making them BCAS property after 10 days.
- 63 animals were returned to their owners after they complied with administrative remedies as defined by the county. These are things like changing the animal's housing or providing medical care.
- 27 animals had replevin filed but their owners did not or could not comply with administrative remedies, if there were any offered. These 27 animals were held on average for 5-7 months pending the resolution of seven separate replevin actions. Of those 27 animals:
  - 9 are still in BCAS' care.
  - 18 dogs had their replevin cases closed by the courts and BCAS was awarded custody of those animals.
- None were returned to their owners by the court at any point in the process.

At an average calculated rate of \$16 per day for boarding (staff time and supplies needed for basic care) plus basic preventative medical care, the cost to Baltimore County taxpayers for caring for the animals seized in 2023 was approximately \$42,150. The toll on the mental health of the animals is far greater. Life in the shelter is hard for any animal, especially for this length of time.

The Maryland state code was amended in October 2022 to allow the county law department to request prepayment of the costs of housing and caring for the animals at BCAS during the replevin process. The goal is to motivate some owners to surrender their animals instead of paying or for the County to recoup some of the funds spent on their care. However, this provision has never been utilized by the county law department due to the resources and extensive staff time required to meet the new and lengthy procedures.

Since the County Code categorizes all cruelty as a misdemeanor, criminal cruelty is charged under state code, which has more severe penalties.

The financial and staff resources required to care for the animals during the replevin process, combined with the toll on the animals and the 0% return rate when the replevin case is finalized, highlight the dire need for an alternative process to move the animals through the system faster.

The City of Baltimore, who has animal services officers and a shelter that are entirely separate from BCAS, typically moves administrative hold animals through their system fairly quickly and does not hold the animals for the result of the cruelty case. In the rare case that the court awards custody of the animal back to the owner, the City of Baltimore compensates the owner for the value of the animals. This prevents the animals from spending months at the shelter but still allows the owners to receive some compensation if they win the case. In some rare cases, the City of Baltimore will hold administrative animals on a case by case basis until the court case is finalized.

Baltimore County has an [Animal Hearing Board](#) that currently hears and decide all contested civil cases and all cases referred by the Health Officer concerning the enforcement of [Article 12](#) of the County Code, in addition to

other duties. This board is appointed by the County Executive with the approval of the County Council and is entirely separate from the Advisory Commission.

In October 2022, the Baltimore County Health Officer drafted a [memo](#) recommending that the Animal Hearing Board be given the authority to order the removal of an animal when it determines that returning the animal to its owner would be detrimental to the animal's health or public safety. The memo was sent to the Baltimore County Office of Law, which has not yet approved it. Their primary concern appears to be the potential for double jeopardy if a case is handled by both the Animal Hearing Board and the state District Attorney.

The memo addresses this concern by proposing a code change that would grant the Animal Hearing Board, an extension of the Department of Health, the authority to order the removal of animals for health and public safety reasons, rather than based on the merits of the cruelty case.

This issue is complex, involving multiple levels of approval from both county and state authorities. Whatever is decided, it is paramount to eliminate the waste of resources on caring for animals for months on end that are unlikely to be returned to their owners.

Recommendations:

- **Plan A:** If enlisting the Animal Hearing Board to avoid holding animals for months during a cruelty case is feasible, it would be the best solution for managing administrative holds. The County Law Office should respond to the memo by October 1<sup>st</sup> to clarify next steps.
- **Plan B:** Alternatively, releasing the animals with the intention of compensating the owner if the courts decide in their favor could be another option.
- **Plan C:** If neither option is viable, the Baltimore County Office of Law should start filing for prepayment of boarding costs.

### Public/Private Partnership

The original RFP lists the following requirement: *Review the concept, including feasibility, and operational issues related to a Public/Private Partnership for animal care in Baltimore County and make a recommendation that is in the best interest of the County, the animals and the residents.*

The City of Baltimore contracts with a nonprofit, Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS), to provide sheltering services. In recent years, there has been discussion about the possibility of privatizing BCAS also. The county would release an RFP clarifying the services they want a contractor to provide (sheltering, adoption, spay/neuter, public clinics, etc.) and organizations would respond with their cost and plans. Some municipalities privatize medical or shelter operations only and retain field services, others privatize field services as well. The county would then evaluate the proposals to select a vendor and finalize the contract term and cost. The selected vendor would then likely move their staff and supplies into the current BCAS buildings. All current BCAS staff would be laid off and their tenures with the county would end unless they find another position elsewhere in the county government.

