



*By email only*

March 6, 2018

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

Re: Community Outreach by Huntsville Animal Services

Mr. Hamilton:

We had a conference call with Kelley Bollen of Animal Alliances and Bonney Brown and Diane Blankenburg of Humane Network a couple of weeks ago concerning issues at Huntsville Animal Services regarding dogs being destroyed for behavior. Kelley wanted our input on our concerns about the rise in the number of dogs being destroyed for behavior in advance of her April visit to train the shelter staff again. We have since connected with Kelley regarding Dr. Sheppard's apparent reliance on a website called Dogsbite.org for information about pit bull type dogs. This is not a reliable information source because it is based on media accounts which are inaccurate. We have encouraged Dr. Sheppard to instead rely on information from the National Canine Research Council (which is based on actual research) and on the information contained in the "Forsaken No More" research paper prepared for Dr. Sheppard at her request of Aubrie Kavanaugh in 2009 (and which was later updated in 2014). We believe Dr. Sheppard has an inherent bias regarding pit bull type dogs which is not based on science and may be based on inaccurate information.

During our conversation with Bonney and Diane, it was agreed that one of the best ways to reduce shelter intake and increase shelter output is to put proactive measures in place to connect with the public being served. This is part of the community involvement/public relations element of the No Kill Equation. Most of the public does not even think about the local animal shelter unless they are personally affected by it in some way even though personal behavior has a huge impact on the shelter operation.

We have made several recommendations in the past which do not require additional staffing or money and which we believe will help the shelter operation. The one thing we have recommended in the past (last expressed to you in our September 2017 meeting) and which we write about today is implementation of a community outreach program to engage directly with the public in a very visible and personal way with the help of local elected officials. The

campaign would take less than 2 hours a month and would cost nothing. It would not require additional staffing. It would consist of one, one-hour meeting a month in each of the 5 city council districts and each of the 6 county commission districts to engage directly with the public in those districts. The meeting would cover the services provided by Huntsville Animal Services, what services are not provided by or required of Huntsville Animal Services, issues specific to the district which impact both shelter intake and shelter output (i.e., dogs running at large, animals found at large without identification) and ways in which the public can alter behavior to help Huntsville Animal Services operate more efficiently. Specifically, ways to keep animals contained, microchipping animals, low cost spay/neuter options, plans to rehome animals in the event of some crisis or in the event of the death of the owners (to avoid owner surrender), why adopting shelter animals is a good idea as opposed by buying an animal, why chaining dogs is a bad idea, how to do report abuse or neglect, and how to foster or volunteer.

We realize that the recommendations of our group are given a lower priority than those ideas of shelter staff and volunteers. Dr. Sheppard has told us as much even though we fail to understand her position. We sincerely hope that a community outreach program will be considered not only because it is encouraged by experts like those with Humane Network, but because we really believe it will improve the perception of and positively impact the operation of the shelter. No animal shelter is an island. When the shelter is put on the public radar in very visible ways, public behavior will change and make it easier to better serve the entire community.

As we thought would happen, Huntsville has been removed from the Saving 90 website and is no longer considered a No Kill Community by the standards of that site (which require a Live Release Rate of 90% for both dogs and cats). Huntsville is now listed as a Saving 80 community.

The fundraiser to offset costs for the upcoming visit by Kelley Bollen resulted in the sale of 122 shirts and a total payout of not quite \$1,300.00.

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

cc:  
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Huntsville Animal Services  
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