



## Baltimore County Operational Excellence

Report: High level assessment of Operations Related to Animal Care at Baltimore County Animal Services

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## i. Executive Summary

### Purpose & Scope

This project was commissioned by the Baltimore County Executive's Office to assess the current effectiveness of the Baltimore County Animal Services (BCAS) department's operations -- specifically with respect to the care of animals.

The scope of this project therefore focused on the quality of the environment, medical care of animals, and general comparison of care metrics with respect to several other jurisdictions and overall operations. This effort was intended to be a high level assessment of the operations that would advise which areas of BCAS can be readily improved and which areas may need further observation to assess their performance. Personnel was not specifically addressed in this project; however, the audit team did catalog feedback submitted via [ideas@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:ideas@baltimorecountymd.gov).

### Results

The overall result of this study indicates that, while animal care at BCAS is generally very good, there are some shortcomings in communication both internally and externally that should be addressed. Those recommendations for improvement are detailed in the full report, but the high level summary of those improvements is as follows:

- **Coordination between BCAS and BPD Animal Abuse Team Needs Improvement.** Some steps have already been taken to improve coordination between BCAS and the Police Department's Animal Abuse Team (AAT). For example, within the first two months in office, the new administration has put in place case review meetings so those two teams can stay coordinated. However, additional work can be done to make the hand-offs between the groups more timely and effective.
- **BCAS Should Develop a Formalized Feedback System to Improve Communications with Constituents.** BCAS needs a more formal feedback process for communicating with constituents – both for expressing what BCAS' progress is regarding its long-term improvement efforts and for responding to direct constituent concerns.
- **BCAS Should Improve Volunteer Management and Engagement.** BCAS has a dedicated group of volunteers, but those volunteers do not feel as engaged as they could be regarding the care and enrichment of animals currently in the custody of BCAS' shelter. Steps can be taken to structure the volunteer program better and allow volunteers more involvement in deciding how they will participate in the shelter.
- **Communication Between Shelter Staff and Constituents Regarding Animal Surrender Should Improve.** The communication between shelter staff and constituents requesting to surrender an animal to the shelter can be improved in several ways—chiefly regarding to whether or not the constituent is requesting euthanasia.
- **BCAS Has the Potential to Streamline Operations to Improve Efficiency.** Additionally, the project team found some areas where the operation of some of the medical facilities could be improved by streamlining the purchasing process or optimizing the hours a spay/neuter center is open. However, these recommendations do not impact the quality of care animals are receiving—only the efficiency with which the animal care staff works.
- **Options for Contracting Out Certain BCAS Functions Exist but Additional Review and Detailed Analysis Needed.** Finally the project team explored the considerations around whether or not certain aspects of BCAS could be outsourced to a non-profit organization. Although it is possible to outsource single components of animal services, most local examples of this model (Baltimore City and Harford County) have outsourced a significant portion of their services to their respective non-profit shelters (BARCS and the Harford County Humane Society). Those shelters handle all medical, shelter, and some field services (such as pop-up adoption events) for Baltimore City and Harford County. This type of configuration has both pros and cons. Pros include some discount pricing, easier ability to rapidly respond to constituent concerns and streamlined bureaucracy. However, one of the chief Cons is that if another major Baltimore area shelter were to utilize a non-profit (bringing the total up to 5), the competition for grant and donation funding would now be significant. Moving to a non-profit or outsourced model would also not pre-empt the above recommendations; they would still need to be implemented.

# 1. Project Directive/Research Question

## Directive/Goals

After receiving a considerable number of citizen and advocacy group concerns regarding Baltimore County Animal Services (BCAS) and its care of animals, the Administration directed the county's internal Operational Excellence group (OpEx) to conduct a 30-day operational review of the current state of the animal shelter's operation with a focus on the care of the animals in its custody. More specifically, OpEx was requested to review:

- Its performance regarding commonly accepted standards of animal care
- Its service offering with respect to its stated mission and other local municipal and non-profit shelters
- The validity of raised concerns
- Any operational improvements that could be made to improve animal care or customer service
- The role of the Baltimore County Police Department (BCoPD) in responding to animal issues
- Identify possible options and consideration regarding outsourcing any specific services where value could be gained or animal care enhanced

The requested outcome of this project was a report summarizing animal services' mission and operations, performance, responses to community concerns and recommendations for operational improvement with a focus on care and treatment of animals.

## Qualifications and Methodology

The OpEx team is comprised of consulting professionals who have experience in both operational improvement methodologies and tenured subject matter experience at Baltimore County. Analysts are certified Lean Six Sigma professionals whose focus at Baltimore County is operational improvement.

OpEx took a multifaceted approach to analyzing BCAS' operations that included staff interviews, secondary research and a targeted review of BCAS services. The following is an overview of the steps taken to complete a 30-day operational review.