There are distinct pros and cons to both privatizing and keeping BCAS under county control. Privatizing offers benefits such as easier fundraising and less bureaucratic red tape around processes like hiring. On the other hand, keeping BCAS public allows current employees, many of whom have long tenures with the county, to retain their benefits and ensures smoother collaboration with field services (assuming they are not also

privatized) and other county departments. Remaining public also makes budgetary and staffing changes through an internal process easier. If the contractor wanted to change their funding amount, it would require the county to reenter contract negotiations, if it was even possible to make changes.

With high intake rates and low fundraising, Baltimore County animal welfare non-profits are struggling and have had to decrease community outreach services lately. This has led to additional concern with BCAS staff that privatization would lead to a decrease in community outreach services. However, specific funding from the county for outreach services could be built into the contract since the county is already currently funding those programs.

#### Recommendations:

- **Remain Public:** While this review will provide specific recommendations to bring BCAS up to best practices, I recommend remaining public for the time being.
- **Prioritize Humane Care:** If BCAS leadership can implement the recommendations in this review, the benefits of privatizing do not outweigh the cost of staff losing their tenure with the county. However, serious issues with current shelter operations, particularly around dog enrichment, must be addressed to ensure humane care.
- **Reconsider:** If BCAS leadership cannot resolve the dog enrichment issues, the humane care of the animals must be a top priority. Privatizing would bring in an entirely new leadership team, ideally from an organization experienced in running a municipal shelter, which may be more effective in implementing humane care.

#### Satellite Location

The original RFP lists the following requirement: *Animal Services primary location lies in Northern Baltimore County, about 20 minutes north of Towson. However, animals, both lost and found ones, are located all across the County. The Consultant will identify an area for a “satellite” office to assist the public in gaining the variety of services provided by Baltimore County Animal Services, including a location closer to the public for lost and found animal.*

Due to the unique shape and large size of Baltimore County, many residents struggle to reach BCAS' primary location in Baldwin to adopt or reclaim pets. Although the Baldwin location is centrally situated within the county, it remains fairly rural, making it unfamiliar to many residents and limiting opportunities for drive-by traffic.

To address this, the BCAS event team has been working to bring the Cuddle Shuttle into more populated areas, increasing adoptions and community outreach. They report high adoption numbers in Dundalk in the southeastern portion of the county, where BCAS currently operates a spay/neuter clinic open three days a week.

#### Recommendations:

- **Dundalk:** Given the high adoption numbers and population density in this part of the county, Dundalk is the best area for an additional location.
- **Plan A:** BCAS should expand their Dundalk operations to offer public surgeries five days a week and include stray intake, pet reclaims, and adoptions. This would require a capital investment to create

holding space for animals, although this satellite location would not need to have as much holding space as the primary location in Baldwin.

- **Plan B - Resource Center:** If the capital investment to build holding and adoption capabilities in Dundalk is not feasible, the location could be converted to a resource center to provide food, medical care, preventative, etc. to the community. If someone confirms their pet or an animal they definitely want to adopt is in Baldwin, that animal could be transported to Dundalk for temporary holding until they can be picked up.

## Billing & Fees

The original RFP lists the following requirement: *Examine the current fee structure to determine areas for improving fee collections related to animal services activities. Evaluate fee schedules and provide avenues for fee collection*

There is no fee to surrender an animal to BCAS, and due to overcrowding, there are currently no adoption fees. When space is not as limited, the adoption fees charged are relatively low compared to industry standards: \$50 for dogs and \$40 for cats.

Rabies clinics are held at least once per year and offer a rabies vaccine, microchip, and county pet license for \$9. This is a very low cost but an awkward amount to collect without access to a credit card machine.

The fee for county residents to have their animals spayed/neutered is \$20, which includes vaccines, deworming, a county license, and a microchip. This program is a proactive way to reduce unwanted litters and connect with the community, especially those who may not otherwise visit the shelter. However, there is concern that the program's popularity has led to appointments being booked out for months, making it difficult for the priority low-income population to fully benefit. Currently, no appointments are available to book online for any animal type.

The fees imposed by BCAS for violations of Article 12, or misdemeanor cruelty or neglect, range from \$30 for the first violation to \$250 for cruelty. The hearing board can decide to reduce or dismiss the fees. If the violation is minor, the hearing board is likely to decrease or dismiss the fee but if the violation is severe, there is no option for a more severe penalty.

Recommendations:

- **Increase Adoption Fees on Desirable Animals:** If increasing revenue is a priority, a surrender fee of around \$20 could be implemented and adoption fees could be raised to \$100 per dog and \$60 per cat. Higher fees should be charged for kittens (\$150), puppies (\$200), and small dogs (\$150). These fees could be introduced now since the space concerns center around adult cats and medium/large dogs. The Chief of Animal Services should have the authority to waive these fees based on specific circumstances.
- **Free Clinics:** If the goal of the rabies clinics is to increase vaccination and identification among animals in the community, the services should be offered at no cost to county residents.
- **Target Spay/Neuter Appointments:** Instead of opening up spay/neuter appointments to all county residents online, the offerings could be more targeted. Appointments could be prioritized for pets that Animal Control Officers interact with or pets brought to rabies vaccine clinics. This approach would open up more appointments for those whose pets are less likely to get sterilized elsewhere.

