




September 2023

ROCKLAND GREEN AND HI-TOR ANIMAL CARE CENTER CONSULTATION

Provided by the
ASPCA Shelter Medicine Services
Consultation Team



September 15, 2023

Dear Leadership Teams at Rockland Green and Hi-Tor Animal Care Center:

The ASPCA Shelter Medicine Services Consultation team was invited to do a comprehensive consultation at your organization.

The observations in this report were collected by our team in the following ways:

- On-site observations during our site visits at Hi-Tor Animal Care Center from August 29-31, 2023
- Review of Hi-Tor's shelter statistics, medical records, and existing operational materials
- Discussions with administration and staff prior to and during the site visit

We have tried to ensure the accuracy of our observations; however, we recognize that some observations may only be partial snapshots or only be reflective of isolated incidents and not necessarily indicative of the organization's standard operations.

Our intention in providing this evaluation report is to provide an objective view into the functioning of the organization, along with targeted recommendations for ways in which Rockland Green (RG) and Hi-Tor Animal Care Center (HT) can collectively improve animal health and welfare in Rockland County.

As detailed throughout this evaluation report, our team identified several opportunities for Rockland Green and Hi-Tor to improve care for animals in the shelter. Significant challenges exist, and while it is clear that staff have a high level of commitment to the animals in the organization's care and are doing their best in highly challenging circumstances, unfortunately, their efforts are not enough to adequately and consistently meet comprehensive animal needs.

We have detailed commentary and recommendations, arranged by topic section, in the following report. We recommend that the report is read as a whole, rather than excerpting sections, since many comments and recommendations are interconnected with other aspects of shelter programming. By nature, these consultations are a critical assessment; however, readers are encouraged to read this report with a goal of improving current practices in the county, rather than with a goal to be punitive.

As a note, the ASPCA is not a law firm nor is it licensed to practice law in any jurisdiction. We recommend that you seek assistance from legal counsel licensed in your jurisdiction if you intend to rely on any documents produced by the ASPCA. This report references industry guidance from two key sets of shelter guidelines: the new Companion Animal Care Standards Act (Article 26-C, effective December 2025), which represent *minimal* requirements for shelters in New York State (NYS) and the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' (ASV) Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, 2nd ed, which are more comprehensive and include best practices. (ART26-C is based on the 1st ed of ASV GL). For each section of this report, Rockland

Green and Hi-Tor Animal Care Center are advised to review the related sections of each of those documents. Other trusted resources are included throughout the report to support the change needed in Rockland County.

A note on confidentiality

As a policy, we will not share this report outside of the ASPCA, Rockland Green, and Hi-Tor Animal Care Services without explicit permission of RG or Hi-Tor organizational leadership or unless required by law.

Our comments are intended to help RG and Hi-Tor improve their operations using the latest available information and best practices. We have great respect for their request for external review to improve provision of care for the animals of Rockland County.

Thank you,



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Executive Summary

Sheltering has changed tremendously in the US in the last 20 years. The traditional animal control service and shelter of the 1940-1980s were open admission facilities, focused on holding stray and unwanted animals for a short period of time and then euthanizing most of them. With the 1980s came an increased emphasis and value on companion animals as pets, and this older model, fortunately, is no longer palatable to most people in the US. Approximately two-thirds of households own a dog or cat, and over 95% of pet owners [surveyed](#) consider their dog or cat a family member. Shelters and municipalities needed to respond with a different model that recognizes the changing value of companion animals in communities and the increased expectations for their care.

The facility in which Hi-Tor operates falls far short of a modern functional animal shelter. The original building, designed as a dog holding facility, classic in the middle of the last century, is the only structure with running water on the property. All the cat housing and human spaces are temporary office trailers or retrofitted. Many of the fences and runs are insecure, causing hazards for animals and people.

The shelter operates severely over capacity for care for animals, both in terms of physical space and of staffing/delivery of care services (veterinary care, spay/neuter, behavioral care and enrichment). It is our assessment that both Rockland Green and Hi-Tor Animal Care Center truly believe they are doing “the best that they can with what they have”. However, leadership of both agencies express an unwillingness to change decision-making processes for animal admissions, evaluations, and outcomes.

The mandate of Rockland Green and the mission of Hi-Tor are incompatible with the humane capacity of the facility. Rockland Green repeatedly expressed their interpretation of Schedule 2c of their contract with Hi-Tor to mean that Hi-Tor must accept all animals immediately from the public upon request; this mandate is in addition to the standard municipal requirement to provide for stray dog control ([AGM Article 7](#)). Hi-Tor expressed a commitment to housing all animals at the shelter for as long as it takes to find a live outcome, including dogs and cats with bite histories, animals with chronic conditions not currently receiving treatment, and even dogs legally deemed dangerous. These two positions are simply irreconcilable with providing positive animal welfare and safe working conditions, especially given the condition of the facility and size of the staff working there. Adding additional temporary trailers or other piecemeal attempts to expand housing available to accommodate an increasing number of animals is an unacceptable and ineffective solution to this problem and should be stopped.

Staff interactions with animal control agents and the public reflected great concern and commitment to the animals of Rockland County. In their daily care, they worked diligently, though practices at the shelter were often not in line with best practices and staff were unable to provide care at the level they wished they could. Many staff have been in their positions for a year or less and expressed concerns about “having too many animals to care for” but “not being

able to do anything about it.” They routinely worked to provide basic care (cleaning and feeding) in inefficient and overcrowded spaces. Several expressed frustration at the limits on behavioral enrichment and socialization they could provide, recognizing its importance. They also routinely failed to recognize signs of distress in animals, likely due to lack of training in animal body language and handling.

Solutions to these challenges must address policies, processes, and protocols to manage the intake, care, and outcomes of animals based on a clearly defined and realistic capacity for care.

- Intake to the shelter should not be the default or sole option; many animals and families can be better served by providing services specific to their needs (e.g. veterinary care, pet food pantry, temporary boarding). Appointments to surrender animals should be scheduled according to capacity.
- A primary goal should be to shorten the length of stay for every animal by creating a pathway and plan for an outcome that is established at intake and advanced every single day.
- Leadership needs to create clear criteria, protocols, and processes to help staff identify and act when an animal has a medical or behavioral condition that needs urgent treatment.
- A veterinarian experienced with shelter population medicine should work with trained on-site medical staff to provide expertise and oversight of medical protocols and treatment plans.
- Behavioral enrichment protocols should be written and enacted to ensure all animals have access to daily enrichment.
- Humane euthanasia must be considered for animals suffering from medical or behavioral conditions that cannot be managed by Hi-Tor and who do not have an immediate pathway out of the shelter where appropriate treatment can be provided elsewhere.
- Staff members need additional training, and exposure to industry resources and up to date information.
- A management plan must be put in place for the large (and growing) population of free-roaming cats on the property, especially given the plan to move animal services to a new facility in the next couple of years.

Processes across the organizations need to reflect the urgency of the situation and to meet the needs of animals in care. Unless operational changes are made, the new facility being built will temporarily provide safer housing and structures but will quickly also be overwhelmed with animals. Meaningful improvement will not be achieved by replicating current mandates and operations in a new building.

Management

Mandate and Mission

It is common in the US for private sheltering organizations to take on municipal contracts for stray dog control if there is not a municipal agency to do so. In NYS the requirement for stray dog control (Ag & Markets Article 7) is mirrored in the Schedule 2.b of the Rockland Green (RG) – Hi-Tor Agreement in effect until December 2024 that contracts Hi-Tor to *“accept all dogs which are brought to the Animal Shelter Facility by the various dog wardens employed by the Towns within the County.”*

The contract, including in Appendix X, exceeds standard animal control requirements in NYS by further requiring in Schedule 2.c that *“Contractor shall, also accept dogs and any other animals brought to the Animal Shelter Facility by persons other than dog wardens and provide for the proper care and provision of proper food and shelter for, these dogs and other animals until redeemed or otherwise disposed of. The Contractor shall operate the Animal Shelter Facility in a manner that ensures the availability of sufficient resources and space and the proper care of animals delivered to the Animal Shelter Facility from within the County.”*

Schedule 2.c essentially creates an impossible situation with the resources allocated for this contract: all animals must be accepted, AND the shelter must operate within its capacity for care. Both parties stated their interpretation of this agreement includes “all” animals – dogs, cats, livestock, wildlife, reptiles, birds, etc. –and to mean “at all times.” This exceeds the scope and capabilities of most sheltering organizations and all of those with the size and facilities currently allotted to Hi-Tor, making it untenable.

As lifesaving efforts have increased in US shelters, many have evolved their practices from “Open admission” policies to “managed admission.” In the past, open admission shelters provided population control to communities in large part through euthanasia. Animal shelters today provide a scope of services in communities that aim to support animals and families, but in a way that reserves intake to the shelter to truly only animals with no other options. Robust programs in shelters and across their communities work in concert to align shelter animal populations with organizations’ capacity for care, thereby ensuring animal health and well-being: such programs include reunification of lost pets in the field, low cost spay/neuter programs, Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) programs, medical and behavioral service interventions for pets, transfer out to shelter partners, timely in-house shelter medical and behavioral care, and supported owner to owner re-homing.

In addition to the RG mandate, Hi-Tor has a No-Kill mission; leadership and staff clearly stated this means that HI-Tor doesn’t euthanize any animals except when they have severe medical conditions, and no animals are ever euthanized for behavioral conditions. The no-kill mission was commonly referred to as an explanation for the shelter crowding and operating over capacity for care. A commonly accepted definition of a [“No-Kill”](#) animal shelter is where “all healthy and

treatable” animals are saved and where only “unhealthy and untreatable animals” are euthanized. Based on available resources and the level of care afforded by a “reasonable” community member, each organization (and community) determines which animals are “unhealthy and untreatable.” Oftentimes, organizations determine that “unhealthy and untreatable” animals are those who are:

- ill or injured to a degree that is unable to be treated or managed by a reasonable person in the community
- suffering with chronic medical and/or behavioral conditions or mental deterioration
- aggressive with a poor prognosis for rehabilitation

Such animals can be humanely euthanized under this definition of “No-Kill” and still be true to a no-kill mission. This practice is also consistent with preserving animal welfare and with good public health and safety practices. A desire to avoid euthanasia cannot be used to justify an inadequate level of care. Additionally, many of the practices we will discuss around managed intake and pathway planning for animals helps to bring the shelter back into balance so that they can accomplish extraordinary measures and provide more care for special-needs animals.

Making many of the changes recommended in this document is going require a united effort from both RG and Hi-Tor leadership to 1. achieve common approaches to challenges and 2. message how change is happening to better serve animals and communities.

Recommendations

Both organizations need to discuss this core conflict and strategize, together, about how to message and engage the community in an approach to animal services that involves much more than intaking animals into the shelter. This united effort likely means pulling town supervisors and ACOs into the conversation as well and re-framing the role of the shelter for the public. While all people reaching out to the animal shelter for assistance should receive help, that help can look very different from shelter intake and is tailored to their situation. Everyone in the organization needs to have clear talking points and pathways to helping in new ways. This recommendation is also discussed in greater detail in the section on field services and community-supported sheltering.

Activities prioritizing outcomes need to be as core to operations as daily care. The RG/Hi-Tor agreement has other requirements for Hi-Tor including hosting regular adoption events and monthly spay/neuter clinics. These activities are key to decreasing intake, increasing timely outcomes, and decreasing length of stay in the shelter and should be given adequate priority and resources to reflect their critical nature.

Delayed delivery of appropriate veterinary services creates a bottleneck in moving animals quickly to an outcome, and priority must be given to alleviating these delays. Many shelters are experiencing delays to accessing spay/neuter services, for instance, and Hi-Tor’s use of foster to

adopt or spay/neuter contracts is a reasonable compromise. However, the priority should be to proactively advance access to veterinary services going forward.

Hi-Tor should develop a matrix to guide pathway planning and outcomes that both reflects a common understanding of the organizational mission and clarifies for community stakeholders the scope of conditions that can be treated or managed by the organization with available resources. This is discussed later in Pathway Planning section as well.

Tap into shelter specific marketing strategies to help with shaping a more positive animal services message in Rockland County. [Hearts Speak](#) is a non-profit dedicated to exactly this process and free to shelters.

Targeted Resources

[Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff, 2nd ed](#) (provided to both RG and Hi-Tor)

[Asilomar Accords Definitions](#)

[An Example of a Matrix based on Asilomar Definitions](#)

[Hearts Speak](#)

Organizational structure

There are disagreements between RG and Hi-Tor regarding the organizational structure. At the time of our visit, Hi-Tor's Executive Director was also acting as the Shelter Operations Manager, choosing to de-centralize management of the cat and dog programs to two department managers. He expressed that he envisioned that there were actually two different shelters being operated on the property – one dog, one cat – and a centralized administrative group providing the paperwork and promotions elements for both. He stated he did not see a need for a shelter manager given the size of the organization. Small mammals were included under the Cat Manager.

