



*By email only*

August 8, 2023

Mr. John Hamilton  
Huntsville City Administrator  
[John.Hamilton@huntsvilleal.gov](mailto:John.Hamilton@huntsvilleal.gov)

Re: Huntsville Animal Services Decline and the No Kill Equation

Mr. Hamilton:

Members of No Kill Huntsville first met with you on March 21, 2014, to introduce you to the programs and services of the No Kill Equation we promote, and about which Dr. Sheppard has known since at least January of 2009. We have consistently promoted the Equation as a DIY solution related to how the shelter interacts with the community and how the animal shelter is operated. Your June 19, 2014, Power Point presentation about what was then referred to as “Huntsville Pets Alive” included a drawing of the Equation we believe was created by you. It looks like the Parthenon.

We have watched as the live release rate at Huntsville Animal Services has continued to decline even though adoptions and owner reclaims are up. We realize rescue releases are down as rescue groups focus on other areas where they have better relationships with shelter leadership. We also see the owner surrenders have skyrocketed.

It is our position that the decline in the live release rate at the shelter is based in the failure of the shelter to fully implement *all of the programs and* services of the Equation.

- Proactive Redemptions. The source locations of dog intake is known and is displayed on a GIS map, yet no community outreach has been undertaken with the help of members of the city council to try to stop or slow this intake. Districts 1 and 4 are consistently the most problematic. In a city council meeting years ago you encouraged members of the council to have a senior member of the shelter staff attend town hall meetings; we’re not aware of that happening consistently for any district toward reducing shelter intake.
- Pet Retention Programs. The number of owner surrenders is three times what it was before the pandemic. The shelter takes in more owned animals only to destroy more animals. Even when all other options have been explored, owned animals should only enter the shelter on a managed basis to avoid killing for space.

- Comprehensive adoption programs. While the shelter often promotes fee waived adoptions, the fact remains that being open when people are at work creates barriers to both adoptions and reclaims. Even someone who works at city hall would have to take vacation time to adopt or reclaim a dog during the week unless they left work at 5:00 p.m. on a Tuesday to reclaim a dog before the shelter closed.
- Foster programs. We understand long-term fosters have been “fired” for expressing their concerns about how the shelter is operating related to veterinary care for animals and dogs being labeled as having behavior issues before they are destroyed. Fosters fill the vital role of getting animals out of the shelter and helping the shelter learn more about those animals to market them more effectively. To the extent fosters have concerns about the shelter operation, there should be mechanism in place to allow them to voice those concerns without retaliation and without disrupting the operation of the shelter.
- Volunteer programs. We understand volunteers have likewise been asked to leave the shelter for having the audacity to speak out. All shelters are accountable to the public they serve and volunteers are the eyes and ears of the public.
- Medical/behavior programs. The number of dogs euthanized for “behavior” rose in April of 2022 and remains high. We have reason to believe dogs are being put into play groups while still overstimulated, causing them to be marked for euthanasia unnecessarily. We believe dogs are, in fact, being euthanized for space. The shelter is ending the lives of dogs less than a year old for aggression and behavior. We see no logical reason for that.

We will continue to promote the HAPA with members of the city council as a backstop to try to reduce the volume of euthanasia. Should a time come when you and Dr. Sheppard would like to meet to talk about full implementation of the Equation, please let us know.

We are powerless to stop the downward trend in lifesaving at the shelter. That backsliding will only stop when the city lives up to the commitments it made to itself when the city code was revised in 2018.

Sincerely,  
*read but not signed to avoid delay*  
 Karen Borden, Dixie Dachshund Rescue  
 Dianne Burch, World of Pawsabilities  
 Susan Burlingame, Challenger’s House  
 Jane Jattuso, North Alabama Spay & Neuter Clinic  
 Aubrie Kavanaugh, Paws4Change

cc:

[tommy.battle@huntsvilleal.gov](mailto:tommy.battle@huntsvilleal.gov)  
[devyn.keith@huntsvilleal.gov](mailto:devyn.keith@huntsvilleal.gov)  
[david.little@huntsvilleal.gov](mailto:david.little@huntsvilleal.gov)  
[jennie.robinson@huntsvilleal.gov](mailto:jennie.robinson@huntsvilleal.gov)  
[bill.kling@huntsvilleal.gov](mailto:bill.kling@huntsvilleal.gov)  
[john.meredith@huntsvilleal.gov](mailto:john.meredith@huntsvilleal.gov)  
[karen.sheppard@huntsvilleal.gov](mailto:karen.sheppard@huntsvilleal.gov)

## Sec. 5-2. - Department of animal services.

- (a) HAS shall be under the general supervision and control of the director of the city's animal services department. The director shall be a department head of the city and shall be appointed by the mayor subject to the approval of the city council as provided by law. The director shall hold office for the term of the mayor making the appointment. The director shall administer the department in accordance with city policies and procedures and the laws of the state. Generally, the director shall be available to councilmembers to respond to requests for information or questions related to matters under the general control of the director which are pertinent to the performance of a councilmember's duties.
- (b) All enforcement officers assigned to HAS shall be known as HAS officers and shall provide animal control and services. Any provisions of this chapter referring to the director shall also mean and include any authorized employee acting in his stead and under his supervision.
- (c) The policies, programs, procedures, and activities of HAS, as established by the director, shall be in furtherance of advancing the following goals:
  - (1) Maximize the live release of all healthy and treatable domestic animals received into HAS care;
  - (2) Development of routine and positive relationships with private animal rescue organizations to pursue joint programs that facilitate the release of HAS animals into the care of the partner agencies as a component of the department's active foster and adoption programs;
  - (3) Intake procedures of domestic animals that meet modern standards for shelter medicine and seek to identify the owner of owned domestic animals. All methods of identification should be attempted at intake, including use of microchips and similar emerging technologies;
  - (4) Foster care programs to provide for the temporary care of HAS animals during mandatory hold periods and while awaiting adoption;
  - (5) Pre-selection of HAS animals for permanent care solutions during mandatory hold periods;
  - (6) A single web-based source for listing and advertising all domestic animals at HAS to include initial listing as a component of intake processing of all animals and ensure daily updates to the site;
  - (7) Defined standards of care of all domestic animals housed at HAS that meet the standards for modern shelter medicine;
  - (8) Accurate recordkeeping of all animals housed at HAS. Publish interim monthly reports providing outcomes for animals received at HAS; and following audit, publish an annual report (calendar year based) providing aggregated annual statistics for all animals received and their outcomes. Reports shall be published on the City of Huntsville website for free, public access; and
  - (9) Required director approval before any euthanasia procedure. Authority to perform euthanasia shall be retained by the director. The euthanasia policy shall include all conditions that must be met prior to conducting any euthanasia procedure.

(Ord. No. 95-693, § 5-2(b), 10-12-1995; Ord. No. 96-845, 10-28-1996; Ord. No. 07-69, 2-8-2007; Ord. No. 18-952A, § 4, 11-1-2018)

**Cross reference**— Department of public safety, § 2-301 et seq.

# Huntsville Animal Services Dog Live Release Rate October 2021 through June 2023