- **Increase Fees for Violations:** The fees for violations of Article 12 should start at \$50 for the first violation, increase to \$250 for repeated violation up to \$500 for severe violations.

## County Code

In addition to state regulations, BCAS is restricted in their operations by the county code, or ordinances, as drafted and approved by the County Council. The entire current code can be found [here](#). These are the specific edits and recommendations to update the county code to allow BCAS to fully implement best practices.

- **Stray Cats:** Feral cats are specifically exempt from the county at-large code, meaning BCAS has no obligation to impound them and can release them before the 72 hour stray hold is up. The definition for feral cat is in the state code and is:
  - (a) Shows no evidence, such as a collar, tag, or grooming, of being owned; and
  - (b) Exhibits savage or wild behavior or is living in the wild.

BCAS interprets this to mean that friendly cats, while living in the wild, are not showing savage behavior and therefore don't meet this definition.

Recommendations:

- Specifically exempt all healthy stray cats, regardless of behavior, from the at-large and stray hold sections. The only stray cats that should be impounded are those that are sick, injured, or involved in a bite case.
- **Caregiver registration:** Requiring community cat caregivers to register with the city is onerous for the TNR coordinator, who already keeps diligent records. Anyone who needs help getting TNR in the county should be eligible without requiring registration.

Recommendations:

- Eliminate the caregiver registration requirement to receive free TNR.
- **Animal Hearing Board:** Since the animal hearing board is an extension of the health officer, they should be able to order the removal of animals from a home for the health and safety of the animal. This will be helpful to keep administrative hold animals from having to be held at the shelter for months.

Recommendations:

- Add language to allow the hearing board to remove animals from a home for the health and safety of the animal.
- **72 hour stray surrender:** Due to the size of Baltimore County and the location of the Baldwin Shelter, animals are more likely to be reunited with their owner if they stay in the neighborhood where they were found. If a finder wants to hold on to the animal and post on social media, they should have the ability to do so without violating county code.

Recommendations:

- Remove the language mandating that stray animals found in the county have to be brought to BCAS within 72 hours of being found.

## Advisory Commission

According to county code 3-3-2402, *the purpose of the Animal Services Advisory Commission is to advise the County Council and the County Executive on issues pertaining to animal care and welfare, animal rescue and adoption, control of the animal population, animal bite prevention, zoonotic disease transmission, standards for animal shelters, training of personnel and volunteers, and other issues related to the County's Animal Services division's duties.* There are 11 members appointed for three year terms by the County Council and the County Executive.

I connected with four members of the commission who shared similar experiences and hopes for its future. The commission hasn't met in over a year, leading to confusion about members' terms and who is currently appointed. Each member has individual strengths and a shared a genuine commitment to BCAS.

Recommendations:

- **Reconvene:** The commission should reconvene in person and elect a chair.
- **Reexamine:** The charter should be reexamined and revised to reflect the commission's current goals.
- **Add Staff:** Meetings should include senior BCAS staff, who can provide updates on shelter data and recent developments, either verbally or through a report submitted to members for each meeting.
- **Collaborate:** BCAS staff and the commission should collaborate to identify ways the commission can support BCAS and make recommendations to the County Council on ordinance changes.

### Culture & Staff Training

The number one indicator of lifesaving success at a municipal shelter is having a strong culture of lifesaving among the staff and volunteers. A positive culture ensures humane animal treatment, high staff morale, and community trust. Comprehensive staff training guarantees quality animal care, safety, and adherence to standards. Both elements are crucial for the efficient operation and success of the shelter in achieving its mission.

The hiring and onboarding process was frequently mentioned during my visit and in the survey as an operational hurdle. It takes several signatures and 3-4 months to fill a position. During that time, many candidates accept positions elsewhere, and if there is no backup candidate, the process must be restarted.

Once on boarded, staff have limited opportunities for continuing education unless it is required for their position (like veterinarians). Two officers recently attended and completed the ASO training academy. Although the Chief recently completed a university-level online course in shelter leadership, she had to pay for it out of pocket and was later reimbursed by the county. Due to budgetary constraints, staff do not attend national conferences, although leadership agrees they would appreciate the opportunity to learn from and connect with other shelters. This disconnection from other shelters and modern best practices likely contributes to some of the outdated practices at BCAS.

