



Office of Multnomah County Auditor

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February 24, 2016

Chair Kafoury; Commissioners McKeel, Shiprack, Smith, & Bailey; Sheriff Staton; District Attorney Underhill;
COO Madrigal; DCS Director Peoples; MCAS Director Rose

Animal Services Audit: Opportunities for Improvement

We last audited Animal Services in 2002 at a time of Director transition. In an inadvertent adherence to that tradition we started this audit just as the long-term Director was leaving, so what we have described here were the conditions that existed prior to the current Director coming on board. In part, we have made many more detailed recommendations to help the new Director with improvements.

Over the years there appears to have been sort of a benign neglect of MCAS by the County as well as this office. Perhaps it is a bit of out-of-sight, out-of-mind, given their location, but Animal Services is still required to perform certain services under state law and County Code. With new leadership and assistance of this audit, they will hopefully be better able to also follow professional guidelines going forward.

Over the last few years they have increased their live-release rates and it is evident that they have very dedicated staff and volunteers, including a significant number of foster homes for the animals. As detailed here, one issue is staffing, and a strong recommendation from this office is that they receive additional staffing in the upcoming budget cycle. This will allow the new Director to address both the recommendations we have made and the additional improvements already envisioned. We recognize that MCAS operates out of an obsolete facility that will eventually need replacing, but while they are still there, they need to be better staffed so that they can better fulfill their mission to the animals in their care and to the public.

We look forward to the improvements at MCAS and hope to return sooner to follow up with additional recommendations around issues like facilities. We would also like to commend management for changes that have already started; the new management reports they have already addressed the issues involving cat cages that we observed and reported here. The response to this report can be found after this letter.

Steve March, PhD
Certified Internal Auditor
County Auditor

February 25, 2016

Auditor Steve March
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Dear Auditor March:

Please accept this letter as Management's response to the Animal Service Audit conducted by your office during the summer/fall of 2015. Thank you for the in-depth review and analysis conducted by you and your staff. The information presented in the report will be very helpful in guiding MCAS as we continue to evaluate our services and make the necessary changes to enhance our programming and operations. We are in agreement with the recommendations and desire to implement many of these modifications. However, as indicated in your report, additional resources will be critical to the success of these efforts.

In an effort to succinctly respond to the report, we will present a brief overview of the recent progress made by MCAS and will then address the stated recommendations. Again, please note that we fully agree with the need for the stated improvements and have been working the past several months on developing ways to move these issues forward.

Recent Progress/Program Enhancements

As history is our greatest teacher, it is important for us to acknowledge the progress that has been made by MCAS the past several years and strategically build upon these changes in the years to come. The past three (3) to five (5) years have been monumental for MCAS. During this time period, MCAS has made great strides and has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to enhancing its services and to be innovative and responsive to the needs of the community. This is evidenced by the significant increase in the Live Release Rate for animals served between 2007 and 2014 (Cats: 36% FY 2007 to 87% FY 2014 & Dogs: 70% FY 2007 to 94% FY2014). This level of improvement could not have been accomplished without a strong dedication to exploring programming options and a willingness to "take a risk" to try something new. One example of the many facets that contribute to the increased Live Release Rate is the dog and cat volunteer foster care programs. The program consists of a large network of volunteer homes that under our direction provide 24/7 care for animals in preparation for adoption into their forever homes.

MCAS has experienced many changes the past several years and has consistently sought to implement creative and innovative programming to better serve the community. Nonetheless, while these changes have been successful, they have been extremely demanding upon "the system" (daily operations) and have placed additional stress upon the staff to sustain these efforts. It is this factor that seems to underlie many of the recommendations made in the report.

Response to Recommendations

1. To Improve Record Keeping and Data Quality

We are in complete agreement with the premise that record keeping and data management are critically important components to the successful operation of MCAS. Unfortunately, for the past many years MCAS has been operating with a data management and program operations system (known as Multiple Options) that has been sorely inadequate and has not met the needs of the division. This system has drastically limited MCAS in its ability to accurately collect and analyze data, maintain animal records in an organized and comprehensive manner, and facilitate/construct mechanisms to decrease user error. As a result of these deficiencies, an RFP was recently released by the County for the replacement of this system. We are currently in the proposal review and assessment phase and anticipate selecting a new software system and vendor within the next few weeks. The anticipated date for implementation of the new system is June 2016.