The Cat and Dog department managers were each responsible for overseeing staff providing daily care, as well as the intake, medical, behavioral, adoptions, volunteers, animal handling, and overall welfare of their species. This structure and existing processes do not support proactive management of the population or adequate record-keeping. Managers knew the animals in their care, but it was apparent they spent a lot of time reacting to urgent needs, such as emotionally charged intake scenarios or driving animals to veterinary clinics. Because the number of dogs is significantly less than that of cats, recordkeeping and overall tracking of cats was particularly problematic. Both cats and dogs were lingering in the shelter waiting for medical or behavioral services, in some cases with unrecognized needs. Managers were also responsible for training new staff, which requires a significant time commitment as the majority of daily care staff was relatively new. There were no written protocols for this training, which is also the role of a shelter operations manager.

Recommendations

A shelter operations management (director or manager level) position is needed. This individual should not be directly providing animal care but instead be responsible for oversight, record-keeping, protocols, current shelter practices, key shelter statistics, training, and daily operations and decision making, including communication strategies discussed later in this document. A significant part of modern shelter management is the less visible but essential elements of problem-solving animal pathways and service provision for community members in need, as well as the “numbers” elements of looking at reports and performance indicators.

Given the previous discussion regarding the need to focus on marketing and re-messaging the work and role of the shelter, **the Executive Director should be focused on shaping public perception of the organization, building collaborations across the community to provide a safety net for animals across the community, tracking and reporting on financial and administrative responsibilities, rebuilding a strong volunteer and donor base, and promoting the work of the organization.** They of course are also tapped into the numbers and processes being performed by the shelter operations manager and are in constant communication with both operations staff and the board of directors.

The lack of a clinic on-site as well as attractive spaces for the public to meet animals results in management spending a significant amount of time transporting animals to other places (clinics, offsite adoptions, other organizations). **Adding a transportation staff member dedicated to that task rather than pulling from management would make for more consistent management on site and streamline some of these processes, which are acting as bottlenecks in the current animal flow.**

Outsourcing medical care to varied practices, including an emergency facility, does not meet the population medicine needs of the shelter or provide for overarching shelter medicine informed protocols and practices. **A consistent veterinarian with shelter medicine experience and knowledge should be identified to provide regular on-site visits, as well medical protocols and training.**

The organizations would also benefit from a **dedicated social media staff member working with the volunteer and foster coordinator as well as adoptions staff** to get more consistent, high-quality messages out to the community.

Salaries and compensation should be reviewed considering current market information, including the [AAWA Compensation and Benefits](#) report as well as local labor market information. We are not experts in compensation; however, the salary budget lines provided in the contract that was shared seem low for the region and the market. Additionally, even full -time staff are not receiving healthcare and other standard benefits which makes total compensation for these roles even less competitive than what salaries otherwise suggest.

[Written Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\) and Protocols](#)

Written standard operating procedures (SOPs) for many aspects of animal shelter operations are a requirement of Art26-C and a must or should recommendation in the ASV GL 2022. Required and recommended protocols are detailed in chart form in the Appendix of this document and include topics ranging from daily care (sanitation and feeding) to behavioral care, medical care, and documentation.

Writing and overseeing the creation of SOPs is a duty of shelter operations leadership, although details may need to be collected from department managers and reference industry recommendations and examples.

The only written protocols made available to us during this consultation were a medical intake protocol for cats and dogs written by a veterinarian no longer at the organization, and a medical euthanasia policy. It was our impression that the organization currently does not have protocols for the other areas necessary in shelters.

Recommendations

Hi-Tor must create a set of written operational protocols in line with at least the minimal requirements for Art26-C. This falls under the duties of a shelter operations director/manager and should be done in consultation with a veterinarian who has oversight of the medical and behavioral welfare of the shelter's animals.

Targeted Resources

[How to Create an SOP](#)

[Sample Shelter SOPS from UF](#)

Staff Training

Sheltering is also an industry that experiences tremendous turnover in staff given the relatively low compensation and high levels of stress. Over the last few decades, animal sheltering and animal control organizations have worked to both professionalize and formalize the work that we do. Training programs, certifications, college degrees, and continuing education are all available to support shelter, animal control, and shelter veterinary professionals. Professional organizations such as the [National Animal Control Association](#) (NACA), the [Association for Animal Welfare Advancement \(AAWA\)](#), and the [Association for Shelter Veterinarians](#) (ASV) provide networking opportunities and guidance in best practices related to the spectrum of work across the field. Animal sheltering is a career choice and successful organizations maintain high levels of professional training and expectations commonly seen in corporations.

Fortunately, given the non-profit or municipal status of most organizations in this industry, work has also been done by the national organizations and grant makers to be sure that high level educational materials, training opportunities, and even national conferences are affordable. Both the ASV GL and the AGM Art26C have clear recommendations regarding staff training.

Hi-Tor has experienced a lot of turnover in the past 7 years, and many current staff, including the Executive Director, have been with the organization less than a year. Many positions, including those in leadership, are filled by team members new to animal sheltering. Hi-Tor has a couple of staff members in managerial roles that have been with the organization for 5-7 years but have limited formal training in current shelter recommendations. Training does not appear to be part of the culture. There is no common meeting space for staff training or access to technology to provide training throughout the facility. There are also not up to date written SOPs on daily required tasks for staff to follow. New staff have primarily been trained by word of mouth rather than documented processes.

Staff training and documentation of training will be required by Art26C and is already required by the ASV GL 2022.

Recommendations

A training plan needs to be put into place for staff at Hi-Tor that reflects the core areas of animal care, as well as content related to their work areas. Likewise, RG leadership is projected to play a significant role in animal services going forward and should be encouraged to access online training, professional resources, networking, and conferences in the field.

The training curriculum should encompass all aspects relevant to each person's job description and fulfill the requirements presented in Art 26-C (see Appendix for details). Pre-packaged training can be a mix of online modules and interactive sessions. For example, staff could be assigned to watch a webinar on safe animal handling, cat/dog body language, adoption programs, spot cleaning vs deep cleaning, or a shelter medicine topic, and then meet to discuss for 20 minutes.

All staff training needs to be tracked and documented.

All staff providing any direct animal care should be required to complete [Fear Free Shelters training](#). This covers body language, monitoring for fear, anxiety, stress, and safe and humane handling in a shelter setting.

All shelter managers and other leadership should be required to read the ASV Guidelines for Standards in Animal Care 2022 and watch the short videos provided on each section in [this ASV Bootcamp series](#). This includes Board members if they are to act in any operational capacity or make operational decisions.

Staff and leadership should visit other shelters, particularly shelters in their region that might be collaborative partners in shelter and community work.

Staff and leadership should tap into national level conversations and networking around the challenges that are facing shelters today. One quick point of entry is the weekly [Maddie's](#)

[Community Conversations](#), which provide a weekly subject matter expert presentation as well as an opportunity for networking. They also provide financial incentives to attending organizations.

Staff and leadership should be given support and time to attend at least one sheltering conference annually. There are several shelter medicine and well as shelter professional meetings on the east coast, (Ex. ASPCA Cornell Maddie's Shelter Medicine Conference) as well as many that occur nationally or have a virtual option.

ACOs play a key role in this work and must be part of the community's solution to shelter overcrowding. RG and Hi-Tor should work with the townships to promote that ACOs are participating in the National Animal Control Association. Additionally, there are many opportunities to access continuing education provided by ACOs through the Human Animal Support Services on topics related to field services and community sheltering.

Targeted Resources

[ASPCApr](#) Online Courses

[Maddie's University and the Learniverse](#)

[Fear Free Shelters](#)

[ASV Guidelines Short Videos on Highlights](#)

Population Level Record Keeping and Reporting

Shelters are required to be able to produce both individual animal records as well as population level reports. Hi-Tor uses a popular and effective shelter software system called PetPoint which allows for both individual and population level reports to be easily generated as long as data is reliably and accurately entered in the system. Hi-Tor has several staff members who are responsible for entering information into records. Computer stations are available in two of the trailers and accessible to administrative and managerial staff. There are no protocols detailing the process or who is responsible to ensure data is entered.

Both Art26-C and ASV GL 2022 have specific types of reports that are required, and these may not line up exactly with reports that are easily produced by PetPoint.

All animals are required to have unique identifiers and individual animal records. Kennel cards were present on most animals but missing on many. They were noted to be missing and replaced during our visit once we asked for them.

Approximately 30-50 cats free-roam the property. Most of these cats have names and the staff know them, but there were also some new additions during our visit. It is unclear which of these animals are accounted for in the shelter's record keeping.

Recommendations

Shelter operational staff should review animal inventories daily and rectify the report with kennel cards and animals in enclosures.

Hi-Tor leadership should review the list of reports required by Art26-C and identify PetPoint reports that fulfill these minimal reporting requirements. Examples of specific report recommendations we discussed during the consultation are provided in the Appendix.

Likewise, **RG should work with Hi-Tor to match their additional reporting requests to those that can generated by the software** and still provide the information they are looking for.

In addition to the standard reports, both organizations are encouraged to include average length of stay reports, since ALOS is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) and an important measure of shelter function and animal welfare.

Leadership and operational staff should routinely review monthly reports together and evaluate their progress in meeting industry benchmarks for humane and efficient sheltering as they work to decrease animal inventory in the shelter (e.g. decrease ALOS, increase RTO, decrease intake, minimal Died in Shelter, increase Transfer, etc). PetPoint offers an [Industry Dashboard](#) which allows you to compare your statistics with the whole of their database.

Individual Animal Record Keeping

Shelters are required to create individual animal identifiers and document histories and interventions performed in the shelter, as well as outcomes. Hi-Tor uses both paper records and PetPoint, which has terrific capacity to produce individual animal records, adoption and foster contracts, and kennel cards in addition to many other standard shelter documents.

Petpoint also interfaces with Hi-Tor website. Hi-Tor was very consistent in capturing photographs of animals that appeared on animal adoption profiles – this is NOT an easy task and is very important to attracting adopters. However, the majority of cats and some dogs had no “adoption profiles” online, promoting them to adopters.

Specific observations and recommendations regarding medical and behavioral care are provided in later sections, so this section only focuses on the methods and accuracy of documentation in the record keeping system.

During our visit, we performed an audit of a subset of 26 paper records that were randomly pulled and reviewed alongside their PetPoint record. This subset contained both owner surrender and stray animals, cats and dogs, and varied outcomes (adoption, transfer, deceased).

Summary findings from this brief audit:

- Of these 26 records, more than 80% were missing physical exam notes either on a paper record or in Petpoint.
- None of the records had behavior notes of any kind.
- Routinely, core vaccinations (FVRCP for cats; DHPP and Bordetella/Parainfluenza) were not delivered on the day of intake, even if the animals were of an appropriate age (greater than 4 weeks).
- Several animals had never received core vaccines, even though they were old enough and had been in the shelter for at least 2 weeks and as long as 8 months.
- Several animals that died had no medical notes in their paper or PetPoint records regarding disease conditions, status, or decline. The word “died” was just written on their folder, and the date written did not match the date in Petpoint (this is likely a clerical issue with not changing the date when entering the information to the actual date of death).
- Medical treatments and behavioral treatments administered at the shelter were not documented in records. Likewise, veterinary records from offsite clinics are not added to PetPoint medical records.
- ACO intake forms routinely collect location of origin and officer identification, but no other history. Several ACO interactions observed at the shelter involved extensive conversations about the animals’ histories (e.g. known owners) but in the reviewed records ACOs do not appear to document any of the back stories or information that

could be useful in shelter intake diversion or services (see later section on Community-Centered Sheltering and Field Services).

Recommendations

Complete a comprehensive audit of records (paper and PetPoint) by someone with shelter medicine knowledge to determine the current medical status of each animal and acute medical needs (vaccines, treatments, follow up). This list should then be prioritized for care delivery.

Add a field to the paper “health charts” to capture basic physical exam finding by a trained medical staff member. This exam, and documentation of this exam, is a requirement of both Art26-c and ASV GL 2022.

All information regarding behavior and medical findings must be entered into Petpoint, including examinations, recommendations, treatments, outcomes, and recheck dates. All offsite exams and treatments also need to be entered into PetPoint. Records received from veterinary hospitals can be uploaded into animal’s PetPoint medical record as an attachment, or the information can be summarized in standard PetPoint fields.

At outcome, an individual animal record should be provided that details all medical and behavioral information.