The Chief sends out a monthly newsletter with continuing education opportunities, but staff feel they do not have time during their workday to attend these webinars. There are monthly meetings between staff and leadership and quarterly all staff meetings which include CE presentations.

Recommendations:

- **Expedite Hiring:** The hiring process should be audited to identify opportunities to expedite it.
- **Conference Attendance:** Every year, 3-4 staff members should be given the opportunity to attend the HSUS Expo or the Best Friends National Conference. Attendance at these conferences is essential to keep up with industry best practices and connect with others within the industry.

### Owner Surrenders

When pet owners bring their pets to the shelter and formally give up their ownership rights that is called an owner surrender. This is typically due to reasons like financial difficulties, behavioral issues, allergies, moving, or

changes in personal circumstances. The shelter then takes responsibility for the care and rehoming of the owner surrendered animals.

Scheduling appointments for owner surrenders in an animal shelter is crucial for effective resource management, ensuring there is adequate space, staff, and supplies for incoming animals. It allows for thorough intake assessments and proper care, while also providing emotional support and guidance to the owners. Additionally, it helps collect important animal history and reduces stress for both animals and owners by making the process more orderly and predictable.

There is information on the BCAS website about requiring an appointment to surrender an animal and anyone who calls about surrendering is emailed a form to fill out to make an appointment. However, individuals who show up in person to surrender are not turned away or asked to make an appointment. This constant influx of animals prevents the staff from effectively managing the inventory of animals.

Recommendations:

- **Universal Policy:** The policy for owner surrenders should be consistent, regardless of contact method.
- **Appointment-Only Surrenders:** Owner surrenders should be by appointment only, with a goal of scheduling the appointment at least two weeks after initial contact. This timeline encourages pet owners to seek alternatives before resorting to surrendering their animals to BCAS, which should truly be the last resort.
- **Information Gathering:** Adjust current practices to ensure that the top priority is to keep the animal in the home whenever possible. Appointment-based surrenders allow staff to gather more information about the reason for surrender. This can help bring about solutions that might enable the owner to keep the animal. If surrender is still necessary, the shelter will have more information to create a positive outcome for the animal, such as arranging rescue or foster care before the animal arrives.
- **Emergency Surrenders:** There will always be situations requiring same-day owner surrenders. BCAS leadership should have the autonomy to make these decisions on a case-by-case basis.
- **Further Information:** Refer to Best Friends Animal Society's Humane Animal Control manual, particularly the chapters on [intake diversion](#) and delayed or [diverted intake](#).

## Field Services

The ASOs that make up the Field Services department are professionals responsible for enforcing animal-related laws and regulations, handling stray or dangerous animals, and ensuring public safety. They play a crucial role in protecting both animals and people by responding to animal emergencies, investigating cases of animal cruelty, and educating the community about responsible pet ownership. Their work helps maintain public health and safety, prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases, and promote humane treatment of animals.

BCAS ASOs contribute to the lifesaving culture with their commitment to keeping animals in their homes whenever possible. This reduces intake at the shelter and preserves the human-animal bond. The ASOs currently operate an ad-hoc resource distribution system to families in need and wish to bring more structure to this process.

Recommendations:

- **Formalize Resource Distribution:** Collaborate with all Animal Control Officers to develop a formalized plan for distributing resources in the field. This includes specifying which resources can be distributed

(e.g., donated pet food, collars, treats, toys, spay/neuter vouchers) and under what circumstances they should be provided.

- **Further Information:** Refer to Best Friends Animal Society's [Field Services Training Playbook](#) or National Animal Care and Control Association's [resources](#).

## Strays

Stray animals are pets without homes or identifiable owners, often due to abandonment or getting lost. Many strays truly need to be rescued and brought to the shelter while others can be reunited or rehomed without entering the shelter. Differentiating between these two helps prevent overcrowding and lowers euthanasia rates, ultimately improving the chances of successful rehabilitation and adoption for all shelter animals.

The current stray hold for both dogs and cats at BCAS is 72 hours, which aligns with the national standard. This means that any animal entering BCAS as a stray cannot be adopted, rescued, or sterilized until the 72 hour stray hold has passed. This is to give owners a chance to reclaim their animal before it is rehomed.

The county code was recently amended to change the requirement for anyone who finds a stray to bring it to BCAS within 24 hours to 72 hours. This means that anyone who finds a stray in their neighborhood and is willing to temporarily house the animal and put up signs and search for the owner themselves may not do so for more than 72 hours.