Stakeholder interviews:

As part of the analysis, OpEx interviewed BCAS staff and members of the BCoPD Animal Abuse Team. These interviews were focused on the topics of animal care and cruelty/neglect prevention. Additionally, OpEx interviewed leaders of other Maryland county animal shelters to understand their level of service and to assess the non-profit 501(c)(3) model used by some counties.

Review of BCAS Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):

The project team reviewed BCAS' written SOPs to get a basic understanding of the programs included in its services inventory. Specifically, that included a detailed examination of BCAS' written processes and procedures for euthanasia, enrichment and animal intake.

## Data Analysis:

As required by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), BCAS and other Maryland animal shelters report quarterly data regarding the number of animals housed in their shelters, new animals arriving at the shelter, and the final disposition of those animals. The figures in section 3 of this report for live release rate, pet redemption rate and owner requested euthanasia were obtained from MDA reports.

## Secondary Research:

OpEx reviewed the following secondary sources as part of our research:

- Reports written by the Baltimore County Animal Services Advisory Commission, Target Zero, Team Shelter USA and BCAS.
- Industry best practices written by the ASPCA, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians and the Best Friends Animal Society.
- Applicable laws and regulations set by Baltimore County and the Maryland General Assembly.
- Nationally recognized industry leading animal shelters.
- Articles, reports and blog posts written by local media and animal welfare advocacy groups regarding BCAS.

## Project Scope:

OpEx's 30-day operational review included the following:

- Review and assessment of policies and procedures surrounding care and welfare of animals in the custody of the Baltimore County Shelter including high level roles and responsibilities of various groups therein (staff, volunteers, vets, administrators, etc).
- Review and assessment of medical services offered to the public (in addition to those provided to animals in the custody of the Baltimore County Shelter).
- Review and assessment of policies and procedures surrounding prevention of animal cruelty and neglect

OpEx's 30-day operational review did not include the following:

- An assessment of the policy decisions governing BCAS' services. The team has identified BCAS policies that require further review; recommendations focus on operational improvements.
- An assessment of BCAS staff salaries, workloads and organization structure.
- In-person observations of most of BCAS' services and practices. The team toured the BCAS facility, and was able to observe a few stray animal surrenders and a meeting of the new BCPD Animal Abuse Team. The rest of the information is based on interviews and secondary research.
- Interviews with members of the Animal Services Commission or attendance at Animal Services Commission meetings.

## 2. Background

Animal Services falls under the Bureau of Prevention, Protection and Preparedness (PPD) which is a division of the Baltimore County Health Department and addresses most public health concerns regarding animals within the county. The full scope of charges and responsibilities is outlined in Article 12 of the Baltimore County Code. BCAS' program structure can be divided into 3 areas: 1) the animal shelter, 2) medical services, and 3) field services. At present, BCAS employs 58 people with 2 vacant positions. Those positions are currently allocated as follows: 7 positions in administration (including the TNR coordinator), 25 medical staff, 16 shelter staff and 12 field services staff. (Note: Shelter and field have 10 shared positions; for the sake of ease of numbers, this report is estimating 4 of those positions are commonly allocated to the field and 6 commonly work the shelter). BCAS's budget is divided by budget code

(personnel, rents & utilities, supplies & materials, etc) but not by program. As such, it is difficult to say with total accuracy what the budget of each separate section of BCAS is. The project team's best estimation is:

- Admin: \$ 623,154
- Medical: \$2,028,451
- Shelter: \$ 817,596
- Field: \$ 387,721

For a total annual budget of \$3,856,922

It is important to note that BCAS is considered an **“open admission”** shelter which means that it will accept any animal from a county constituent who brings an animal to the shelter at the time that person brings the animal. This distinguishes it from many non-profit shelters that use “selective admission”—meaning they're able to turn down surrender requests if they do not have space to house additional animals. The BCAS shelter serves an average of about 6,000 animals per year (around 2,000 dogs and 4,000 cats). It is also different than operations such as BARCS which use a “managed admissions” structure which is similar to open admission with the caveat that it requires individuals to schedule surrenders.

### Shelter services

The animal shelter is intended to be a temporary holding facility for 1) stray animals that were found within the county, 2) owned pets that county constituents have chosen to surrender, 3) animals that have been impounded by the county for legal reasons 4) some wildlife that has been picked up if there are behavior or medical concerns from a constituent. The shelter's mission is to maintain an animal's welfare while it is in the county's custody and to work to find a live permanent disposition for that animal (either returning it to its original owner, adopting it out to a new owner, or transferring it to another shelter or organization who has the capacity to continue working towards finding a permanent home). While in the county's custody, the shelter manages the animals basic (food, water, shelter) needs as well as medical needs and enrichment (which includes attention, socialization and exercise).

### Medical services

The BCAS medical staff fulfill two primary roles: 1) provide medical care and enrichment to the animals in the county's custody 2) provide subsidized medical clinic services to the community at large.