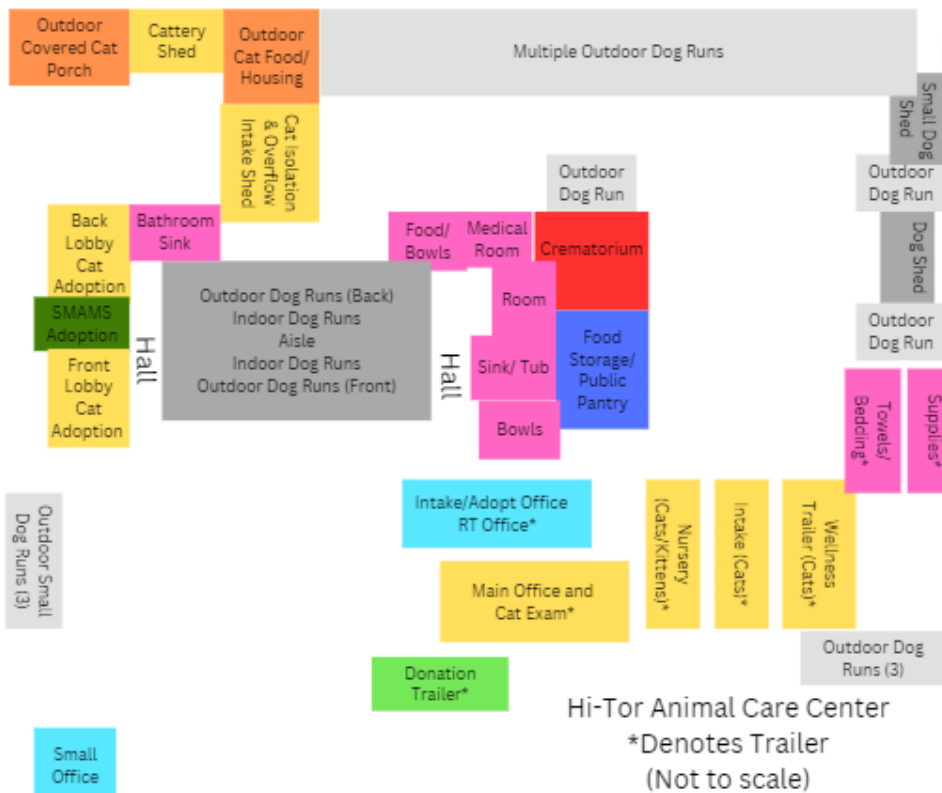
Core vaccines must be administered to ALL animals AT INTAKE and this should be documented on the paper record and entered into PetPoint. Shelter-specific recommendations should be followed, and a protocol developed in conjunction with the veterinarian overseeing medical care for the animals. Vaccinations are not being administered within 24 hours of arrival. Although the staff stated that all cats were vaccinated for FVRCP, records reflected that several cats who had been here for months had no evidence in their record or otherwise that they vaccinated for panleukopenia, despite the shelter experiencing an outbreak less than one month ago.

ACOs and intake staff should add any known history to the shelter’s intake form to improve animal care and support efficient pathway planning. Many animals that currently enter the shelter through ACOs or public service holds (evictions, hoarding seizures, owner hospitalization or incarceration, etc) are being held for prolonged holds without clear paperwork, ownership information, or outcome pathways. Without complete histories and information, and a clear pathway out of the shelter, these animals linger for long periods and contribute to crowding. In some cases, this results in an uncertain legal status (see later section on community sheltering for more discussion of this issue) that poses risks to the organizations and for animal welfare. Both RG and Hi-Tor need to clarify the shelter’s role and legal responsibilities in these cases and identify opportunities to advocate for more clear procedures and efficient pathways for these vulnerable populations.

Prioritize writing adoptions profiles on-line to promote animals. Shelters have recently discovered that open source [ChatGPT](#) is very effective at writing interesting profiles if provided

with just a few lines of basic information about an animal. The profile needs to be reviewed for accuracy prior to posting, but this tool is commonly being used by shelter staff to save time and ensure clever and interesting profiles.

Facilities



Safe and humane facilities are the backbone of any animal sheltering organization. The quantity and design of housing must be appropriate for the species, the number of animals housed in the animal shelter, and the expected length of stay. Most shelter animals spend most of their time in their primary enclosures, so ensuring appropriate housing that allows for normal behaviors improves welfare and reduces risk of disease transmission. Facilities must allow for the separation of animals by species, age, predator/prey status, health and behavior. The animal shelter facilities should also include sufficient space to allow for essential shelter operations outside of those enclosures, including cleaning and enrichment.

In modern shelters, animal housing comprises only half to two-thirds of the space in the shelter. This reflects the importance that human spaces also play in effectively and humanely caring for animals. Spaces for staff training, intake and adoption conversations, community events, medical and behavioral services, storage, sanitation equipment, a kitchen, laundry, and other essential shelter functions are core to accomplishing the work of a modern shelter. Hi-Tor should be commended for creating separate medical exam rooms for cats in the cat area, and dogs in the dog areas. These spaces were organized and ready for exams to be accomplished.

The only permanent structure at Hi-Tor Animal Shelter was built for a classic animal control function in the middle of the last century. It contains a small lobby and what were offices (now cat housing), and a large run of dog kennels made to hold dogs only for a few days while waiting

to return to their owner, or to be adopted or euthanized after a stray hold. Because cats now occupy what was the lobby, office, and presumed staff break rooms in the original structure, there are no spaces for visitors or staff. There are also no laundry facilities on site.

As the sheltering and animal welfare industry has progressed, classic animal control facilities no longer serve our population of dogs with longer lengths of stay and more complex medical and behavioral needs. These older shelters were also not built with cats or other species in mind, each who have their own housing needs.

Much of the current housing at Hi-Tor does not fulfill requirements of what is considered humane. Most cats occupy small or temporary trailers without plumbing and with undersized enclosures. The large dog runs are hazardous to the dogs and staff and in need of extensive repairs and renovations. The small dog kennels are also located in temporary sheds, and many contain slatted floors which may cause injury. Isolation spaces are currently used as overflow housing and occupied with animals, so they are unavailable to animals who come in or break with illness. Isolation areas also do not have sinks for handwashing and biosecurity.

It is noteworthy that Hi-Tor has achieved species separation between cats and dogs through some relatively recent renovations, which is a significant improvement from the past.

Recommendations

All parties recognize that a new facility is an urgent need for Rockland County and this build is a priority. Stay the course and **continue to emphasize that a new build for animal services is absolutely necessary for Rockland County.**

RG is advised to involve a shelter veterinarian in review of plans for the new facility in addition to utilizing a design and build team with experience in animal shelters. Animal flow, particularly around infectious disease control, is an important piece of any design. Additionally, given that the new build includes a clinic (for shelter and community facing care) it would be important to have a shelter veterinarian review the plan.

Organize continued clean-up of the current campus to minimize debris and improve both staff and visitor experiences.

Provide an additional climate-controlled restroom on the current campus via a temporary trailer or similar structure.

Utilizing strategies discussed in other parts of this document, prioritize decreasing the numbers of animals housed on the property. Once this is accomplished, reclaim the office space and the back lobby for adoption visits and conversations or staff work and break spaces.

Targeted Resources

[UC Davis Shelter Facility Design Resources](#)

[Shelter Design, Chapter 3 of the Shelter Medicine for Vets and Staff Textbook provided with this consultation](#)

Humane Animal Housing and Physical Capacity for Care

Physical capacity, including overall facility and enclosures, is part of the equation when considering whether an organization is operating within its capacity for care.

Physical capacity calculations should only include appropriate **humane housing units** (HHUs), and animal shelters should not house more animals than they have capacity for. For purposes of this report, HHUs will be defined per NYS Art26-C language which details that individual primary enclosures should provide sufficient space to allow each animal to:

- make all normal postural adjustments
- fully stretch their bodies and have sufficient room to circle, lie down and stand upright without the head or tail touching the sides of the enclosure even with the presence of water, food bowls, beds, litter boxes and other normal cage objects.
- sit, sleep, and eat away from areas of their enclosure where they defecate and urinate.

In addition to these requirements, shelter industry standards as described by the ASV GL 2022 further recommend the following to improve welfare and reduce incidence of disease.

Although the ASV GL 2022 are focused on dogs and cats the following recommendations are applicable to most species:

- The primary enclosure must be structurally sound and maintained in safe, working condition to prevent injury and escape
- All animals should be given the opportunity to hide within their enclosure
- A soft resting place that elevates animals off the floor should be made available for all animals
- The use of cages or crates intended for short-term, temporary confinement or travel is unacceptable as primary enclosures.
- Enclosures should not be stacked or arranged in such a way that increases stress/discomfort, compromises ventilation or allows waste material contamination between housing units
- For animals remaining in the shelter long term (more than 2 weeks) housing must provide additional space, enrichment, and choice.
- Multi-compartment housing should be provided for the majority of animals

For cat individual housing:

- Individual cat housing with floor space less than 8ft² is unacceptable; ideally cat housing provides 11ft² or more of floor space.
- Cat housing units should be elevated off the floor
- Cat cages should face away from each other or be spaced more than 4ft apart
- Cats must be given the opportunity to hide, and their primary enclosures must allow scratching, climbing, and perching.

For cat co-housing:

- A minimum of 18ft² of floor space per adult cat should be provided, and no more than 6 adult cats should be cohoused regardless of size of primary enclosure
- Random co-housing is unacceptable practice
- Unrelated animals must not be cohoused until health and behavior are assessed
- When planned appropriately, group housing can offer great companionship, healthy social contact, and provide opportunities for normal behavior; however, not every cat enjoys group housing and introductions must be carefully planned – group housing is NOT a solution for lack of space.

Cat individual housing recommendations

Collapse a pop-up crate whenever one becomes empty with the goal of not using it again. Pop up crates are inappropriate as primary enclosures as they provide little opportunity for hiding, provide little separation from other animals and can be easily contaminated by the waste of other enclosures especially when stacked. They are also difficult to sanitize completely between cats given the bars and surfaces.

Ensure that there are opportunities to hide in every cat enclosure every day – this is vital. We observed many instances where cats were attempting to hide under blankets. Cardboard boxes are cheap and simple options that provide the option to hide and perch. If you add a [feral den](#), or travel carrier this also allows for hiding opportunities and fear-free cleaning since the animals can be encouraged to go into the feral den/carrier and the door closed during cleaning.

Plan to add portals to stainless steel and plastic units in good condition. You have several single stainless steel and plastic cages that can be connected via portals to create HHUs. Steel and plastic enclosures in good condition are easily cleaned and sanitized. Frames need to be built to secure individual kennels. Portals are ideal as they provide separation of living and bathroom spaces, provide choice, and allow for fear-free cleaning: just close one side of the enclosure to clean one side, then repeat on the other side. These units will be useful in your new space as well.

Ensure enclosures only house a single cat or a single litter. Double-sides, standard sized cages fulfill the requirements of humane housing if only a single animal is housed per double enclosure. A bonded pair of adult cats essentially needs a room or large enclosure, which can be accomplished by adding portals to 3 or 4 units to create a condo.

Increase use of foster for litters of kitten under 8 weeks, and nursing moms and kittens. The nursery should only be a temporary (<1 day) “landing zone” for nursing queens and kittens as they wait to go to a foster home. Reduce the number of crates in this room to 5 and elevate off the floor. Just as with all other housing, provide hiding opportunities and other enrichment for both kittens and adults.

Decrease length of stay for kittens by scheduling return from foster and spay/neuter at 8 weeks for healthy kittens. Kittens should be spayed/neutered and placed in a kitten area of adoption housing as soon as they reach 8 weeks old.

Retrofit any cat enclosures with slatted cage floors with High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) board or other safe, cleanable solid surface. Slatted floors are inappropriate in primary housing due to the risk of injury. Ultimately these should not be retrofitted with portals but discarded.

Cat Group Housing Recommendations

Match the number of cats housed in groups to industry recommendations. Overcrowding group housing negates its benefits. At the time of our visit, we counted 19 cats housed in the cattery. Overcrowding increases risk of injury and disease and multiple instances of resource conflict were observed during our visit. The number of cats in this space must be a maximum of twelve based on Art26-c. Reduction to six would be in line with ASV GL 2022 and much better.

Cats should be assessed medically and behaviorally before introduced to group housing.

Cats in group housing should be carefully monitored during introductions and regularly during their stay to ensure appropriate access to basic necessities. If conflicts are occurring, cats will need to be moved or alterations made to resources to provide more space and less conflict.