Recommendations:

- **Eliminate 72-Hour Mandate:** Given the size of Baltimore County, a stray animal is more likely to be reunited with its owner if it remains in its community rather than entering the shelter. The 72-hour mandate should be eliminated, allowing finders the option to hold onto the animal while they advertise to locate the owners.
- **Finder-to-Foster Program:** Implement a [finder to foster](#) program where staff encourage residents to hold lost pets in their homes for the duration of the stray hold. This would likely decrease stray intake and increase reunification.
- **Petco Love Lost:** Use [Petco Love Lost](#) to facilitate quick reunions, decreasing length of stay, enhancing the welfare of all shelter animals and increasing the chances of a live outcome for all stray animals.
- **Further Information:** Refer to the [Return to Owner Playbook](#).

## Dog Housing & Behavior Management

Intelligent housing design for dogs while in the shelter and management of their behavioral needs are both forms of enrichment. Enrichment is crucial for shelter dogs as it provides mental stimulation and physical activity, reducing stress and preventing boredom-related behaviors. It helps improve dog's overall well-being and mental health, making them more adoptable by showcasing positive behaviors. Enrichment activities also aid in socialization and training, preparing dogs for successful integration into their new homes.

Dogs at BCAS are housed in double-sided kennels with guillotine doors open during the day to provide more space. The kennels were clean and well-attended during my visit. All staff are required to complete the [Fear Free Shelter Program](#) during onboarding. BCAS recently installed sound systems in each animal room with species-specific soundtracks playing at all times. They recently published and began using a daily enrichment schedule with activities for each day including lick mats, ice tray molds, Kong feeders, peanut butter Frisbees, and scent enrichment.



Dogs on a 72-hour stray hold, a 10-day bite hold, under medical treatment, or administrative hold do not leave their kennels. With limited staffing, the responsibility to walk and track behavior notes about the available dogs falls primarily on the volunteers. There is a feeling among some staff that the volunteers should receive more training in behavior modification and frustration that they spend their time walking the dogs instead of on behavior modification due to the high volume of complex behavior challenges seen in the shelter. The volunteers are well aware that they are the only ones who walk the dogs and feel a strong sense of responsibility associated with getting every available dog out each day, something that doesn't always happen with current volunteer levels. The volunteers would simply rather use their time walking 10 dogs than doing behavior modification for two dogs.

Dogs on stray hold are housed in a separate, locked kennel which prohibits the volunteers from access to walk them. If an adoptable dog is housed in that room due to space constraints in the adoptable room, volunteers have to request the dog be brought out by a staff member. Volunteers are not allowed to enter that room due to a previous incident where a volunteer took photos of a dog that was not available for adoption yet.

Formal behavior assessments are conducted for each dog after their stray hold or immediately after surrender. This includes evaluating how dogs respond to children (using a large doll) and how they react to someone putting a hand in their bowl while eating (using a rubber hand). Initially, it was presented that these assessments are required for rescues to consider pulling a dog, but the rescue coordinator reported that as long as some basic information (e.g., friendly, loose body language) is provided, rescues do not require the full checklist from the assessment. Staff also insist that these assessments are essential to identify and euthanize dogs that may bite people post-adoption as it was stated that dogs showing resource guarding at the shelter are more likely to bite after adoption.

Behavior assessments are used to quickly collect information; however, shelters are stressful, unnatural environments, and assessments are conducted on stray animals that haven't left their kennels for at least 72 hours. This stress likely causes animals to display behaviors that do not reflect their true nature. While the concern about adopting dogs that may bite is understandable, the ASPCA's position statement states that "Behavior assessments have not been proven highly accurate or precise when used to predict aggression after adoption."

There are two part-time trainers working a total of 18 hours a week and one full-time behavior staff member. One part-time trainer is a certified professional dog trainer (CPDT-KA). The full-time position was vacant during my visit. The two part-time trainers spend most of their time completing behavior assessments, leaving limited time for behavior modification for dogs with identified needs.

According to the [Association of Shelter Veterinarian Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#) (ASV Guidelines), "Dogs must be provided with daily opportunities for activity outside of their kennels, unless doing so creates an unmanageable risk to the health or safety of people or other animals." The ASV defines "must" as necessary to ensure humane care. Additionally, the ASV Guidelines state, "Requiring all shelter animals to go through a formal behavior evaluation test is no longer recommended."

When talking about lifesaving in an animal shelter, the focus should be on reducing length of stay. Dogs and cats who become ill and require long stays in isolation during medical treatment take up space, resources, and can have long term consequences due to the isolation. Behavior issues acquired during pets' long stay at the

shelter decrease adoptability and lead to euthanasia. Reducing stress for shelter animals boosts their immune system and decreases the frequency of illness in addition to [reducing the occurrence](#) of long term behavior issues.