All animals that are accepted into the shelter are given an initial evaluation by a veterinarian. This evaluation will determine the actions that will be taken regarding the animal's care. Some examples of questions that might be evaluated at that time are:

- Does it need to be spayed/neutered?
- Does it need vaccines or a microchip?
- Does it need to be transferred to a full-service vet for extended care?
- Does it have behavioral concerns indicating it may need specialized handling for exercise/enrichment?
- Does it have a communicable disease indicating it should potentially be quarantined from other animals until it is healthy?

Once those determinations have been made, veterinarians at the Baldwin facility (where the shelter is located) are primarily focused on providing the appropriate medical care and enrichment to animals in the shelter's custody.

The second service provided by the medical services team is subsidized spay/neuter, microchipping and rabies vaccination to county constituents. Spay/Neuter services are provided at the Baldwin location (although those services are secondary to shelter animal care at that location) as well as at satellite locations in Dundalk and at the Southwest Area Park. Public spay and neuter clinics opened in 2016, offering all surgeries for \$20. Since starting the public spay & neuter program, the three clinics average over 5500 surgeries per year – including owned pets and community cats in

Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) programs. In addition to this being a subsidized service for families that cannot afford full-priced veterinary care, this increase in the percentage of fixed animals in the county will also serve to, over time, help stem unwanted animal reproduction.

Rabies vaccination services are provided every second Sunday at the Baldwin facility throughout the year and in the mobile clinics every Wednesday and Saturday rotating through each Councilmanic district in the spring and fall. Microchipping and licensing services are available at all of those clinic locations. Over 2017 and 2018, Rabies clinics vaccinated an average of more than 2200 animals a year—with an additional 850+ receiving microchips and 900+ getting licensed.

BCAS humanely euthanizes animals that pose a risk to humans and other animals, are gravely suffering, or are not readily adoptable. Baltimore County residents may surrender their animal to be euthanized free of charge, but BCAS maintains sole discretion over the final decision whether to euthanize. The final decision to euthanize an animal is made by consensus among veterinarian staff, the medical director and shelter supervisor, except in cases of medical emergencies.

When animals are euthanized, BCAS follows medical best practices and any applicable local, state and federal laws to ensure a humane and respectful process. All staff members administering euthanasia must be either a licensed veterinarian or be certified by the Professional Animal Workers of Maryland (PAWS). BCAS also has an internal certification for staff to complete in order to perform euthanasia. BCAS follows the standards for administering euthanasia set by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Maryland Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners and PAWS. Example standards include; the procedure will be performed in a dedicated euthanasia room and the animal will be scanned for a microchip before the procedure begins. BCAS has additional policies aimed at ensuring a humane euthanasia process that include providing the animal with a blanket and mandating that only essential staff be in the room so as to prevent the animal from becoming stressed.

## Field services

The category of field services covers all work that is done in the community rather than at a BCAS location. These services include but are not limited to:

- Inspection of community complaints of animal code violations
- Removal of deceased animals from public areas
- Mobile animal adoption events using the county's new "cuddle shuttle"
- Community education events
- Inspection of animal kennels and holding facilities for appropriate licensing

At present, if a constituent calls in a complaint about an animal related issue, it will likely be investigated by an animal services officer (ASO). If the complaint can be verified, the ASO will issue a violation that compels the individual to correct the behavior. If there appear to be signs of animal cruelty or neglect, the ASO supervisor will escalate the case to the Police Animal Abuse Team (AAT) who will investigate further. In cases where the initial complaint indicates that neglect or cruelty is a strong possibility, the case may be escalated to the police immediately.

There are some situations in which the issue may fall outside of animal services' purview and the complaint may be referred to another jurisdiction or agency. Some examples include:

- Complaints about a pet owner neglecting to remove waste from their own yard is investigated by county code enforcement.
- Complaints about wild animals are normally transferred to the state Department of Natural Resources
- Requests for deceased animal removal on state maintained roads (such as interstates or state roads like Dulaney Valley Rd) are referred to the State Department of Highways

## Prevention of animal neglect/cruelty (Baltimore County Police Department)

The Baltimore County Police Department Animal Abuse Team (AAT) is currently responsible for both preventing and responding to complaints and issues regarding animal neglect and cruelty. The unit was created expressly for this purpose and has been operating since May of 2018. The unit is currently staffed by a Sergeant and three officers, as well as an animal services officer assigned to the team. The team responds to a variety of serious complaints but has indicated that it has been receiving a number of direct calls from animal advocates and has been responding to considerably low-level complaints as well. It is also of note that the AAT appears to be averaging less than five new cases per week or approximately 20 per month. Given that there are four officers assigned to this team that would only be five new cases per officer per month with an average of a three-week case close time. Additionally, BCoPD currently reports an average of seven to nine cases per officer. At this point it is difficult to assess whether these are high or low caseloads as the AAT is somewhat unique and is relatively new. BCoPD and AS have indicated that if additional responsibilities for triage were shifted to AS that this may reduce officer caseloads even more and reduce the need for officers assigned to that unit. At this point there are no specific performance metrics related to police AAT. Recommendations for improvement in this area are found in the recommendations sections below (see recommendations A & B).

