



January 23, 2017

Mr. John Hamilton
Huntsville City Administrator
John.Hamilton@huntsvilleal.gov

Dr. Karen Sheppard
Huntsville Animal Services
Karen.Sheppard@huntsvilleal.gov

Re: Shelter Disaster Response Plan

Mr. Hamilton and Dr. Sheppard:

Congratulations on the 92% live release rate achieved by Huntsville Animal Services in 2016. We recognize that an incredible amount of progress has been made to change the culture at the animal shelter and we do not take that change lightly. It takes a lot of courage to try new ways of thinking and functioning and to risk the possibility of failure in the process. We do still encourage the city to strongly consider making a commitment to no longer destroy healthy and treatable pets and to continue to fine tune programs which help reduce shelter input and which increase shelter output (the “keep them out” and “get them out” programs of the no kill equation). We believe the city is in an excellent position to draw that “line in the sand” in the wake of the progress achieved to date.

As a means of sustaining the progress achieved to date, we write to you both today to touch on a subject we mentioned in our June 20, 2016, letter to Mayor Battle and the members of the city council: development of a Shelter Disaster Response Plan. When we speak of a disaster plan, we are not referencing the types of comprehensive plans developed by cities or states in the event of a natural disaster. While it is certainly recommended that the animal shelter have an evacuation plan in place in the event of fire or some other unforeseen event, the plan we are talking about has to do with a mass-intake event.

It has been many years since the shelter had an influx of dogs from a dog fighting operation (1998). We are not sure of the last time there was an influx of animals at the Huntsville shelter due to a collector or a puppy mill operation. The last collector seizure of which we are aware was in the City of Madison in 2012 and the last local mill seizure we know about was in Colbert County in 2013. We think our region is fortunate that we have not had any recent law enforcement events related to animals which have led to the shelter having to house a large number of animals unexpectedly.

We strongly encourage you to consider developing a plan in the event of a mass-intake event simply so you can avoid displacement killing of animals already in the shelter and so you can limit the possibility of the spread of disease. This plan need not be complicated. It can simply consist of arrangements made ahead of time so that a certain number of animals can be placed with designated

sister shelters in the region and with rescue groups, veterinary clinics, boarding facilities or foster homes. Creating a plan like this would require meeting with potential disaster plan partners ahead of time to work out the details of their support for the shelter and to determine how many animals could be placed with which animal shelter, organization or business. Even placing 2 or 3 animals with a number of other animal shelters in the region and with rescue groups, veterinary clinics and boarding facilities in the area would help a lot (particularly if those organizations agreed to house animals for a finite period of time at no charge to the city).

We hope that there is never a need to execute a Shelter Disaster Response Plan for a natural disaster or for a mass-intake event. We would just hate to see the city revert to destroying more healthy and treatable animals in the event something unforeseen happened. Preparing a plan like this helps strengthen the bonds between animal-oriented agencies and the community and serves to keep animals alive.

Sincerely,

read but not signed to avoid delay

Nina Beal, The Ark

Karen Borden, Dixie Dachshund Rescue

Dianne Burch, World of Pawsabilities

Susan Burlingame, Challenger's House

Jane Jattuso, North Alabama Spay and Neuter Clinic

Aubrie Kavanaugh, Paws4Change