2. To Better Protect the Health and Safety of Animals in the Shelter

The protection of the animals we serve is of utmost importance to all involved with MCAS and is the heart and soul of our mission. Accordingly, we are committed to ensuring that all animals receive the highest quality care. While MCAS has made great strides in the areas of daily care (feeding, cleaning, and sanitation) and veterinary services, we recognize that we are deficient in the provision of comprehensive behavioral assessments and enrichment services. In an attempt to address this area, MCAS has initiated various short-term efforts designed to address these concerns. Unfortunately, most of these efforts have not yielded sustainable outcomes. It is this area that is most critical to the success of MCAS and the animals we serve. As such, we will continue to explore funding options to support these efforts and will seek to provide additional training and supportive consultation to staff to increase their skills and knowledge in this area.

3. Better Protect the Health and Safety of People

Equal to the health and safety of the animals is the health and safety of the people associated with MCAS (staff, volunteers and the public) and we are dedicated to making improvements in these areas. However, it must be clearly stated that they actually are several distinct issues.

First, in regards to workplace safety, we will work closely with Risk Management to develop and implement a comprehensive training plan designed to address the common types of potential workplace issues that confront our staff and volunteers. This will be an ongoing strategy with adjustments/modifications made as needed.

Second, in regards to the safety associated with adopters and potential adopters, staff will be trained and documentation will be monitored by supervisors to ensure that all potential known or suspected safety issues are clearly expressed to all potential adopters and that such communications are explicitly documented in the animal's record. Additional training/supervision will be provided as needed.

Third, in regards to the issues concerning workplace culture and professional behavior, this issue has already been elevated to the new Division Director, Jackie Rose and her management team. Accordingly, they are currently developing various mechanisms to address these concerns. In early December, all staff participated in an MCAS-specific employee survey designed to target issues related to workplace culture and interpersonal behaviors. The results of the survey indicated there were several underlying issues affecting the staff's morale and behavior. In an effort to address these issues multiple events have been held to address these concerns and staff have responded positively to these events. Additionally, daily activities such as supervision and coaching, staff meetings, staff trainings and role modeling have been emphasized by management and have resulted in staff expressing positive feelings and improved behaviors. Lastly, all staff have been informed that any/all unprofessional behavior will result in discipline and such behavior will not be tolerated. These issues will continue to be addressed with staff with the goal being the improvement of staff morale and attitude.

4. Improve Planning and Measurement

This recommendation is extremely timely, as MCAS is currently in the process of evaluating the efficiencies of daily activities, the effectiveness of services, and the methods in which we collect and review this data. Further, with the implementation of the new software system discussed above, the ability to capture data and complete thoughtful analysis will be something that can be accomplished fairly easily by the management team without having to rely on multiple internal county systems to assist with these efforts. We are extremely dedicated to ensuring that all processes, effectively and efficiently, support the mission of MCAS and look forward to having the ability to utilize accurate and manageable data to help us plan for the future.

In closing, we greatly appreciate the insights presented by the Audit Team and applaud your use of the ASV Guidelines to help assess our services. I look forward to the leadership of Ms. Rose as part of the DCS/MCAS team to help move the agency forward to address the identified areas of concern and am confident that we will be able to make the necessary modifications needed to enhance our services.

Sincerely,



Kim E. Peoples
Director

Summary of Recommendations



Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

To better protect the health and safety of people, the Board of County Commissioners should

1. Establish a policy that provides parameters for when it is safe to re-home animals.
2. Support Animal Services in getting access to criminal background information.
3. Provide Animal Services with the funding to increase staffing as needed to meet minimum national standards for providing care to shelter animals.

Recommendations to Multnomah County Animal Services Management

To improve record keeping and data quality,

1. Conduct manual checks to ensure that there is not conflicting information in the animal records.
2. Ensure that all euthanized animals are recorded in both the drug logs and the animal records database.
3. The new animal database should
 - a. Include mandatory fields that must be completed for every animal.
 - b. Produce reports that are accessible online by the public.