Appropriate amounts of resources must be provided and spaced out in the enclosure to reduce competition. Divide portions into more bowls, increase number of litter boxes (1 per 2-3 cats), and separate the resources around the room to allow for distance when eating and eliminating. At the time of visit, we noted two overfilled dry food bowls next to each other, two water bowls, three litter boxes, and three wet food plates in the middle of the enclosure.

Free Roaming Cat Recommendations

Triage and strategize around the management of the large free-roaming cat population on the property. Many were described as long-term occupants but several were identified as new members by staff during our visit. Solutions include pro-active spay-neuter and prioritized placement for more socialized cats. All free-roaming cats should have a record and identification and be ear-tipped when altered.

Negotiate whether the long-term unsocialized cats in the colony will need to be relocated or if they can continue to be managed on-site even after animal services relocates. Relocation is considered [a last resort](#) for managing community cats as it can be a stressful and prolonged process for cats that have lived in that area for a long time.

Dog Housing Recommendations

Urgent repairs must be done to improve the safety of the large dog runs. The floors must be repainted and re-sealed in order to be properly sanitized. Insecure latches, sharp edges, or damaged fencing should be repaired.

Most small dog housing is single sided and contains slatted floors. The goal should be to **replace slatted floor enclosures over time** as slatted floors can cause pain, discomfort and injury. In the meantime, you may **place solid bottoms in these kennels** to prevent accidents.

Just as with cat housing, **dog housing should be enriched** with soft, raised sleeping surfaces such as Kuranda beds and a regular rotation of other enrichment items.

Guillotine doors should be open during the day to allow for separation of resting areas from elimination areas and provide choice to be visible or hide as desired. Some of the doors cannot remain open because of safety concerns with some enclosures that are insecure, and these enclosures should be prioritized for repair.

Keep in mind principles of dog housing for renovations or your new build. Ideally, pods of primary enclosures for dogs contain no more than 4-6 kennels to reduce noise and ongoing arousal between dogs. This also allows for flexibility and separation of different dog populations. Ideally, dog kennels also do not face each other.

Small Mammal (SMAM) Housing Recommendations

Rabbits and guinea pigs should ideally not be housed in the same room to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Rabbit upper respiratory infections can be deadly to guinea pigs.

Strive to have adequate numbers of dedicated small mammal foster homes that are on a roster to pick up rabbits and guinea pigs at intake to prevent them from entering the shelter in the first place.

Prioritize transferring out SMAMs to other organizations as much as possible. If cat numbers are driven down, establishing a SMAM trailer would be a reasonable approach to reclaiming the office for other purposes and provide for species separation. In general, do NOT accept another SMAM until a space opens up; instead create a waiting list and referral organizations.

Continue proper prey/predator separation and never house small mammals in the same room as dogs and cats.

We recognize that the facilities challenges at Hi-Tor are historic and will take time to address. We encourage you to implement small changes discussed here to bridge the transition to the new facility and to improve animal welfare at Hi-Tor today. Ensuring a short length of stay and

reducing your population numbers will also help ensure you are operating closer to your physical capacity.

Targeted Resources

[UC Davis Shelter Medicine Enclosures and Portal Information](#)

Isolation Housing Recommendations

Clarify the appropriate use of the terms 'Isolation' and 'Quarantine' and how spaces are being used at Hi-Tor. 'Isolation' housing is housing where animals who are currently sick with infectious diseases are placed to prevent the spread of illness to others. This is different from 'Quarantine' housing that contains animals who were exposed to infectious disease but who are not currently showing clinical signs. 'Medical' housing contains animals who have non-infectious illness or injury. In general, shelters minimize quarantining healthy animals (this is discussed further under Pathway Planning)

Animals with signs of infectious disease should be placed in Isolation housing. Animal shelters must have the ability to separate animals with infectious diseases from the rest of the population. This housing should be as enriched as adoption housing to help reduce stress which is associated with disease.

Isolation housing should have access to a sink for handwashing, and be set up with space for treatments, examinations, and storage for dedicated supplies. Staff working in these rooms should only do so after caring for healthy animals first and be sure to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and follow other biosecurity measures.

Isolation housing should be empty if there are no animals with infectious diseases. Isolation housing cannot become an overflow space for adoptable animals. It should also be located away from other animals or busy traffic patterns.

If proper Isolation housing is unavailable, there must be an alternate plan in place if additional sick animals arrive or are identified. This may include off-site care such as foster or an offsite facility.

Veterinary care should be available to assess animals in Isolation housing and to evaluate and alter treatment as conditions progress. Staff must be trained to deliver recommended treatments for infectious disease in shelter Isolation housing, and to recognize when further intervention is needed.

After an animal leaves Isolation housing, it should be deep-cleaned and prepared for future use, including restocking supplies. It then remains empty until it is needed. Isolation housing is not counted as part of shelter physical capacity due to its specialized use.

Population Management and Capacity for care

Population management is crucial for maintaining a shelter’s capacity for care and reducing an animal’s length of stay (LOS). This is the process of intentionally and efficiently planning services for each animal in the shelter’s care to ensure that animals only stay in the shelter as long as they need to. Operating within an organization’s capacity for care ensures animals’ needs are met humanely using available resources which includes housing, staffing and programmatic expertise. Tools employed in population management include:

- Determining capacity for care
- Pathway planning
- Daily rounds
- Welfare panels

Efficient pathway planning ensures animals move within the system in a timely fashion. Population management can start at or prior to intake, ensuring only animals that need to be in the shelter come into the building when in line with the organization’s mission. Implementing return to field or interventional care for owned animals that allows them to stay in their homes is increasingly part of population management, in addition to being a critical approach to meeting community needs and keeping pets and people together.

Capacity for Care

An animal shelter’s capacity for care is calculated not just by the number of kennels and cages available (physical housing capacity, discussed in the Facilities section), but also the number of staff available to provide basic care, cleaning, and enrichment. The average daily population that needs care in your shelter is a product of the average number of admissions and average LOS.

Two shelters admitting the same number of animals daily will have a different number of animals in care each day depending on their average LOS (see table below). An animal shelter with shorter average LOS will be caring for fewer animals daily, which allows for better welfare and creates the capacity to provide for animals who require longer stays – this is particularly important for organizations whose mission includes caring for long stay animals until placement in a sanctuary.

When operating within capacity, short LOS allows the shelter to take in more animals and/or expand to other services. Prolonged LOS not only has a direct impact in a shelter’s capacity for care, but negatively impacts welfare by increasing stress for people and animals, susceptibility to disease, and exposure to infectious diseases.

Average admissions per day	Average length of stay (days)	Average daily population (animals)	Total intakes per year
10	7	70	3650

10	14	140	3650
10	21	210	3650

Organizations are best able to optimize LOS and attain overall shorter shelter stays when there is a sense of urgency in getting animals out of the shelter and to their humane outcome. Even with modern facilities, a shelter cannot match the benefits that come from a more natural environment and daily rhythms offered by a home environment. This sense of urgency is supported by many of the practices discussed in the Pathway Planning and Community-Supported Sheltering sections.

Staffing Capacity

The time and skills of shelter personnel are critical determinants of a shelter’s capacity for care. For many organizations, staffing capacity is the limiting factor in overall capacity for care, rather than availability of humane housing. For Hi-Tor, it may be a combination of both factors. A standard estimate such as 15 minute per animal per day may roughly calculate the time needed for basic care – this means basic cleaning and feeding but not does not account for variation in housing and different sanitation protocols, as well as essential time for enrichment and walks, or any other additional care.

Using 15 minutes as a basic guideline (NACA), with 200 animals estimated to be on-site at the shelter as of 8/31/23, means 50 hours of animal care time required per day. At Hi-Tor, approximately 4 hours are allotted for basic care daily, which means that about 12.5 animal care staff would be needed to complete basic care:

$$200 \text{ animals} \times 15 \text{ minutes} / 60 \text{ minutes} = 50 \text{ hours of animal care required}$$

$$50 \text{ hours} / 4 \text{ hours} = 12.5 \text{ animal care staff needed}$$

During our visit, in spite of being understaffed, daily care personnel were able to provide basic care to the animals in Hi-Tor’s facility; in many cases, this was only because having multiple cats per cage resulting in a smaller number of enclosures to clean than the numbers of cats. They also were wisely using spot cleaning when appropriate. For dogs, they took advantage of the set-up that allows them to place dogs in a second outdoor enclosure in the summertime while the kennel runs are cleaned.

However, when aspects of care beyond cleaning and feeding, such as behavioral enrichment, are figured into the equation, animals are not getting what are also considered basic needs met.

With the animal population at the time of the visit, the shelter is operating beyond its capacity for care. There is an imbalance of available care staff and population needs, population management is needed urgently to bring the two into balance.

Recommendations

To counterbalance staffing needs, prioritize moving animals through the shelter more efficiently to reduce the average length of stay and ultimately reduce the average number of animals in care daily. Accomplishing this goal may mean reallocating staff time for cleaning and feeding, adding positions, and being more strategic about pathway planning and the provision of services in a timely fashion.

Hi-Tor uses many part-time staff. To calculate more accurate staffing time needs, **Hi-Tor will need to establish time estimates for all aspects of animal care specific to Hi-Tor’s procedures, typical populations, and expectation for daily care.** This estimate should be based on direct observation of the time it takes to complete basic caregiving duties, but also walking dogs and providing animals with consistent daily enrichment. This time estimate should be used to guide staffing decisions and can be impacted by volunteer hours but should not depend on them.

Promote the realization that staff duties are about more than feeding and cleaning. Daily rounds, promoting outcomes, providing enrichment, and maintaining the facility are all important staff duties that need to be accounted for. Additionally, staffing capacity needs to include time for specialized care for medical and behavioral needs of animals.

Volunteer hours can be added to support daily care staff but should not be relied upon.

Pathway Planning

Pathway planning is a proactive approach to tracking each animal’s stay from intake to outcome. This is to anticipate the needs an animal will have to reach that outcome, so that services and care can be scheduled and provided efficiently to optimize length of stay. Pathway planning is an important aspect of population management as it includes planning for intakes and outcomes, daily monitoring for individuals and populations through rounds, and keeping track of capacity for care. All shelter staff should have a sense of urgency about animals moving along their intended pathways and recognize that shelter housing is not a desirable long-term outcome for animals.

Establishing “fast-track” and “slow-track” categorizations for animal outcomes aid in pathway planning – for example, healthy kittens and small friendly dogs may be considered fast track, while animals with chronic medical conditions or behavioral concerns may be considered slow track. Fast-track animals should have the lowest LOS possible since it is likely that slow track animals will stay in the shelter for longer. Moving fast track animals through the shelter quickly also serves to free up resources for a greater investment in slower track, special needs animals.

An aspect of efficient pathway planning is the ability to make swift decisions about the shelter’s ability to treat or manage medical and behavioral conditions, taking into consideration the prognosis of the condition, the community that the shelter is a part of and the adoptability of the animal, and the resources (financial and personnel) available at that time. Some welfare concerns are more easily recognized than others – for example, a broken leg may be quickly recognized as needing emergency medical attention. Other welfare concerns such as chronic

illnesses and mental distress can be more difficult to recognize but are just as important to address with a matter of urgency.

It is important to consider the Five Domains model (ASV GL 2022 p. 2) when thinking about welfare – think about not just whether the shelter can help the animal avoid negative experiences but can promote a life worth living. For example, the goal should not just be to ensure the absence of pain, but to promote feelings of comfort.

Shelters tackle these important decisions by proactively establishing protocols and written policies on medical and behavioral conditions to expedite decision making, improve transparency, and remove decision making burden from falling on just a few individuals. They also schedule efficient but regular meetings to allow for discussion of pathway points and more complicated decisions: “daily rounds” are short daily huddles, and “welfare panels” are weekly group conversations.

The average length of stay (ALOS) of animals at Hi-Tor is remarkably prolonged as compared to industry standards. A quick review of 2022 metrics revealed that adult dogs stayed on average 2 months, and adult cats 4 months; for puppies 11 days, and for kittens 42 days. Long term stay dogs and cats who had entered the shelter prior to January 1, 2022 would not be reflected in these figures. The trend in 2023 reflected a slightly longer LOS for cats than 2022. Shelters work to reduce ALOS to the shortest window possible while ensuring humane outcomes. It is noteworthy that any stay longer than 14 days in a shelter is considered a “long-term” stay (ASV GL 2022).

Recommendations

Implement “daily rounds” at Hi-Tor. The process is outlined in a sample protocol provided with this document. Personnel included in this huddle include a representative from medical care, behavior care and operations/sheltering. With the current Hi-Tor structure there may be separate Cat/SMAM and Dog Daily Rounds. The team takes 30 seconds per animal to answer the following questions:

- Who is this animal and how are they doing?
- Why are they still here?
- What is their pathway, and are there any updates or concerns that change this pathway?
- What next steps can we enact today to get this animal to their outcome?