### 3. Defining Key Performance Indicators and Setting Performance Goals

There are many commonly agreed upon guidelines that suggest the best ways a shelter can engage in good animal care. However, there are limited formal standards regarding how care should be measured or what the performance goals should be that indicated care levels on shelter to shelter basis. In order to assess how BCAS' performance with respect to animal care, the project team culled together standards from the ASPCA, the MDA, and several industry opinions from leadership in local shelter groups such as BAWA and PAWS. The following are the areas in which care standards were evaluated:

#### Live release rate

The percentage of animals taken into custody by the shelter that had a live-release outcome (either redeemed by owner, adopted, or transferred to another shelter/organization for rehoming).

	BCAS	Anne Arundel	Prince George's	BARCS
Dogs	92%	84.2%	77.8%	85.6%
Cats	89.3%	71.3%	54%	91.5%

#### Pet redemption rate

The percentage of animals returned to their original owner. Note that the redemption rate for cats is significantly lower than for dogs in all jurisdictions because domestic cats typically do not get let outdoors (whereas dogs need to be walked or let outside several times a day). This means that cats that are taken in to a shelter are either not owned or were left outside by a neglectful owner who does not intend to redeem them.

	BCAS	Anne Arundel	Prince George's	BARCS
Dogs	38.7%	67.5%	22.5%	33.5%
Cats	4.3%	5.8%	1.1%	3.6%

#### Average time in shelter

The project team is still evaluating whether these statistics are available for other jurisdictions, but BCAS focuses heavily on minimizing the amount of time an animal has to spend in the shelter.

	BCAS	Anne Arundel	Prince George's	BARCS
Dogs	7.2 days	8.3 days	Did not disclose	6 days
Cats	12.6 days	14.3 days	Did not disclose	5 days

## Animal Enrichment

At present, there is not a quantifiable way to assess performance regarding animal enrichment. For the animals under its custody, BCAS provides enrichment – that is, social, mental and physical activities that encourage the animals to exhibit typical species behavior. These activities fall into two categories: passive and active. Passive activities may include providing animals with toys, treats, music or other auditory stimulation, natural scents and pheromones, enclosures designed for their needs and reading aloud to them. Active enrichment may include interacting with the animals by walking, petting, handling, and playing with them. As recognized by industry standards, it's important to provide animals with a multi-level enrichment program that engages with shelter residents in a variety of ways.

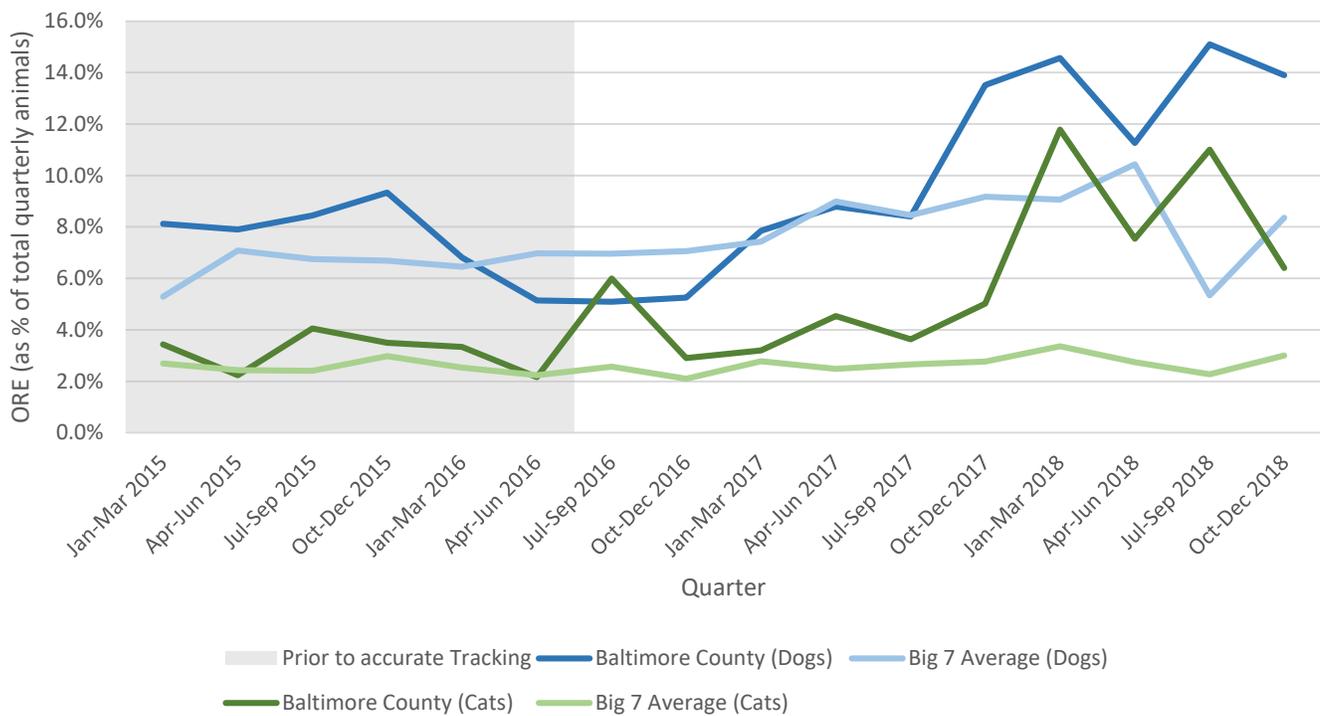
Each animal's enrichment plan is developed through informal staff observations with a formal evaluation conducted by the shelter's Behavior and Enrichment Coordinator, when needed. Plans may be updated by the medical staff based on any changes to the animal's behavior or medical needs. Passive enrichment can be given to animals immediately upon arrival at BCAS, but the animal needs to be evaluated before being handled for active enrichment.