To better protect the health and safety of animals in the shelter,

4. Comprehensively study total staffing needs, and advocate to the Board of County Commissioners for increased staffing as necessary to help protect the health of the animals in shelter care, including
 - a. Increasing staffing for cleaning and feeding to meet National Animal Care & Control Association guidelines.
 - b. Ensuring adequate staffing to provide the shelter's animals with daily enrichment and consistently prompt behavioral health care.
5. Evaluate existing operating procedures and ensure that employees know how to access and use them.
6. Develop and implement standard operating procedures for areas that lack them.
7. Implement a formal training program for new staff as well as ongoing training.
8. Maintain documentation of all training.
9. Remediate the health and safety issues that Risk Management identified in its Safety Site Visit report as soon as possible.
10. Remediate the cooling issues in all dog kennels as soon as possible.
11. Continue to improve housing for individual cats by compartmentalizing housing and increasing each housing unit's space.
12. Provide for separation of animal species throughout each animal's shelter stay.
13. Establish contingency housing to ensure that the shelter can accept all animals brought to it by County residents and Field Services' Animal Control Officers.
14. Provide a comprehensive enrichment program to all cats and dogs in every section of the shelter to ensure each animal receives daily social contact, mental stimulation, and physical activity.
15. Provide cats and dogs at the shelter for longer than 1 week with enrichment that increases as their length of stay increases.
16. Maintain documentation of all enrichment provided, and track this information to ensure all animals receive enrichment consistently.
17. Institute a daily rounds program that includes, at a minimum,
 - a. A rounds team involving people from different shelter units,
 - b. Daily decision-making that is clear and specific, and
 - c. Documentation of rounds' observations, decisions, and actions.

To better protect the health and safety of people,

18. Provide ongoing training to employees and volunteers on workplace safety issues, ranging from managing difficult conversations to workplace violence scenarios.
19. Provide shelter employees, particularly management employees, with training on County personnel rules, which require that the workplace be respectful, professional, safe, accepting of cultural differences, and free from inappropriate or abusive workplace behavior.
20. Document all behavioral concerns and discuss them with potential owners before adoption.
21. Clearly document what information is disclosed about an animal at the animal's adoption or transfer.

To improve planning and measurement,

22. Planning documents should include:
 - a. Clear and specific project mission that fits into the larger strategic goals
 - b. Sufficient and appropriate staffing
 - c. Staff training
 - d. Realistic and measurable goals
 - e. Cost/benefit analysis

Scope and Methodology

The scope for this audit comprised all Multnomah County Animal Services (MCAS) operations and functions. We primarily focused on fiscal years 2014 and 2015 (7/1/2013 through 6/30/2015), with data review including calendar years 2010 through 2014.

Our audit objectives were to:

1. Describe the county's animal welfare ecosystem.
2. Verify live release rate reports and assess their compliance with the Asilomar Accords.
3. Determine whether MCAS shelter practices protect the health, safety and welfare of shelter animals, staff, volunteers, and members of the public.
4. Assess MCAS Field Services operations for compliance with codes, policies, and national standards.

To accomplish these objectives we:

- Conducted over 100 interviews with management, staff, volunteers, animal welfare organizations, and the public
- Visited the Animal Shelter over 20 times and carefully monitored the status of animals
- Visited the Lombard Adoption Center several times
- Went on ride-alongs with Animal Control Officers
- Emailed surveys to staff and volunteers
- Studied County Code, state laws, and national standards
- Analyzed thousands of animal records

To assess the reliability of the data elements needed to answer the engagement objectives, we performed electronic testing of required data elements and interviewed agency officials knowledgeable about the data. The results of our electronic testing showed that data elements contained some incorrect and missing data. Therefore, we determined that the data were partially reliable for the purposes of this report. Thus, references to this data include a warning about its potential errors.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings, and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions.

The Multnomah County Auditor's Office conducted a performance audit of Multnomah County Animal Services. We created a video report to communicate our findings. This document is a printer-friendly version of our video transcripts.