At the end of rounds, each participant should have a to-do list identified during rounds. Population rounds also offer a brief daily check in between teams to communicate any new information and ensure that animals are advancing towards their outcomes. Animals with complex medical and behavioral needs should be consistently discussed to be sure treatment plans are enacted and delivered.

Implement a weekly or bi-weekly welfare panel. Animals with more complex medical or behavioral conditions, whose pathway is unclear, or who have been identified to have a welfare

concern during daily rounds, should be discussed more thoroughly at a regularly cadence (at least weekly, although with the current population we would advise at least twice weekly to start). This type of meeting is often called a welfare or outcomes panel. Participants are often the same as daily rounds participants, with the addition of potentially the Executive Director or other Department Leads. Cases with more complex medical or behavioral issues and treatments are tracked in a shared document and discussed. Decisions incorporate quality of life, prognosis, and available resources. Animals are not removed from tracking documents until an outcome has been achieved. These meetings are attended by decision makers and usually include veterinary guidance.

Develop a Pet Evaluation Matrix or other such matrix discussed earlier in this document. These guidelines reflecting conditions are considered treatable or manageable and taking into consideration mission, resources, prognoses and community will enable more timely decisions and help avoid decision paralysis.

Maximize pathways that keep animals out of the shelter, such as Return to Owner, TNR, and Foster, as well as offering support to community members to keep their pets. The shortest pathway in a shelter is often to not enter it!

Targeted Resources

Population Management chapter of Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff, 2nd Ed.

Example of a [Pet Evaluation Matrix](#)

[Utilizing Rounds to Improve Animal Care.](#)

[Sample Daily Rounds Protocol](#)

Adoption Processes

Preventing someone from adopting a pet from your shelter is unlikely to stop them from obtaining a pet from a different source. Additionally, if people adopt from Hi-Tor, they will be adopting a spayed or neutered pet with basic vaccinations which will help the community as a whole.

Adopters come from the same community as staff, volunteers, and foster parents – most people who walk into an animal shelter looking to adopt are doing so with good intentions. Additionally, research shows the rate of adoption returns are similar between animal shelters with strict adoption policies vs those who employ a more open adoptions model. However, length of stay is increased with barriers to adoption. We encourage you to not make policy decisions based on fear or on a limited number of bad experiences.

Hi-Tor's adoption process involves extensive requirements:

- The adoption application requires several references including veterinary and landlord information. An application must usually be approved before an adopter is able to meet a prospective pet.
- The application review process then involves: Landlord approval, not copy of lease; veterinary records for other animals in house; three references talking to staff; everyone that lives in household needs to come to shelter; and a meet and greet with other dogs done at neutral location.
- The adoption process is same for all dogs and cats regardless of whether they are easy fast track animals or more complicated medical or behavior cases.

When surveying shelter staff, many would not qualify to be adopters at Hi-Tor. In fact, the writers of this report would likely fail this application or get frustrated by the process and go elsewhere. And yet, we are fabulous pet owners.

This process can be lengthy and requires a lot of staff time. Unfortunately, many of these practices have been shown to have implicit bias and be discriminatory. They also unnecessarily prolong length of stay and may deter potential adopters from adopting in the future.

Recommendations

Simplify the adoption process for “fast track” animals such as medically and behaviorally healthy cats and small dogs. Rely on conversations instead of lengthy applications, restrictions, and checks. These conversations help you learn about the adopter to help you match them to the right pet. This process may look slightly different for slower track/ medical or behaviorally complex animals but will allow easier to adopt animals to go home quicker and reduce LOS.

Shift the organization's perspective on adoption returns: although they can be frustrating, a returned adoption is an opportunity to find a better match for both the animal and the adopter. Returns provide information about how the pet behaves in a home which may help future

adoptions. Any time a pet spends in an adoptive home is time that a pet stayed out of the shelter!

Do not close the door on an adopter that had to return a pet – they have tried to do the right thing. Encourage them to consider adopting again once ready and offer the shelter as a resource.

Provide all staff involved in the adoption process with uniform training on how to conduct open adoptions, including topics surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) such as unconscious bias. While volunteers are vital to an organization’s success, they should not be making adoption decisions and recommendations if they have not completed specific training.

Increase offsite adoption opportunities by increasing the numbers of pop-up events, off campus dog walks, attaining an adoption vehicle, and allowing adoption straight from foster homes Utilize your foster parents as often as you can as adoption ambassadors. Due to the condition of Hi-Tor’s campus, adopters are not allowed to freely view animals and all meetings are highly curated. Many adopters do not intentionally go seeking animals but can be converted to adoptions through “accidental” encounters in the community.

Increase onsite hosted and curated open house events (e.g. Kitten Palooza) for the public to improve both adoption numbers and public perception of the organization. The safety issues are real, so Hi-Tor is encouraged to get creative in getting more animals in front of potential adopters at offsite or hosted onsite events.

Targeted Resources

[Humane Pro Adopters Welcome Manual](#)

Psychology Today. [Open Adoptions in Shelters Help Animals and People](#)

[Marketing Checklist to Promote Adoptable Animals](#)

Medical Care and Oversight

Shelter medical programs are the foundation of humane animal sheltering. Shelter medical care starts at intake (or before!) and should continue throughout the shelter stay. Preventive health care should be species-appropriate and should include the implementation of protocols that strengthen resistance and minimize exposure to disease – including a mandate to vaccinate cats and dogs with core shelter vaccines at intake.

Shelter medicine programs need to have veterinary oversight to provide shelter-wide preventive medicine practices, administer individual animal treatment interventions, and make timely decisions regarding both shelter populations and individuals. Oversight of the population is also in line with NYS Veterinary Practice Guidelines definition of a veterinary-client-patient relationship (VCPR). Without a written protocol from a supervising veterinarian detailing scope of care, shelter staff initiating the delivery of medications or providing treatment could be interpreted as practicing medicine without a license.

The investment in veterinary oversight for proactive and preventive practices saves animal lives and also reduces costly individual interventions, especially if acute medical needs are handled across multiple practices and with little consistency. Accessing veterinary care on a case-by-case basis through delivery of individual animals to offsite clinics is not efficient or effective at managing health concerns in a shelter of Hi-Tor's size and does little to address population-level needs.

For seized dogs in NYS, dog control officers “must provide humane handling and transport and any necessary veterinary care” (see [New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets website](#)). Reportedly, some ACOs or law enforcement stand-ins do not take severely injured or ill animals to a veterinary hospital for treatment as would normally be expected of municipal services. Rather, the animal is admitted to Hi-Tor and the shelter is responsible for seeking urgent medical care for the animal. Reportedly, recently a police officer put a Miniature Pinscher in kennel overnight and dog was found dead in morning which, if accurate, reflects a profound gap in triage and proper care and needs to be addressed. Ag & Markets guidance clearly states: “It is not acceptable to deliver a dog in need of veterinary care to a shelter and leave it in a cage when no arrangements have been made for treatment. This is of particular importance if a dog is delivered to the shelter after hours and left unattended in a cage when in need of veterinary care. The municipality could be subject to the Agriculture and Markets cruelty law since needed care was not supplied. The municipality may have a formal arrangement with the shelter to assist in getting veterinary care, with the understanding that all cost will be borne by the municipality.”

Hi-Tor is currently referencing, but not routinely applying, an intake protocol written by a veterinarian formerly employed by the organization. The protocol details that trained staff should provide basic physical exam at intake that establishes baseline health information

including estimated age, sterilization status, body condition score and immediate medical needs, microchip scanning, Wood's lamp screening for all cats, vaccination, and parasite prevention and treatment. While the veterinary supervision of intake protocols is problematic given the veterinarian's departure, it is of greater concern that this protocol is not being followed and many animals are missing basic preventive care. Furthermore, staff commented it is shelter's policy to NOT vaccinate or provide other preventive care services to cats and dogs during stray hold. Staff is currently attempting to test all incoming cats/kittens for panleukopenia by using parvovirus test swab in fecal material.

Exams are infrequently documented either on shelter paper records or in PetPoint. The cat and dog health records used by staff to administer intake care does not have a field for exam findings. Staff stated that records were collected from veterinary hospitals, but on a review of paper and PetPoint records none of these were seen.

SOPs for commonly treated conditions (for example, feline upper respiratory infection (URI) and diarrhea), do not exist so treatment is on an individual animal basis as animals are transported to an offsite veterinary hospital, or wait for twice monthly TARA spay/neuter van visits.

Medical concerns identified by daily care staff are sometimes written on a white board but are mostly communicated verbally to dog or cat managers without documentation. There are no daily observation records or monitoring sheets and no organized meetings or communications around animal medical needs.

The cat and dog managers were frequently offsite, often delivering animals to clinics for acute needs. Several cats with chronic conditions have been lingering without a diagnosis or rechecks and without a plan for follow up care or a pathway out of the shelter.

Recommendations

Animal identification should be established at time of intake with a neck collar, microchipping, or other identification method for all animals. This is essential for accurate delivery of all other shelter services, including care delivery, documentation, monitoring and pathway planning.

Vaccinate all cat and dogs over 4 weeks with core shelter vaccines at intake, even if animal is admitted as a stray, as explained by shelter vaccination guidelines. It is bigger risk to house an animal at the shelter unvaccinated than to administer an additional vaccine when they are already vaccinated.

- Follow recommended [AAHA](#) and [AAFP](#) vaccination guidelines for shelter-housed animals. All dogs and cats should receive DAPP/FVRCP vaccines starting at 4 weeks old and receive boosters every 2 weeks until 20 weeks of age. Adult animals should receive a booster 2 weeks after the initial vaccine if still housed in the shelter. All puppies and dogs older than 3 weeks of age should receive an intranasal Bordetella/Parainfluenza vaccine. An IN vaccine is recommended as it stimulates a local, rapid response that avoids interference

from maternal antibodies in puppies. Injectable Bordetella vaccines should be avoided in shelter settings due to their delayed onset of immunity.

- See this handy [ASPCA chart for FAQs](#) around vaccination in shelters.

Provide all preventive care services (Ex. Deworming, flea control) to animals upon intake, even if animal is admitted as a stray. This serves better population health management if the animals stay in your shelter.

Work with a supervising veterinarian to create medical SOPs for staff to initiate treatment for common diseases, for example feline URI, canine infectious respiratory disease complex, acute and chronic diarrhea. SOPs should be created with veterinary guidance using up-to-date treatment recommendations for shelter-housed animals and allow trained staff to start treatment under the supervision of that veterinarian.

- We recommend using the [ISCAID antimicrobial guidelines for treatment of respiratory disease in dogs and cats](#), which recommend the use of doxycycline as the first line antibiotics in moderate cases of upper respiratory infections.

Work with a supervising veterinarian to establish a population health program that incorporates on-site delivery of veterinary services on an ongoing basis.

- For an organization of Hi-Tor's size, without an on-site clinic in which to perform surgery or advanced procedures, we estimate 10-20 hours a week would be sufficient for on-site ongoing veterinary services, including record maintenance, staff training, population oversight, protocol writing, and other activities *once the organization is at maintenance phase*. However, there is a lot of catching up to do currently in medical records auditing and animal services that are missing, as well as staff training and protocol creation.

Re-establish consistent relationships with veterinary practices in the community for individual animal visits that cannot be accomplished on site. Minimize the use of emergency veterinary facilities for non-emergency issues.

Institute the use of daily monitoring sheets for each animal for daily care staff to briefly detail appetite, water consumption, presence of vomiting and diarrhea, urination, and general attitude. These daily monitoring sheets can also be used to note the start of medical concerns as well as any changes or resolution, reducing the need for individual staff to personally keep track of how the animal is doing. These also aid the veterinarian in monitoring response to treatment.

Use a white board system in each ward to note medical and behavioral concerns for individuals and make these boards a part of Daily Rounds. This does not eliminate the need to flag medical for truly urgent concerns but allows for the rounds team to discuss and address at the time of their team walkthrough. Concerns are marked when noted and are not erased when they have been addressed.

Utilize PetPoint [medical](#) modules more comprehensively in order to capture and schedule treatments, vaccination boosters, recheck exams, etc. These activities can be [noted](#) and completed daily to be sure you aren't missing treatments. This will also provide for more thorough record keeping. Be sure technology is available in medical spaces so electronic records can be completed in a timely fashion.

Stop testing every cat/kitten for panleukopenia with parvovirus test. This is not a cost-effective strategy to control panleukopenia in shelter and leads to false results based on test specificity and prevalence of disease. This test should be reserved for use in sick cats and interpreted by a veterinarian with knowledge of the cat's vaccination and current health status.