While plans may differ among animals at the shelter, the focus of enrichment for every animal is to keep them stress-free, comfortable and stimulated. Stray cats are kept in quiet rooms with cage covers while dogs are provided Kuranda beds and Kong toys to keep them engaged overnight. Dogs that are deemed too aggressive to handle are still enriched by giving them toys and treats and having members of staff read aloud to them.

## Owner Requested Euthanasia

The below chart displays owner requested euthanasia (ORE) as a percentage of total quarterly animals for Baltimore County and a weighted average of that statistic for seven Maryland jurisdictions (Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Harford County, Howard County, Montgomery County and Prince George's County). It should be noted that BCAS statistics prior to July 2016 are estimates; after that point, the BCAS IT system was modified to better record intake types (including ORE) more accurately. That time period, highlighted in gray on the chart, reflects an *estimate* of BCAS' ORE on intake. The non-highlighted periods after that more accurately reflect the type of intake the BCAS shelter receives.

## Owner Requested Euthanasia Compared to Other Maryland Counties



The chart shows that Baltimore County largely stayed in line with the “Big 7” average from 2015 through the summer of 2017. Following that, there was an increase in BCAS’ ORE rate that moves it to a point consistently above the Big 7 average.

Changes to the BCAS shelter’s process have focused on the intake interview processes that BCAS began implementing in 2015. BCAS has made a point to have frank conversations about euthanasia with pet owners surrendering animals with bite histories and behavioral issues that will not be readily adoptable. Because that intake interview process had received some criticism prior to the start of this project, the team was unable to observe the original process to determine whether it has an effect on OREs. However, the change to the ORE totals are significant enough that it is likely that only a structural change (such as revising the interview process) could result in that level of difference.

What is known about the changes to the ORE intake process over time are:

- When the current BCAS leadership was appointed, they implemented changes to the intake interview dialogue. Specifically, BCAS has made a point to have frank conversations about euthanasia with pet owners surrendering animals that will not be readily adoptable due to bite histories, behavioral issues or other circumstances that will make their adoption difficult. The intent of these conversations is to give pet owners realistic expectations and to encourage them to seek other foster/surrender/rescue options if possible.
- There have been numerous complaints from multiple sources indicating that constituents felt pressured to request euthanasia during the animal surrender process. While BCAS reiterates that such a pressure has not been their intent, the frequency of these concerns indicates a communication problem that needs attention and is addressed in this report’s recommendations [C](#), [D](#) and [E](#)
- Overall medical practices surrounding euthanasia have been examined by BCAS and revised to meet industry standards. This has included defining standards for the euthanasia environment to reduce animal anxiety and developing the internal euthanasia practitioner certification.

Another important item to note is that BCAS is not euthanizing more animals in total. The above concerns about owner requested euthanasia reflect the communication and customer service surrounding the intake process, record keeping distinctions and subsequent use of those records to report performance statistics. But over the same period of time, total euthanasia of Dogs has remained around 15% of total intake (which is 7-8% less than the Big 7 average). And total euthanasia of Cats has gone down from 25% to 14% as operations have improved and TNR was implemented. Those rates are very much in line with the trends at the rest of the Big 7 counties.

### Comparing BCAS service offerings to other locally and nationally recognized shelters

In addition to available performance data, the project team also compared BCAS' service offering and pricing to that of Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties (who are the most comparable in intake size to BCAS in the state of Maryland) and to Fairfax County, VA and Dane County, WI who are known to be highly reputed municipal shelters on the national level.

One of the primary take-aways from this analysis is that BCAS' service offering is the most comprehensive and, in most areas, the most subsidized for its constituents. A chart displaying the service offerings of BCAS and these other shelters can be found on the next page.