Overview of Findings

Slide 1



The Multnomah County Auditor's Office conducted a performance audit of Multnomah County Animal Services. This video is an overview of our audit. You can find videos with more detailed information by visiting our website.

Slide 2



We want to thank the employees and volunteers at Animal Services for their assistance during this audit. We found the employees and volunteers to be incredibly hardworking and dedicated.

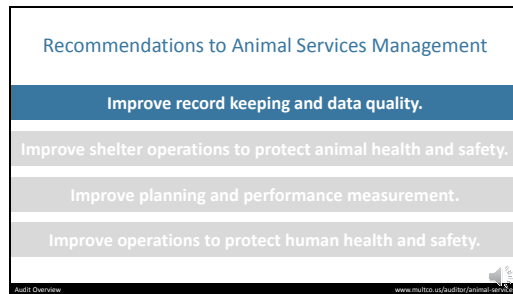
Slide 3



Based on months of observation and analysis, we recommend that Animal Services:

- Improve record keeping and data quality.
- Improve shelter operations to protect animal health and safety.
- Improve planning and performance measurement.
- Improve operations to protect human health and safety.

Slide 4



First we will discuss record keeping and data quality.

Slide 5



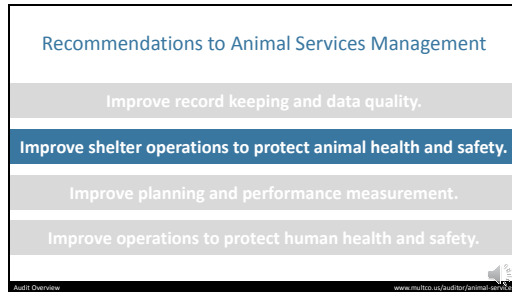
We looked at a 5 year period and found a few thousand animals with incorrect or missing information. For example, some animals have no record of what happened to them after they left the shelter or how they ended up at the shelter in the first place.

Slide 6



We also found that staff didn't record all instances when they used euthanasia drugs. Because these are controlled substances, it is necessary that Animal Services keeps good records.

Slide 7



Next, we will discuss improving shelter operations to protect animal health and safety.

Slide 8



We found that there were not enough employees to properly feed the animals and clean their housing. We found that they needed 18 additional hours per day to meet the staffing guideline. Staff work very hard to feed and clean, but there are simply not enough employees. The animal housing areas appeared clean despite the staffing challenges they faced.

Slide 9



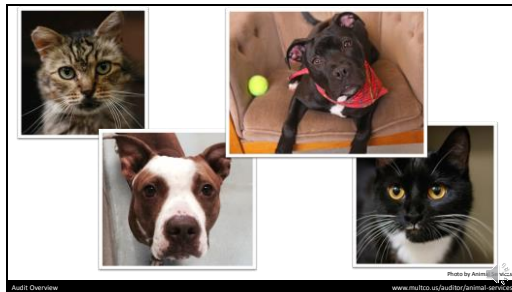
We were also concerned about the lack of consistent animal enrichment.

Slide 10



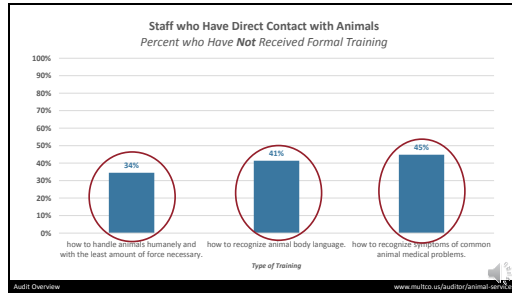
For example, this is Gotham. During the time we observed him, he only received 1 walk in 9 days.

Slide 11



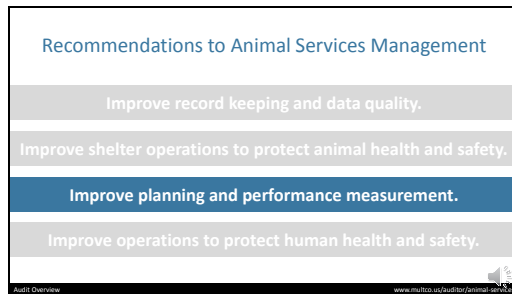
In addition to Gotham, we found that most animals did not receive the recommended amount of enrichment. This lack of enrichment can be mentally and physically taxing on dogs and cats. It also makes them less likely to be adopted because they may be less sociable than normal. Many people work hard to provide social contact and physical activity, but there are simply not enough volunteers and employees.