The staff at BCAS appear divided on the prospect of starting playgroups. Those with experience at other shelters that utilize playgroups are in favor, while staff who have not seen playgroups in action believe they will cause unnecessary injuries and disease transmission and require extensive staff time. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) supports well-managed playgroups. By adopting playgroups, BCAS can enhance the physical and mental well-being of the dogs in their care, ultimately increasing their chances of finding forever homes.

Playgroups offer numerous benefits for shelter dogs:

- **Exercise and Enrichment:** Dogs can burn off energy and engage in mental stimulation, leading to calmer behavior in their kennels.
- **Natural Behaviors:** Dogs can exhibit and practice natural social behaviors, improving their overall well-being.
- **Reduced Stress:** Interaction with other dogs helps reduce stress and anxiety, making them more relaxed and approachable for potential adopters.
- **Improved Social Skills:** Dogs learn to interact appropriately with their peers, which can be beneficial in a home setting.
- **Behavioral Insights:** Staff can observe dogs' interactions, gaining valuable insights into their personalities and behavior, aiding in more accurate matchmaking with adopters.

The extensive time inside kennels without socialization or enrichment, combined with outdated assessment processes, likely leads to unnecessary euthanasia for behavior reasons. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that decreased behavior euthanasia would lead to overcrowding. Labeling euthanasia decisions accurately—whether for space or behavior—is crucial. Policies to decrease behavior-related euthanasia should be paired with recommendations to reduce length of stay and increase adoptions to avoid space-related euthanasia.

Recommendations:

- **Daily Walks:** To ensure humane care, every dog should be walked daily unless they pose a danger to handlers or other dogs. This will require increased volunteer time and investment in volunteer recruitment. If volunteer levels are insufficient to get each dog out each day, staffing should be increased.
- **Outdoor Space Utilization:** Designate one outdoor area or play yard for dogs with upper respiratory symptoms, allowing them outdoor time during treatment to reduce stress and speed recovery.
- **Discontinue Formal Behavior Assessments:** Formal behavior assessments are inaccurate and time consuming. Studies have consistently shown behavior assessments to be inaccurate predictors of post-adoption behavior, and most shelters have discontinued their use in favor of observation notes. Gather behavioral information through surrender forms and detailed observations from staff and volunteers in various settings (e.g., playgroups, vet exams, walks, foster care). This approach provides more accurate behavior predictions for adopters and frees behavior staff to focus on playgroups without requiring additional staff time.
- **Volunteer Engagement:** There are a great group of core, dedicated volunteers who communicate with each other daily and are deeply committed to the organization and the welfare of the animals. I encourage all staff to reflect on the dedication and emotional toll these volunteers subject themselves

to each day and pivot their attitudes towards them to treating them as unpaid staff. They deserve access to walk non-dangerous animals on stray and administrative holds. If a volunteer acts inappropriately, that can be addressed with that individual on a case by case basis rather than limiting volunteer access to dogs which only hinders enrichment opportunities for those dogs. The volunteers should have the freedom to interact with the dogs in any way that is safe and comfortable and should not be made to feel insufficient for only walking the dogs and not focusing on behavior modification.

- **Playgroups:** Collaborate with behavior staff to identify any capital improvements needed to create an appropriate yard for playgroups and begin implementation gradually. Since a member of the behavior team at BCAS has managed playgroups before, the implementation should be straightforward and can be done on a trial basis. Utilizing staff to run playgroups instead of perform behavior assessments will increase dog's adoptability without decreasing BCAS' ability to identify and flag potentially dangerous dogs. Refer to [Dogs Playing for Life](#) for more information on the benefits of playgroups and specific considerations for implementation.
- **Further Information:**
  - [Enrichment for shelter dogs.](#)
  - [Kennel enrichment.](#)
  - [Enrichment on a Dime \(webinar\)](#)
  - [Enrichment for shelter cats](#)
  - [Hiding places for cats](#)
  - Best Friends Animal Society's Humane Animal Control manual, [chapter on shelter cat enrichment](#)
  - Best Friends Animal Society's Humane Animal Control manual, [chapter on shelter dog enrichment](#)
  - American Pets Alive! [blog post](#) on Behavior Assessments
  - Fear Free Pets [article](#) "Why Behavior Evaluations in Shelters Can Be Misleading"
  - Journal of Veterinary Behavior [study](#) "What is the evidence for reliability and validity of behavior evaluations for shelter dogs? A prequel to "No better than flipping a coin"
  - National Canine Research Council [article](#) "No better than flipping a coin: Reconsidering canine behavior evaluations in animal shelters"
  - Maddie's Fund® Dog Handling [Handbook](#)

### Community Cat Programming

A community cat program focuses on managing unowned, free-roaming cats through practices like Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), where cats are humanely trapped, spayed or neutered, and then returned to their original location. This program is important in shelters as it mitigates nuisance behaviors by free-roaming cats, helps control the cat population in the community, reduces shelter intake, and prevents the euthanasia of healthy cats. By managing community cat colonies, shelters can keep space in their shelter for indoor placement owner surrendered cats, instead of on free-roaming cats that are thriving outdoors and do not need to be rehomed.