Services	Baltimore County, MD	Fairfax County, VA	Dane County, WI (Humane Society)	Anne Arundel County, MD	Prince George's County, MD
Animal Care Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Animal Code Compliance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Animal Cruelty Investigations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Behavior and Enrichment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bite and Dangerous Animal Inv.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community Cat TNR	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Foster Program	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Humane Euthanasia	Free	Free	\$50-250	\$5	Yes (fees unknown)
Low Cost Spay & Neuter Surgery	Free or \$20 (Based on income and breed)	Dogs: \$85-275 Cats: \$45-170 (Through partner organizations)	Dogs: \$80-95 Cats: \$50-55 (Through partner organizations)	Dogs: Free-\$200 Cats: Free-\$65 (Through partner organizations)	Dogs: Free-\$100 Cats: Free-\$45 (Through partner organizations)
Microchipping	\$10	\$25-50 (Through partner organizations)	\$15-40	\$20	\$15
Open-Admission Domestic Animal Shelter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pet Adoptions	Dogs: \$50 Cats: \$40	Dogs: \$100-175 Cats: \$50-125 (Based on age)	Dogs: \$250-450 Cats: \$30-125 (Based on age)	Dogs: \$17-20 Cats: \$14-17 (Based on pet license)	Dogs: \$225 Cats: \$175
Pet Surrender	Yes	By appointment	By appointment	Yes	3 days/week
Pickup of Dead Animals from County Roads	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rabies Vaccinations	\$9	\$15	Free	\$5	\$10
Rabies Risk Management	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regulation of Animal Holding Facilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rescue Transfers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stray Pet Redemption	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stray Pickup	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

## 4. Assessment of complaints/concerns from the public at large

The observations and recommendations in the following section incorporate a significant amount of feedback received from the Animal Services Commission and public at large in recent months. A full itemized list of those concerns and responses from both BCAS and the project team is provided in [Appendix A](#).

## 5. Operational Observations and Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the targeted observation of areas of concern. Those areas of concern were identified by consolidating feedback from current staff with concerns from the Animal Services Commission and the public at large. Because of the rapid turn-around of this report and subsequent short research period, the following recommendations have not yet been fully vetted for operational feasibility. The first step in managing the organizational change of any of these recommendations will be to elicit feedback from the management teams to assess any difficulties in implementing.

### Handoffs from BCAS field officers to AAT

BCAS has expressed some concerns about how reliable the handoff is between BCAS and the AAT. The project team concurs that there is some unclear delineation of responsibility between the two teams and unclear process when a case's responsibility changes from one team to the other. Additionally, because of the multi-step review and approval process of police reports, 82% of police reports are received by BCAS within 2 days of the initial incident. However, 3% take over 1 week to be received by BCAS. This delay is a risk to potentially vulnerable animals. To improve this effort, the project team recommends one of 2 possible courses of action (either recommendation A or B as follows):

#### A. Clarify scope and training of AAT and BCoPD operations involvement

- Publish what actions/case types are the responsibilities of each group
- Clarify communication path from BCoPD patrol officers to both AAT and BCAS
- Develop a process for escalating concerns from BCoPD patrol officers to BCAS/AAT prior to final approval of police report. This does not need to include full narrative detail – just the Criminal Complaint number (assigned by the 911 center) and high level assessment (cruelty/neglect or not)
- Improve and formalize officer level training for the initial triage assessment performed by BCoPD operations
- Formalize a process to facilitate animal code enforcement investigation for the subjects of neglect/cruelty investigations. Example: if a constituent is being investigated for being confined without ample water, it may be prudent to also inspect their home for cleanliness and adequate fencing.
- Potentially creating a unified case record system or data sync between systems to ensure smoother handoff between AAT and BCAS

#### B. Return initial triaging work to BCAS

If it is determined that disseminating training to all BCoPD patrol officers regarding assessing likelihood of animal cruelty/neglect is unable to be effective enough to properly respond to allegations of cruelty/neglect in a timely manner, a determination should be made to return the initial triaging process back to ASOs. That transition would require:

- When the AAT was formed, part of their resourcing was established by transferring 3 ASO positions to the Police. To return this triage work to BCAS, those 3 ASO positions may need to be transferred back to BCAS so this workload can be adequately staffed
- Formalizing circumstances and method for escalating cases of significant neglect/cruelty to the appropriate group (either within the police criminal investigation division (CID) where the AAT is currently located or directly to the States Attorney's Office)

- Reconsider method by which calls and complaints come to Baltimore County regarding animal complaints, cruelty and neglect. Currently complaints engage with the county through BCAS, AAT and 911 if a call is made directly to 911. There may be an opportunity to streamline this process.

#### Note: Collaborative Case Review

An apparent weakness in information flow has been a lack of case review between animal services and the AAT Team at BCoPD. Until the new administration's directive to begin meeting, AS and BCoPD had no formalized information-sharing process. This has since changed and AS and BCoPD now meet weekly to discuss cases and other information sharing issues. This practice should be continued.