Slide 12



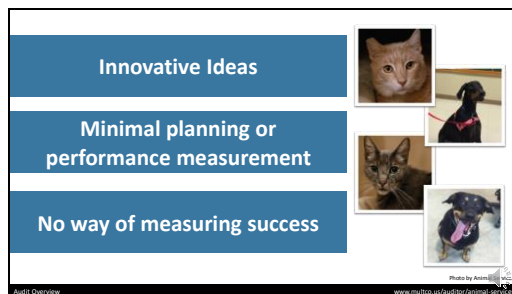
We were also concerned about inconsistent training. In a survey of employees who have direct contact with animals, many of them said that they have never received training in important areas. For example, 34% had never been trained how to handle animals humanely with the least amount of force, 41% had not been trained in how to recognize animal body language, and 45% had not been trained in how to recognize common animal medical problems.

Slide 13



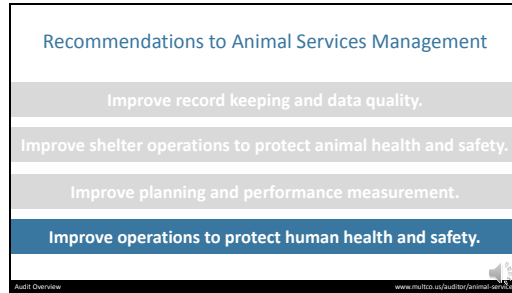
Next we'll discuss improving planning and performance measurement.

Slide 14



One of Animal Services' strengths is their ability to generate innovative ideas to help animals in our community. That said, many programs did not involve plans for employee training, sufficient budgeting, or development of long term goals. We identified several programs that were well-intended, but because they lacked planning and goals, we could not measure if they were successful.

Slide 15



Next we will move on to improving operations to protect human health and safety.

Slide 16



One of our concerns was that the shelter has adopted out animals who have injured people and other animals. Not all adopters have been informed of the animal's bite history. This practice presents a risk to public safety.

Slide 17



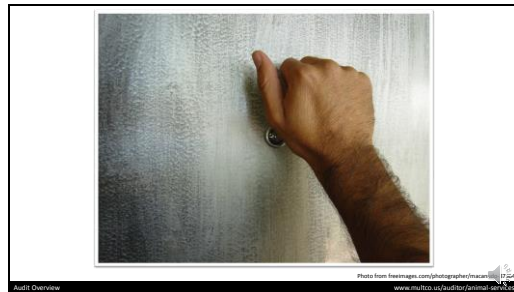
We also believe that management could work to make the shelter a more professional and respectful workplace. The shelter work environment has negatively affected the well-being of some employees.

Slide 18



Another area of concern is the safety of Animal Control Officers.

Slide 19



When an Animal Control Officer responds to a call, they do not have access to criminal background information, so they have no idea about the potential risks behind the door. Animal Control Officers do not carry firearms and have limited ways to protect themselves.

Slide 20



The Oregon Humane Society also has officers who respond to animal cruelty complaints, but they have access to criminal background information. It seems that since Animal Services offers the same services, plus has more of an enforcement role, that the same criminal background information should also be granted to Animal Services.

Slide 21

Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

- Establish a policy that provides parameters for when it is safe to re-home animals.
- Support Animal Services in getting access to criminal background information.
- Provide Animal Services with the funding to increase staffing to meet national standards.

Audit Overview www.multco.us/auditor/animal-services

Because of the kinds of health and safety issues we observed, we recommend that the Board of County Commissioners:

- Establish a policy that provides parameters for when it is safe to re-home animals.
- Support Animal Services in getting access to criminal background information.
- Provide Animal Services with the funding to increase staffing to meet national standards.

Slide 22

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Audit Overview www.multco.us/auditor/animal-services

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