Consider testing for FIV/FelV only when indicated by clinical signs or history. Due to the complexity of interpreting point-of-care tests in communities where there is a low prevalence of disease, many shelters are moving toward testing only cats in which it is clinically indicated - for example sick cats, cats from overcrowded situations, or cats that will be group housed. We support your decision to not test cats that will be returned to field. Consider whether this might be appropriate for healthy cats staying in your shelter system too. See the [ASV statement of FIV/FelV testing](#) for more information.

Utilize "isolation housing" only for sick animals. It should remain empty and ready to receive sick animals at any point rather than becoming overflow.

Do not quarantine (i.e. hold) *healthy fast track* animals. Once they have been examined and provided preventive care at intake, progress them along the pathway to their outcome. Fast track animals should move to adoptable status as quickly as possible.

Schedule spay/neuter or other services as soon as possible. Utilize foster to adopt or adopt animals out with appointments for medical or grooming services if these services are acting as a bottleneck to adoption or other outcome.

Supply medical staff with textbooks, coursework, and other shelter-specific resources highlighting how shelter medicine practice differs from private veterinary practice. Textbooks were supplied to both RG and Hi-Tor to start these libraries.

Targeted Resources

[Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff, 2nd Ed.](#)

[Infectious Disease Management in Animal Shelters, 2nd Ed.](#)

[Sample Shelter SOPS from UF](#)

Behavioral Care and Oversight

Being admitted to an animal shelter is often a stressful event for animals. Cats and dogs are exposed to loud noises, overwhelming odors, as well as unfamiliar people and animals. They are separated from their human companions or the environment they call home. They are confined and can no longer choose activities in which to engage. It's imperative that shelters provide proper husbandry, environmental management, and enrichment to reduce these negative impacts.

At Hi-Tor, information regarding animals' behaviors in a home environment is reportedly obtained from owners who complete a written form for cats and dogs who are surrendered to the shelter. During our observations, this information was inconsistently completed.

Staff are not currently reliably recognizing signs that an animal is experiencing fear, anxiety, or stress (FAS).

Cats

There is no method of collecting or documenting a cat's response to being housed in shelter or any changes in their behavior over time. Reportedly, volunteers who recently provided enrichment for cats through playtime, petting, or brushing are no longer volunteering at the shelter. Cats are not provided a hiding box in their primary enclosure. Toys, scratchers, and elevated resting surfaces (Kuranda bed) were seen in some cat kennels. All cats were provided with soft bedding. Outdoor cats on shelter premises were seen fighting over food.

Dogs

The shelter uses 2 white boards to color code and record the behaviors of dogs onsite. Of 37 dogs onsite, 19 dogs (51%) were categorized as red which is assigned to dogs with a history of aggressive behavior to other dogs or humans; 5 of these dogs (15% of total dog population) are labeled as "Will Bite." At least 2 staff members indicated that they have been bitten by dogs housed in the shelter. Other notes by staff on whiteboards indicate that some dogs have barrier frustration, cage aggression, or self-injurious behaviors. It was reported that euthanasia is not considered for such dogs since Hi-Tor is a "No-Kill" shelter.

The majority of dogs are walked outside on a leash by a staff member each day in a public area for what was described as 20 minutes. Dogs are also placed in outdoor pens throughout the day. At time of visit, it was noticed that one dog escaped a closed kennel, ran down interior aisle of building, and gained outdoor access. Fortunately staff was able to return him safely to his kennel without incident.

Cats & Dogs

Cleaning and feeding of cats and dogs are performed on a regularly scheduled daily basis but behavioral care, considered essential daily, is not routinely provided. Hi-Tor is to be commended

for arranging a recent consult with a professional certified in Fear Free animal handling in attempt to improve enrichment for cats and hosting onsite trainers to provide training for dogs. Staff reports that animal's behavioral information is shared with adopter when animal leaves shelter.

Recommendations

The shelter should obtain and record as much information as is known about an animal's behavior when the animal enters facility. This information, as well as contact details, should be requested from every person bringing an animal to the shelter, including ACOs and members of the public bringing in strays. Information about an animal's behavior is valuable in pathway planning, and in providing appropriate care for the animal during its stay at the shelter and should be shared with those interested in adopting the animal.

Staff should be trained to recognize significant features of cat and dog body language so they can determine when an animal is not coping well in the shelter environment (Ex. Cat hiding under newspaper, dog cowering in corner of kennel, cat hissing/swatting at people). Animals are to be monitored for such signs on a daily basis to detect changes in well-being. Interventions to lessen an animal's stress are to be implemented.

Professional animal behaviorist, shelter veterinarian, and/or animal trainer with shelter experience should be consulted for creation of SOPs that outline husbandry and enrichment protocols for all animals in the shelters care. There are many resources available on this subject from which the shelter can adapt and build protocols. For example, as a starting point each cat should be provided: a spot to hide (cardboard box, paper bag, etc); social interaction with people (if interaction is sought by cat); and exercise and exploration outside of primary enclosure (if housed in shelter for greater than 14 days). Many dogs also benefit from crates in their enclosures, and all require daily time outside their enclosure, in-kennel enrichment, and socialization as appropriate for their behavioral treatment plan. The textbook [Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff, 2nd ed.](#), is a good resource and was provided to the organizations during our visit.

Beyond standardized protocols, enrichment strategies should be tailored to provide for individual animal needs and mitigate each animal's fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS). This means that staff are not only recognizing FAS, but also monitoring and documenting status as well as treatment interventions, in records or on whiteboards.

Spay/neuter and ear tip each free-roaming cat on the shelter's premises. [Provide food, water, and resting spots in multiple locations](#) throughout property to lessen cats' antagonistic behaviors over resources. Arrange for most cats to be safely and humanely relocated and acclimated to barn or shop sites in Rockland County.

Regarding dogs who have bitten humans or other animals, [ASV GL 2022](#) indicates that **shelters must promptly respond to behavior that poses a significant safety risk.** Shelters must have

protocols in place to manage animals at high risk of causing harm to shelter personnel, the public, or other domestic animals.

Decisions about rehoming require careful consideration of public safety, the animal's quality of life, and whether mitigation of risks is feasible. Long-term confinement of any animal who cannot be provided with basic care without inducing stress or compromising safety is unacceptable. Euthanasia is the appropriate outcome for animals at high risk of causing serious harm to people. Board members of Hi-Tor and town supervisors must consider the negative ramifications of maintaining dangerous dogs in the animal shelter, including public safety as well as animal welfare.

Targeted Resources

[Fear Free Shelters](#)

[Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff, 2nd ed.,](#)

[Instructions for Daily Monitoring of Animal Health and Behavior](#)

[Behavioral Red Flags](#)

[Alphabet Soup: What Does That Dog Training Certification Mean?](#)

[Behavioral Euthanasia: Approaching Decisions with Care and Impacts with Compassion](#)

Staff Health and Well-Being

Staff at Hi-Tor are unfortunately accustomed to the challenges posed by the facility and the population. Several verbalized that being injured frequently comes with the job. Many of the free-roaming cats on the property are known to scratch or respond poorly to people, and many of the dogs cannot be approached or handled by anyone but a couple of handlers. Enclosures are not entirely secure and were witnessed to pop open as dogs jumped against them, allowing dogs to escape.

When people have been injured, the people or environment are often blamed rather than acknowledging the behaviors exhibited by the animal reveal a low threshold for aggressive behaviors injurious to a person or another animal. There is a normalization of injury that greatly exceeds what is common or acceptable in shelter environment.

Hi-Tor maintains a population of dogs with a history of significant aggression, including human-directed and dog-directed aggression. At the time of this report, at least 5 dogs on the property fit this description and are in a “Sanctuary Program” waiting for space to open in a long-term sanctuary facility. Dogs are housed at Hi-Tor without clear treatment plans, awaiting placement in a sanctuary for months to years. Many of these dogs have a single handler who can safely accomplish minimal daily tasks such as cleaning and feeding and time out of the run. The single handler for two of these dogs recently left the organization, and the staff is working to identify someone else who might safely provide care for that dog.

Purpose-built facilities and highly trained medical and behavioral teams to provide safe and humane housing and daily care and treatment are necessary for an organization committed to providing care for animals with significant medical or behavioral conditions. When distressed animals are not receiving or responding to treatment and other options are not feasible or available, euthanasia is the humane and responsible outcome. Regardless of mission, allowing animals whose quality of life is compromised to linger in a shelter without receiving relief from suffering is not humane.

Recommendations

Incident reports should be completed anytime a person or animal is injured, including bites and scratches or other injuries. These records should be maintained along with other required documentation. Animals with histories of severe or repeated bites are a danger to staff, volunteers, visitors to shelter, and other animals.

Hi-Tor is committed to providing or finding care for animals with significant behavioral concerns. Animals in Hi-Tor’s Sanctuary Program need clear behavioral diagnoses, active daily treatment plans, ongoing evaluation, and a faster track to a suitable facility with behavior teams able to manage their care. This is both for their own welfare, and the welfare of other animals and people at the current location. The average shelter, particularly with a municipal role, is not built or intended for sanctuary level activities. This facility, in particular, is not a long-term safe and

humane housing option for dogs with a history of serious aggression and injurious behavior to people or other animals. Long-term confinement of any animal who cannot be provided with basic care without inducing stress or compromising safety is unacceptable.

Staff currently communicate by cellphone and texting across campus. **Consider getting radios with shoulder speakers**, especially for the dog staff, to enable more timely and accessible communication across the campus. This can be especially important when there is potential for loose dogs or other urgent needs that can impact safety.

Staff needs break space on site and more opportunities for positive interactions with animals, each other, and the public. **Reducing animal numbers and offering more support for human needs is an important goal** that will help reduce stress, improve staff wellbeing, elevate animal care and welfare, and improve outcomes.

Targeted Resource

[ASV Well-Being in Shelters Position Statement and Backgrounder](#)

Provision of Humane Euthanasia Services

Access to euthanasia services for animals who are suffering in care is essential for animal shelters. The ASV GL 2022 indicates that euthanasia decisions are to be based on a shelter's ability to support the welfare of individual animals in the context of the population, available resources, and the community. Animals dying in shelter care is considered an indicator of poor welfare.

Euthanasia is not performed onsite at Hi-Tor's shelter. No controlled drugs are stored on the premises. Hi-Tor has a written policy regarding euthanasia for severe medical conditions. They do not have one for behavioral conditions. There is no SOP for how euthanasia services are accessed and/or performed. If needed for a shelter animal with a severe medical condition, euthanasia is performed at a local veterinary hospital in consultation with the veterinarian. The shelter has a crematorium which is no longer used.

During July and August of 2023, Hi-Tor experienced an outbreak of feline panleukopenia. According to Petpoint records, 45 cats "died in care" during this period, most without any medical notes. Two cats were euthanized. This number of deaths, without proactive medical evaluation and euthanasia in sick and dying cats, is of great concern.

Ideally, in organization's euthanasia decisions are collaboratively made by 2 or more people to avoid undue burden on 1 individual, but this decision also needs to be timely in the event of acute suffering. Any animals dying in the care of the shelter should always warrant further diagnostic investigation and veterinary evaluation of the population.

Reportedly:

- Veterinarians in local animal hospitals are reluctant to euthanize an animal due to behavioral concerns.
- Hi-Tor's Executive Director made the decision to euthanize a dog with a severe bite history earlier this year and the organization's board reversed this decision. The dog is currently housed at shelter.
- The decision to euthanize an animal for a medical reason is made collaboratively by Executive Director and one other staff member.

Recommendations

Develop a written SOP regarding euthanasia decisions for medical and behavioral concerns for both cats and dogs and other animals in their care. A veterinarian should be consulted for guidance in determining the types of acute and chronic medical conditions as well as types of behavioral concerns that would warrant the consideration of euthanasia. Such an SOP should also outline who in the organization has authority to make euthanasia decisions and how staff are to access services in a timely fashion.

Targeted Resource

[Euthanasia in Shelters: Data and Decision Making](#)

Sanitation

Cleaning is defined as the manual removal of waste (Ex. Feces, urine, bodily fluids) and pathogens from the environment. Disinfection is the application of a chemical product to kill most of the remaining pathogens. Sanitation is the combination of both cleaning and disinfection. “Spot cleaning” is used for a kennel that will continue to house the same animal. “Deep cleaning” is used when a kennel is to house a new animal, once weekly when same animal is to remain in kennel, or when kennel is heavily soiled. Properly performed spot cleaning is less stressful for animals, especially cats, and can decrease staff time spent on sanitation. Written protocols for sanitation of all areas in shelter are essential for staff training and consistency.