## Communication with constituents regarding pet surrender process

### C. Review and formalize animal surrender verbiage (both verbal and written communication)

- All communication should clearly reflect that surrenders to the shelter bear the risk of eventual euthanasia, however there should be no pressure or encouragement from BCAS staff that the owner request euthanasia. While shelter staff indicates that this is in fact the process, there may be processes or policies to restructure the conversation with citizens to ensure citizens feel comfortable with the process.
- BCAS should work to discern and document all available information regarding the reason for surrender in an attempt to identify if the owner's problem with the animal is a temporary one that could be fixed with support resources (such as medical, behavior or physical supplies/equipment)
- BCAS should provide all possible resources for alternative re-homing. This may be especially useful in cases of common surrender breeds that have local rescue organizations able to accept and foster animals.

### D. Consider a more structured surrender intake process

It is becoming more common that both municipal and non-profit shelters structure their surrender intake process to create time between a constituent's initial surrender inquiry (and subsequent receipt of the above mentioned education on potential resources) to the surrender itself. This can be done with either scheduled surrender appointments (such as BARCs, Harford County Humane Society or the Fairfax County, VA shelter) or limited surrender hours (such as Prince George's county's 3-day a week surrender schedule).

BCAS has taken the charge that they must be an "open admission" shelter very seriously and does not want to turn away any constituent indicating they need the shelter's assistance. However, with the understanding that keeping animals out of shelters is the best course of action in many (if not most) cases, the trend of what is being called "managed admission" appears to be a potential middle-ground. By providing the constituent with as many resources as possible (many of which may have been previously unknown) and giving them time to consider all of their options before ultimately surrendering their animal, the shelter would be ensuring that constituents are making as informed of a decision as possible before surrendering an animal.

### E. Consider recording client interaction during surrender interviews

If surrender interviews are recorded either by video or audio, it would provide 2 significant benefits:

- Ensuring both BCAS employee accountability and accuracy of citizen complaint
- Providing a full and reviewable record of all animal history details for both training and animal care/rehoming purposes

The main drawback to this recommendation is potentially making constituents reluctant to be completely honest about the animal during the interview.

## Volunteer engagement and leadership

Baltimore County Animal Services has a staff and group of volunteers dedicated to animal enrichment and care. There are currently 79 active volunteers in the program and they volunteer approximately 200 hours of service to the shelter each month. Volunteers are assigned to teams that are responsible for either working with cats, dogs, attending offsite events, or photographing the animals for the BCAS website and social media accounts. Volunteers start as cadets and are paired with a senior volunteer mentor who helps train them. After working at the shelter for a period of time, volunteers are promoted to captain and then eventually to mentor. Cadets are only allowed to handle animals with no behavioral issues (green dot) and captains are allowed to handle both green dot animals and those with minor issues (yellow dot). Volunteers are not allowed to handle animals deemed too aggressive or dangerous to be classified as green or yellow dot. Through our interviews with animal shelter staff with BCAS and other jurisdictions and research of industry best practices, we have identified a few key areas for improvement.

### F. Granting volunteers more ownership of their engaged activities

Continuing to partner with volunteers and give them more ownership of the animal care and enrichment program will help strengthen the BCAS volunteer program. BCAS is in the process of bolstering its volunteer training program and instructional materials. These changes are focused on codifying how much experience volunteers need to accrue to move from cadet to mentor and make absolutely clear what work each experience level is allowed to do. The OpEx team recommends instituting monthly meetings attended by BCAS management to help improve partnership with volunteers. Although the volunteer coordinator meets regularly with volunteers and relays their concerns to BCAS management, creating these monthly meetings might ensure that volunteers feel that their voices are being heard.

### G. Off-site event logistics and coordination

BCAS volunteers have asked for greater guidance on who is able to handle which animals at off-site events. Since BCAS has informed OpEx that only green dot animals (animals that can be handled by any volunteer) attend off-site events, this issue appears to be the result of a drop in communication. The overarching recommendation of this report is that communication needs to improve among the parties involved caring for animals on behalf of Baltimore County.

### H. Enrichment of Administrative-Hold Animals

Volunteers have also reported wanting to get more involved in handling and enriching animals that are on administrative-hold or not readily adoptable. It's understandable that BCAS staff are reluctant to let volunteers handle these animals, but allowing more mentor volunteers to do so may help lessen the workload for BCAS staff and give volunteers more ownership of the enrichment program. This will likely require categorizing the animals more specifically than "admin hold" (ie: do they have medical concerns, behavioral concerns or aggression concerns). Once these changes are in place, BCAS can also consider opening these rooms to persons looking for a lost animal.

## Formalizing a feedback process for questions/concerns

Over time, there has been an erosion of trust and communication between BCAS and the Animal Services Commission. Repairing that relationship will require a more formalized and constructive feedback processes between the two organizations. This process will need to include:

### I. Improvements to structure and recording of feedback

Feedback from the Animal Services Commission to BCAS should be structured and recorded in a constructive and time-based manner.