BCAS offers free spay/neuter and vaccination to outdoor cats trapped in Baltimore County by caregivers who have registered with the county. The goal is to divert those cats to TNR and prevent them from entering the shelter. However, spay/neuter appointments are limited and unpredictable.

When a stray cat is impounded at BCAS and deemed unadoptable due to behavior, the TNR coordinator works to find a suitable location to return the cat. Without explicit permission from the property owner, the cat cannot be returned to the address where it was trapped. If no nearby location is found or if returning the cat is

not possible for other reasons, the cat is referred to the working cat program, which has successfully found placements at barns, warehouses or other suitable locations. Friendly stray cats are not returned and are put up for adoption regardless of any current cat housing space concerns.

These policies result in the TNR coordinator spending significant time finding locations to return impounded cats, which prevents her from proactively working with complainants to mitigate nuisance cat behavior and prevent future impounds. Community cats can be a true nuisance to residents and the TNR Coordinator needs to have time to evaluate the address those behaviors to resolve resident's nuisance complaints without removing the cats.

#### Recommendations:

- **Return Friendly Cats:** All healthy stray cats should be returned to the location where they were found, regardless of behavior. A cat of healthy weight, free from visible signs of injury or illness should be assumed to be thriving outdoors. Many cat owners allow their cats to go outside and picking up and rehoming cats that are already doing well where they are is a waste of resources and separates people from their pets which goes against BCAS' mission.
- **End Relocation or Euthanasia of Healthy Stray Cats:** Relocating or euthanizing healthy stray cats is costly, ineffective and should not be a service that BCAS provides. Instead, those struggling with nuisance cat behavior should work with the TNR coordinator to use deterrents to haze the cats and discourage them from continuing the nuisance behavior.
- **Refuse Impoundment without Property Owner's Consent:** If the trapper does not agree to the cat being returned to the property where it was trapped, the cat should not be impounded and should be turned away. This will require a county code amendment to exempt healthy stray cats from the at-large provision that currently mandates their impoundment. With no mandate to impound them, stray cats should only be accepted if they are sick, injured, or involved in a bite case. The City of Baltimore does not routinely impound healthy stray cats.
- **End Caregiver Registration:** The county code should be amended to eliminate the caregiver registration requirement. The exact purpose of this provision is unclear, and BCAS keeps detailed records of interactions with people and cats. Anyone seeking help with trapping and sterilizing cats should receive assistance regardless of registration status.
- **Appropriate Cat Returns:** Trespassing is never acceptable so if a cat must be returned by BCAS staff to a residential area, consider releasing the cat on the side of the road or sidewalk if the van can be safely pulled over. Since the cat is familiar with the area, it will quickly find safety.
- **Overbook TNR Appointments:** TNR appointments should be overbooked by 25% to ensure all veterinary resources are utilized appropriately. Caregivers often trap fewer cats than planned, but if more cats show up than can be accommodated, they can be housed until the next surgery day.
- **Train Front Desk Staff:** Given the high turnover at the front desk, the TNR coordinator should have the ability to frequently train front desk staff on appropriate responses to common TNR questions and the details of what BCAS can offer to both community cat caregivers and complainants.
- **Further Information:** Refer to the National Animal Care & Control Association (NACA) position on managing outdoor cats [here](#).

#### Adoption

Adoption programs at municipal animal shelters involve finding new homes for animals that have been surrendered, lost, or rescued. Adoption is typically how most animals leave the shelter. Not only does adoption

benefit the animal by getting it out of the shelter environment, it also supplies the community with sterilized and vaccinated pets. Most people in the community interact with the shelter for the first time to adopt, and a positive experience during this process is the opportunity to create a new volunteer, donor, or advocate.

Adopters are not allowed to walk through the kennels to view large dogs. Various reasons were given for this policy, including reducing the spread of respiratory viruses and decreasing stress on the dogs. A binder with photos of the dogs is available at the front desk for adopters. Dogs undergoing medical treatment are also housed in a room that is not open to adopters but their photos and descriptions are in the adoption book up front and they can go home with medication.

BCAS currently uses Accela, an animal management software not specifically designed for animal shelter management. The shelter's listed hours are Tuesday to Sunday from 8 am to 5 pm, but adoptions are only conducted from noon to 4:30 pm.