New staff members at Hi-Tor who perform sanitation duties are trained by current staff members. There are no written protocols regarding required tasks. Rescue® disinfectant wipes are utilized to wipe cat enclosures and bowls each day. If they run out of wipes, staff will use diluted Rescue® in a spray bottle. Some staff indicated that Rescue® concentrate is diluted by using measuring cup and some indicated that mixing with water is done by approximation. Some bottles of Rescue® were “ready to use” formulations already diluted.

If staff has time, each cat enclosure will be deep cleaned on a daily basis. If pressed for time, staff will “tidy-up” cat enclosures. Staff members were observed changing gloves in between cleaning each cat enclosure and reported that areas housing sick cats are cleaned last. Bowls and litter pans are washed in the tub located in dog building.

For cats, housing areas lacked dedicated cleaning supplies and staff needed to search for supplies prior to start of cleaning. During cleaning of cat enclosures, cats either remained in their enclosure or were temporarily transferred to a clean, empty kennel. In a few cases, they were allowed to wander the room. Care was taken so that animals did not come into contact with disinfectant.

Hose-end foamers containing Rescue® are utilized to clean dog runs. Runs are scrubbed as needed and a squeegee or towels are utilized to remove any water that remains on uneven floor surfaces. Paint on kennel floors is peeling, making proper sanitation challenging to impossible.

Only two sinks and a bathing tub are located on Hi-Tor’s premises, all in the original structure. One of these sinks is in the human bathroom. The numerous sheds and trailers that housed animals do not have water available.

Staff members quickly removed fecal material produced in outdoor runs or when walking dogs. Standing water was not noticed on premises.

Notably, the animal shelter does not have laundry facilities. Soiled animal bedding and towels are discarded daily in the trash. The outdoor area between dog building and administration trailer contained a large amount of clutter consisting of cleaning supplies and kennels.

Recommendations

Develop SOPs that detail sanitation procedures for cat and dog primary enclosures, hallways, and common use areas. The SOPs are to describe how Rescue® is to be accurately diluted and applied. An appropriate contact time for Rescue® on surfaces is to be included. [Spot cleaning for cats](#) and [dogs](#) as well as [deep cleaning for cats](#) and [dogs](#) is to be described in SOP.

Housing areas should have their own set of supplies and equipment that are restocked daily at the end of the day (Ex. Bottle of diluted Rescue®, cleaning cloths, broom, dust pan, etc). This will lessen spread of infectious disease and save staff time in searching for items.

Items currently stored outdoors should be organized and neatly placed indoors, possibly within one of the trailers already onsite.

Sanitation should proceed in an order that minimizes spread of infectious disease. Each day, the enclosures of healthy puppies/kittens should be cleaned first, followed by healthy adult animals, and then unhealthy animals.

Staff should have consistent access to appropriate PPE (Ex. Disposable gowns, shoe covers) to be worn for sanitation of kennels that contain animals with infectious diseases. This will lessen spread of disease through [fomite](#) transmission.

Installation of sinks or use of portable hand washing stations that contain soap and paper towels is recommended in cat housing areas. Hand sanitizer (containing at least 60% alcohol) should also be made available in all animal housing areas. Hand sanitizer can be used on visibly clean hands when hand washing is not possible.

Targeted Resources

Hand Mixing Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide Cheat Sheet (Attached)

[Webinar: Shelter Sanitation \(Part 1\)](#)

[Webinar: Shelter Sanitation \(Part 2\)](#)

Foster and Volunteer Programs

Well-run foster programs are essential to providing different levels of support and housing for shelter animals. When run effectively, they are extensions of the same principles applied in the shelter for managing health and welfare: foster contracts are clear in terms of time and expectations (e.g. return to the shelter, when the animal is expected to be made available for adoption), animals are scheduled for recheck vaccinations and preventive care, and fosters are trained to provide necessary medical or behavioral treatments in their home. Foster homes should be short-stay experiences that improve animal welfare and adoptability. They are particularly useful for kittens and puppies in providing safer housing and socialization.

Volunteer programs often overlap with foster programs, given that many volunteers will do both on-site volunteerism and foster care, and so management of these programs often falls to the person or department in an organization. The key is to maintain active management of these critical resources by setting clear expectations, providing training, consistently monitoring feedback, and using PetPoint to track fosters and activity that will also fulfill AGM requirements.

Hi-Tor has a foster and volunteer coordinator new to the position and the industry, but who has looked to industry resources. She is also the event coordinator for on-site and off-site events in the community, which use foster parents as ambassadors for their animals. There are new volunteer guidelines and a kitten foster training manual. She is also ramping up events and working to rebuild connections in the community.

Hi-Tor has also actively been using social media with great short videos and promotions; however, the intern who was providing this support recently returned to college and so the future of this great work is uncertain.

PetPoint reflects a total of 115 foster homes and that several new volunteers were added as Foster “associations” since the start of August, which suggests the software is being utilized. It was not in the scope of our visit to verify that all animals in foster care currently were accurately represented in software records as that would require rectifying all paper records to software records.

Utilizing foster, off-site events and more “open house” controlled events on-site are very important components of increasing adoptions at Hi-Tor. Putting adoptable pets in front of the public often converts people not specifically looking to adopt but drawn in by a particular pet.

Recommendations

Use PetPoint to track foster parents and foster events. Art26-C requires shelters to maintain a foster registry that can be made available to AGM inspectors. Fosters, and in fact all volunteers, should be entered reliably into PetPoint software as a ‘Person’, followed by their various roles. Foster contracts should be completed in PetPoint for each foster occurrence. A registry is then easily pulled from the software when needed.

Each time an animal is placed into foster, a foster recheck should be “scheduled” for the next vaccine or other treatment. This way rechecks will prompt in the daily treatment report and act as reminders, and the contract acts as a reminder for the foster family.

Increase off-site and on-site open house events. Given the condition of the current facility and previous negative press, the more Hi-Tor can get out into the community or create windows of time when the public is welcomed onto the campus, the more likely they are to place animals more efficiently and effectively. Increasing pop-up adoption events in retail locations through regular agreements or attaining an adoption van would assist in this process as long as staffing and volunteer levels are ramped up to support them.

Streamline volunteer applications. Every shelter needs a lot of volunteer help to do the work they do. It should be easy to apply to volunteer through an online form. The volunteer coordinator should then call applicants and chat with them to determine where their interests and skills and organizational needs overlap and get them quickly on the path to service.

Create a finder-foster program. Finder-foster programs recruit community members who find animals to act as fosters temporarily as a means of keeping animals close to where they were found and out of the shelter environment. Foster information is collected and formalized as with any other foster.

- An entry level approach for litters of kittens: anyone who “finds” a litter of kittens under 8 weeks of age (+/- mom) is asked if they can keep those kittens in their environment or home until they are at least 8 weeks of age, and they are offered food and supplies, vaccine/deworming appointments, and other support.
- Many communities have now extended these programs to adult cats (and even dogs) and linked them with home to home rehoming programs as well.

Use brief guidelines and job descriptions for volunteers just like organizations do for staff. These should be thorough enough to clarify roles and expectations, but not overly detailed to the point of discouraging volunteers or acting as a barrier to onboarding. Stratifying job descriptions at various levels can make it clear that some roles require more training and are not entry level volunteer positions.

Create training packets or modules for volunteers and fosters to be able to increase the scope and volume of activities they do. Much of this material already exists online and can be simply collated for use by Hi-Tor. This can be a time saver while making sure volunteers and fosters have foundational knowledge on current best practices.

Provide a network of support for foster parents, especially those with special needs animals such as pediatric animals or those with medical or behavioral conditions. Shelter staff often act as the frontline during office hours, and even afterhours, but using trusted and trained volunteers can be helpful in managing the workload. This can be done with closed Facebook groups or other online platforms with long-term, skilled volunteers providing support for others.

Reward and recognize volunteers regularly and maintain a positive volunteer and foster culture. Holding an annual recognition event such as a picnic at a local park, posting about foster parents or volunteer activities frequently, and sending volunteers to offsites are important ways of connecting them to one another and the greater community.

Targeted Resources

[Kitten foster training programs](#)

[Bottlefeeding Kittens](#) from Kitten Lady

[Creating a FINDER Foster Program](#)

[Hearts Speak Marketing Support for Shelters](#)

Community-Centered Sheltering and Field Services

Hi-Tor's animal shelter functions within a larger community consisting of government agencies, businesses, ACOs, pet owners, community cat caregivers, other animal shelters and rescue organizations. Regulations, policies, and practices of all local stakeholders impact the overall welfare of local companion animals. Ideally, each invested entity recognizes the important role they play and strives to create an environment where cats, dogs, and people thrive.

Hi-Tor started a pet food pantry so that people need not worry about how their beloved pet will get its next meal. Additionally, staff efficiently utilized social media to post pictures of found animals. This led to at least one dog being returned to its owner during our visit to shelter.

During the consultation, multiple ACOs pulled up to the shelter with animals to be admitted. Such animals included:

- Cat remaining in vacated apartment
- Dog running at large (ACO knew location of dog's home)
- Dog in need of medical care for dermatitis
- Stray cat

Owners coming to reclaim stray dogs are required to produce a dog license. If this is not current, they must return to their town to get one and then come back. The shelter staff stayed late to be sure they could reunify a grateful owner with his dog, but reportedly this is an ongoing source of conflict and contributes to crowding in the kennels, particularly if the dog must be held throughout a weekend due to town offices being closed.

Several cats were being held in the shelter indefinitely due to owners being hospitalized or incarcerated without clear paperwork regarding their legal status or planned outcomes.

Recommendations

Hi-Tor and related stakeholders should embrace community-supported strategies and “out of the box” problem solving. Many shelters across the U.S. have already implemented these strategies and are seeing positive impacts for companion animal populations. Doing this allows animal shelters to function within their capacity for care and avoid the spread of infectious diseases in sheltered populations. With these measures in place, animal admissions to a shelter occur only when there are no other options for animals to receive care. Since the shelter is not overpopulated, staff are able to provide the care that such animals deserve.

Administrative staff taking calls from owners looking to surrender should triage if offering other support services (i.e. food pantry, spay/neuter, temporary housing at subsidized boarding partner, subsidized veterinary care) could help owners keep their pet. Appointments for admission should only be scheduled for those that cannot be helped by other services. Many organizations utilizing Community-Centered Sheltering models have re-written the job

description for this position as a Pet Support Services Manager or Case Manager and utilize staff with social work training or counseling skillsets.

ACO documentation should include histories on the animals and the conditions in which they were picked up. This information not only helps better serve animals and communities but enables pathway planning.

- For example, ACOs should clarify in paperwork the reason they picked up a stray cat. If picked up from a property owner, Hi-Tor should request the owner's name and contact to get more history and initiate pathway planning. The owner should be asked if the cat is spayed and neutered if they would be willing to take it back onto their property explaining all the messaging around community cat welfare.
- ACOs that pick-up dogs with medical issues, behavioral issues, or with known owners should document what they know about the animal's history on the intake sheet.

Return lost animals to their home without ever admitting them to the shelter. ACOs are to scan animals for microchip and if present, contact the owner to return the dog in the field. If no identification is found on the animal, neighbors and local businesses should be asked if they know where the dog lives so return to owner can occur. ACOs should also look to provide support that can help prevent the dog roaming in the future (e.g. help owners repair fencing to prevent escape).

Investigate if the shelter can be authorized to issue dog licenses for the townships. This bottleneck extends the LOS of stray dogs in the shelter, contributing to crowding as well as poor perception of animal services by frustrated owners.

Keep animals with the people who love them by providing various resources rather than shelter intake unless absolutely necessary (e.g. subsidized veterinary care, grooming, temporary boarding at a boarding kennel partner, etc).

Encourage finders of friendly stray animals to first check with their neighbors and post locally to see if the owner is local. This can be extended to allowing finders to house animals during stray hold while also cross-posting to Hi-Tor's website and local social media sites.

Leave outdoor cats and young kittens where they are unless ill or injured. Return to owner rates for cats in shelters (who were thought to be stray) are abysmally low (less than 5% nationally). It is likely that someone is caring for such cats and removing cat from this location virtually guarantees that cat will never return home. Instead of impounding cats resources can be better utilized by proactively identifying areas in which TNR could instead be conducted.

When people call with a nursing mom and kittens, convert them to foster and do not take them until weaning. Offer to spay mom but do all you can to have her remain in the home when the time comes for the 8-week-old kittens to come to the shelter. If possible, schedule the cat spay

so that she never actually comes to the shelter, but goes to the clinic or presents to the TARA van directly.

Support owners to rehome pets without animals entering the shelter by partnering with Home to Home or other professional sites supporting this process. Owners connect online with potential adopters and shelters become a partner in this process. This enables shelter to have an alternative to admission of animal when rehoming is necessary and the shelter is at capacity.

Increase the number of cats and dogs who are microchipped by hosting a clinic where a veterinarian implants microchips. Encourage pet owners to keep contact information associated with microchips up to date so pets can easily be returned to them. Affixing an identification tag to pet's collar during the clinic is also beneficial.

Collect detailed information regarding circumstances when animals are admitted to the shelter due to an owner being hospitalized, incarcerated, or otherwise unable to provide care for pets. Such information is to be utilized to formulate a reasonable plan to return animals to owner, family member, or friend, or place animals for adoption in a timely manner, considering related laws and regulations and with the advice of legal counsel. Animals should not be held indefinitely awaiting further information. If the owner is unable to comment on the situation at the time animals are admitted, consider mailing correspondence regarding the animal's potential abandonment in accordance with New York Agriculture and Markets Law. We strongly recommend correspondence templates and procedure be developed by your independent legal counsel.

Create clear talking points and decision trees for staff around these changes so that messaging is consistent and clear. Ultimately, the shelter offers a service to everyone in need, but that service may look different from shelter intake.

Targeted Resources

[Human Animal Support Services Programs that Support Community-Focused Sheltering](#)

[Human Animal Support Services Toolkits](#)

[Home to Home](#)

Conclusion

As previously stated, both Rockland Green and Hi-Tor play essential roles in improving the welfare of the animals and people of Rockland County. A report of this nature can seem overwhelming; however, this moment in time is actually a substantial opportunity to make change in the shelter and community, fueled by the benefit of “lessons learned” by animal sheltering and shelter medicine fields in the last two decades.

Many of the recommendations are quickly implemented (e.g. in-cage enrichment, adoption profiles, simple enclosure upgrades, more thorough record-keeping) while others will take more time. Undoubtedly many of the changes will require careful planning and messaging to the community from both organizations to ensure that people understand that while they will continue to receive assistance from the shelter, the type of assistance may look different than the past and intaking the animal into the shelter. Because medical and behavioral care are noteworthy bottlenecks for the organization, proactive provision of individual assessments and treatment and population level care will need to be prioritized. Every person involved with animal services should have a sense of urgency about decreasing the LOS of animals in care and advancing animals towards humane outcomes.

In speaking with leadership of both organizations, there was recognition of the benefits of a more community-centered model of sheltering. We discussed several components of this model, including expansion of owner support for pet retention, field reunification of strays, community cat TNRM programs, and off-site adoptions. Additional recommendations for in-shelter improvements apply not only to the current facility but should be considered in the plans for the future facility and programming. We are grateful to have been able to provide this consultation.

Appendix

Sources for Industry Level Guidance

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians

Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, Second Edition

- [Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, Second Edition](#)
- Checklist of key actionable statements from the Guidelines
 - [PDF](#)
 - [Spreadsheet](#) (sortable)
- [Videos to further define some of the standards](#)

[NYS Article 26-C “shelter standards law”](#)

Considered *minimal* enforceable standards for care of animals in shelters.

- [Re-formatted, easier to read version](#)

Lists of Required Protocols

Per NYS AGM Art26-c

each animal shelter shall develop and maintain written protocols sufficiently detailed to achieve and maintain the standards prescribed in this section. These shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. animal handling;
- b. behavioral assessment;
- c. enrichment and stress reduction;
- d. management of bite/scratch cases; and
- e. sanitation.

Each animal shelter shall also develop and maintain the following written protocols, **approved by a duly licensed veterinarian** and sufficiently detailed to achieve and maintain the standards prescribed in this article:

- a. nutrition and feeding;
- b. physical examination;
- c. emergency veterinary care;
- d. pain management;
- e. vaccinations;
- f. parasite control;
- g. anesthesia and surgery, if performed on-site by the organization;
- h. humane euthanasia; and
- i. outbreak management/control of infectious diseases.

Protocols established by each animal shelter pursuant to this section shall be reviewed annually and updated as necessary by designated administrative and managerial staff. Such protocols shall be made readily accessible to appropriate staff and volunteers.

Per ASV GL 2022

The ASV GL 2022 has an even more extensive list of what they consider [Core Shelter Protocols](#) in their Appendix B.

List of Population Reports Discussed and Suggestions

Activity	Requiring Body	Petpoint Report
<p>Individual Animal History</p> <p>Each animal shelter shall create and maintain a record for each animal in their custody or possession which shall minimally include:</p>	<p>Article26-C</p> <p>a. Unique identifiers (tattoo, a permanent official identification number, rabies tags and numbers, or a microchip number, if present;</p> <p>b. The name, address and telephone number of the person surrendering an animal or from whom an animal is seized, and additional contact information as the commissioner may require, or the address or cross-streets and city, town, or village where the animal was located or found prior to intake, if known;</p> <p>c. The date of intake into and departure from the animal shelter;</p> <p>d. Whether the animal was adopted, transferred, redeemed by its owner, died or was humanely euthanized, and, if applicable, the name, address, and phone number of the receiving individual or agency;</p> <p>e. Basic descriptors including species, age, gender, physical description including color, and the spay or neuter status at entry if determinable with reasonable certainty;</p> <p>f. Any available behavioral or health history or information otherwise obtained at intake, including bite history and rabies vaccination status, when known; and</p> <p>g. All veterinary and behavioral examinations, treatments, procedures, or medications occurring during the animal's time under the care of the shelter.</p>	<p>For individual animals, the Animal Review Report will have all of this information as long as it has been entered into the software by staff. Note that this report should NOT be used as a report to be provided to adopters, as it has surrenderer information and other items that may not be shared.</p> <p>For adopters, the</p>
<p>Foster Roster for AGM Inspections Purposes</p>	<p>Each animal shelter shall maintain a record of its designated foster care providers that shall include the written agreement established between such animal</p>	<p>Person: By Association Extended will do this. Because AGM wants</p>

	<p>shelter and such providers pursuant to section four hundred thirty-two of this article, each provider's name, address, telephone number, email address if available, types of animals for which the provider is willing to provide care, inspection reports, and current number of animals in the care of a designated foster care provider.</p> <p>Such records shall be updated immediately in the event any contact information for a given foster care provider changes</p>	<p>“types of animals” we suggest adding a “subtype” of cat, dog, SMAM, other to your Person Association Subtype fields and associate these with your fosters. You can do this under “Admin – Add/Edit Field Value”</p>
Summary records of intakes and outcomes by subtypes	<p>Each animal shelter shall maintain summary records of their total annual animal intake and dispositions by species, by source of intake, and by type of disposition. Such records shall be made available to the commissioner upon request. The commissioner shall make such records available to the public upon request pursuant to article six of the public officers law</p>	<p>Depending on specific requirements, any of the Intake or Outcome reports will prove this information for filtered time periods. The shelter should be pulling these monthly and annually anyway.</p>
	RG-Hi-Tor Agreement Requirement	
Transfer Report that includes animal details and the name and location of the agency to where they went	<p>“Transfer Report” does not report the agency and location as required, but the Agency Report with Transfer out selected as Outcome will meet this requirement</p>	<p>Agency: Activity Outcome Age-Species Crosstab</p>
	Strongly Recommended	
Average Length of Stay	<p>This is a report that is easily produced by PetPoint, and helps to track trends in your shelter. It is important to understand that depending on the time interval used it can be more or less accurate in that it may not capture long-term stay animals. Shelters are encouraged to look at both monthly and annual numbers and set goals to reduce ALOS as an organization.</p>	<p>Length of Stay reports in Petpoint</p>
Animal Inventory	<p>This list of animals in care also has a LOS field for monitoring animals by location in the shelter and can help with prioritizing promotions.</p>	<p>Animal Inventory</p>
Individual animal LOS	<p>This detailed report gives the LOS for each animal. It can be filtered by intake date, outcome dates, and outcome types.</p>	<p>Length of Stay</p>

Staff Training Requirement and Documentation – NYS AGM Art26-c

§ 422. Personnel training requirements.

1. Each animal shelter licensed pursuant to this article shall provide training to all staff members and volunteers having direct animal care responsibilities. Such training shall be provided within

the first sixty days of employment and at least annually thereafter and shall be in addition to any and all training otherwise required by federal, state, or local law or regulation.

2. Acceptable training modalities shall include, but not be limited to, online webinars, on-site lectures or seminars, off-site conferences for animal shelter staff, or other formal training modalities as authorized by the commissioner.

3. Training topics shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. humane handling techniques;
- b. infectious diseases commonly found in animal shelters;
- c. zoonotic diseases;
- d. animal cruelty;
- e. sanitation procedures;
- f. body language and normal behaviors for all species regularly handled; and
- g. required documentation and data entry.

4. Complete documentation of training sessions shall be maintained for a period of not less than three years from the date of

training completion. Such documentation shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. the date of training delivery and the date of completion;
- b. the topic or topics of the training session; and
- c. the provider of the training and a list of training course attendees.

Physical Capacity for Care for Current Facility, by species and housing type

Feline Housing Capacity

Room	Type/Number of Enclosures	Humane Housing Units (HU)	Comments
Front Lobby	2 pop up crates	0	Inappropriate as primary housing. Do not stack
	14 single stainless steel	0	Portals may be installed to create HHUs
	1 double stainless steel with portal	1*	*HHU only if housing single animal
	4 double stainless steel	4*	*HHU only if housing single animal. Consider adding a travel kennel or feral cat den for fear free cleaning
Back Lobby	10 single plastic	0	Portals may be installed to create HHUs
	5 single stainless steel	0	Elevate off floor and portalize to create HHUs
Cat Shed (isolation)	5 pop ups	0	Inappropriate as primary housing. Do not stack.
	2 single stainless steel	0	Elevate off floor and portalize to create 1 HHU
Cattery	10.5x17ft space for group housed cats	6 – 10	A maximum of 6 cats per ASV Guidelines in this enclosure and at least 18ft ² per cat
	4 pop up crates	0	Inappropriate as primary housing. Do not stack
Main Office (new arrivals)	3 single plastic	0	May be able to put portals in these to make them humane. Condition needs closer assessment.
	8 pop up crates	0	Inappropriate as primary housing
Nursery	13 pop up crates	0	Inappropriate as primary housing. Reduce numbers and elevate if needed for

			temporary (<1d) holding
Intake	5 pop up crates	0	Inappropriate as primary enclosure
	10 single stainless steel	0	Portals may be installed to create HHUs
	2 double stainless steel	2*	*HHUs only if housing single cat per double cage
	8 single stainless steel with slatted floors	0	Housing with slatted floors is unacceptable. Place solid bottom until able to replace
Wellness trailer	4 pop up crates	0	Inappropriate as primary housing
	7 single stainless steel	0	Portals may be installed to create HHUs
	2 double stainless steel	2*	*HHUs only if housing single cat per double cage
Outdoor covered cat porch and feral cat houses around the cattery	Provides outdoor dens and resources, cats go in and out freely through the fence	6	Given the limits of the area and food resources provided, this should be a small colony. It is estimated to be at least 30-50 cats at this time.
		Total HHUs – approximately 25	

Canine Housing Capacity

Room	Type/Number of Enclosures	Humane Housing Units	Brief comments
Large dog runs	30 double compartment runs, indoor-outdoor and guillotined	30*	*In need of repairs to improve safety; fresh paint and sealant is needed on floors for sanitation. Visual barriers are in place
Small dog shed	14 single sided stainless steel cages with slatted floors	0	Housing with slatted floors is inappropriate as primary enclosures. Place solid bottom panels until able to replace. Units are small for long-term housing, even of small dogs.

Dog shed	2 wooden stalls with 1 pop up in stall	0	Cannot properly sanitize wood.
Dog "isolation" room	Single small room in dog kennel	1	Isolation housing is reserved for sick animals. Should not be occupied by a healthy animal and room is hard to clean if used for infectious disease housing. At this time, seems to be more of a behavioral isolation room, not medical, which may be more appropriate as long as the animal is getting out and getting enrichment.
		Total HHUs: 31	Many need repair

Small Mammal Capacity

Room	Type/Number of Enclosures	HHUs	Brief comments
Playroom (former admin office in the main building; sandwiched between cat housing) Would be better to use foster or move to a temporary trailer when cat population is reduced.	4 guinea pig dens, good sized.	4	Housing should not be stacked. It is preferable to house guinea pigs and rabbits in different rooms due to risk of infectious disease spread. Majority of rabbits have been moved offsite to foster with the SMAM staff member. She is stretched way beyond capacity.
	1 pop up crate	1	
		Total SMAMS HHUs: approximately 5	