Due to BCAS's remote location, the volunteer and events department is working to increase offsite adoptions through the Cuddle Shuttle at pet stores and other events. This initiative has been effective in boosting adoptions and community awareness. Currently 40% of all adoptions happen on the cuddle shuttle or at off-site locations. BCAS is organizing 3-4 off-site adoption events each week. They have recently attended larger events for the first time such as Baltimore Blast Indoor Soccer and Baltimore Orioles games.

#### Recommendations:

- **Allow Adopters to View Animals:**
  - Permit adopters to view all animals not on administrative or bite hold and those that aren't dangerous, including those during their 72-hour stray hold. If someone is interested in adopting an animal on stray hold, they should be asked to return on the day the hold ends to complete the adoption, with the understanding that the animal could still be reclaimed before the end of the stray hold.
  - Focus on increasing exposure for medium/large dogs, as they are a priority for lifesaving programs like adoption. Adopters connect with dogs through body language, which cannot be replicated by looking at photos. Any opportunity to increase large dogs' visibility to adopters should be utilized.
- **Fast Track Pets:** Those deemed highly adoptable by means of a customized matrix would be spayed or neutered the day after the stray hold is up and placed into the most commonly viewed adoption areas. If the highly adoptable pets are moved through quickly, it frees up space for dogs and cats with longer stays. [ASPCA Fast Track FAQ](#)
- **Upgrade Animal Management Software:** Continue researching software specifically designed for animal shelters to replace Accela.
- **Extend Adoption Hours:** Extend adoption hours into the evenings a few days a week to accommodate community members with traditional work or school schedules. This extension is likely to increase engagement from potential adopters and volunteers.
- **Clarify Public Hours:** Ensure public hours listed on Google and other search sites reflect adoption hours, not intake hours. Public reviews indicate this discrepancy causes confusion and frustration among potential adopters.
- **Separate Volunteer and Events Departments:** As the volunteer and events department grows, consider splitting them into two distinct departments. This division would allow each coordinator to focus on their respective areas without the need to switch between the two.

- **Combo Testing:** To save staff time and money on medical supplies, cats should not be routinely tested for FeLV or FIV, called a combo test, on intake. If someone is concerned because they have other cats at home, this can be offered for a fee at the time of adoption. [More information](#) from University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- **Further Information:** Best Friends' [Adoptions Playbook](#).

## Euthanasia

Euthanasia at an animal shelter is the humane process of ending an animal's life to prevent suffering, due to behavior concerns, or when the shelter cannot accommodate the animal due to overcrowding.

When space is limited or an animal is being considered for behavioral euthanasia, an email is sent to all coordinators for input. If one coordinator objects, the animal continues to be held without an alternative outcome plan.

Volunteers, who primarily interact with the dogs, are asked to enter behavior notes using a QR code linked to an online form. These notes are used in euthanasia decisions, but volunteers were not necessarily informed of the nuances of this process. During my visit, volunteers expressed frustration over friendly dogs being considered for euthanasia because the volunteer didn't enter positive behavior observations. This places an enormous burden on volunteers, who are equipped only with basic dog-walking training and smartphones. Implementing playgroups will allow staff to monitor dogs' behavior more accurately, aiding in euthanasia decisions.

One staff member explained that when space is tight, the front desk advises surrenders to sign owner-requested euthanasia (ORE) forms. These euthanasias are then recorded as ORE outcomes, which do not count against BCAS's euthanasia statistics.

## Recommendations

- **Formalize Proactive Pathway Planning:** There is already a plan to hire an assistant medical supervisor to partner with the assistant shelter supervisor for daily pathway planning. They should ensure each animal has a live outcome planned (adoption, foster, rescue, etc.). If no reasonable live outcome is available, euthanasia should be expedited to reduce space constraints and stress on the animal.
- **Clarify Decision Making Process:** Dogs' behavior should be monitored by staff from the first time the intake staff or ASO begins to interact with the dog. After an initial decompression period, if the dog continues to show potentially unsafe behavior (freezing, whale eye, snapping, etc.), they should be euthanized. This decision should be made by staff and may include volunteer input but should not be entirely based on volunteer notes.
- **Report Euthanasia Transparently:** All euthanasia for space should be accurately reported as such.
- **Resources:**
  - [Webinar](#): "Counting All Paws: Mastering Daily Population Rounds"
  - [Daily Rounds Playbook](#)

*Disclaimer: Shelter Savvy reports are based upon observations and information available at the time of the review of BCAS operations. I do not claim (1) that I have discovered any or all existing or potential hazards or (2) that BCAS or operations are in compliance with any law, rule or regulation. I assume no responsibility for the control or correction of hazards and do not warrant that the implementation of any of my recommendations will result in (1) the elimination of any unsafe conditions or (2) compliance with any standards, codes, ordinances, regulations, statutes or laws.*