- Feedback should include a description of the concern as well as whether it impacts animal care, constituent equity, or employee/volunteer engagement and well-being.
- Feedback should include a recommended solution and estimate of a reasonable timeframe for completion

- Feedback should indicate whether a concern has been observed enough to be considered a chronic/systemic issue or if it appears to be an isolated incident. This will help BCAS identify if there is an issue where a policy is not achieving its intended goal or if a policy was simply not being followed properly
- BCAS should be provided time to assess the concern and provide a response regarding the feasibility of the recommended solution and timeframe. This feedback may indicate:
  - whether a recommended solution to one concern may be in conflict with a solution to another concern
  - whether a recommended solution may be difficult to implement for logistical, safety or budgetary reasons
  - whether a recommended solution/prioritization for one concern would potentially delay solutions for other concerns
- Feedback should be tracked in a manner that allows for a primary record describing the issue in detail and sub-records allowing tracking of subsequent examples of the same problem
- The Animal Services Commission should be the primary venue for fielding concerns from constituents at large. However, feedback that is sent to the administration directly will be sent to BCAS for tracking and response.
- Ideally, this level of tracking would utilize a Client Relationship Management (CRM) IT system that is designed to track the connections from a complainant to an issue to its solution.

#### J. Appoint a (possibly temporary) Accountable Party

At least for the short term, this feedback process will require an accountable party – most likely within the Health Department or Administrative Office – to help facilitate policy decisions, implementation and communication. The purpose of this role is to:

- provide support and accountability to the Animal Services Commission regarding their concerns
- provide resource support to BCAS management in receiving, compiling, triaging and prioritizing inbound concerns and communicating statuses and outcomes as improvements are made

#### K. Improve utilization of PIO resources by BCAS

Separate from responding to individual concerns, BCAS should have consistent messaging about news and changes to the department's policies, structures, staffing and performance. The administration and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) leadership should identify resources and roles regarding which resources in the communications office and/or HHS public information office can offer guidance and support.

#### L. Setting goals and publishing results

Public information about the shelter could include ongoing metrics regarding shelter performance. The metrics used in this report are a potential starting point, but the project team recommends that the Animal Services Commission and performance management subject matter experts be involved in the process of implementing this performance management and reporting effort. Including:

- Defining what the goals of BCAS should be
- Defining what KPIs should be measured to assess BCAS' progress towards those goals
- Defining how those KPIs should be measured
- Defining what the KPI target is in each area

## Other Operational Areas

### M. Streamline the purchasing process

The veterinary services manager has cited numerous times in which the length of the procurement process from start to finish has caused operational problems. The most extreme circumstance occurs when, by the time a delivery order or purchase order is processed, the vendor's quoted price has expired, prices have changed, and the vendor requires a new DO/PO to be issued. As a result, the shelter often orders enough supplies to last a significant period of time. This practice makes inventory more difficult to manage because:

- There's simply more of it to track and manage
- Re-ordering needs to occur long before the supply is depleted (which is difficult to gauge)
- Many supplies (such as medications) have expiration dates and are more at risk of expiring if ordered in bulk.
- The need to store more supplies than the surgery center was intended to hold has resulted in needing to store items in unsecure places (increasing risk of theft or loss)
- Exceeding their normal storage capacity has resulted in needing to spread supplies into other rooms making them far away from their intended workspace and, in some cases, difficult to find.

Improving the procurement process will allow for quicker supply delivery and reduction of inventory storage and waste.

### N. Review operating hours of Spay/Neuter Centers

At present, the Baldwin and Dundalk surgery centers perform approximately 3400-3500 spay/neuter procedures per year; the Southwest Area Park (SWAP) surgery center performs around 1300 per year. The vet services management analyzes costs as averages—dividing total costs of running the three surgery centers by the total number of procedures performed. This gives an approximate cost per surgery that treats spay and neuter procedures equally (even though spay procedures take longer). Based on volume and cost estimates, demand may not warrant current level of open hours each surgery center. At a high level, it looks like reducing the SWAP surgery center from 2 days a week to 1 day a week plus 1 weekend day a month would reduce operating cost from \$132.50 to \$126 for each surgery. This would make their operating costs closer to the expenditures of the Dundalk surgery center.

## 6. Alternative models (partnering with non-profit organizations)

The project team also conducted preliminary research on whether the prospect of outsourcing certain shelter/animal services operations to a non-profit could result in either improved animal care and/or reduce operating costs. The project team reached out to both the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS) and the Harford County Humane Society to identify the pros and cons of alternative models of organizing a municipal shelter. These two shelters share a similar structure in that animal control (a portion of field services) is managed by the municipality, but all other services (shelter, medical and other field services) are managed by the non-profit shelter.

### Pros

Non-profit shelter directors identify the following items as benefits of their structure:

- Pricing benefits of non-profit discounting. This has not yet been quantified by the project team; there is some question as to the extent of this benefit.
- Separation of shelter administration and municipal administration allows for faster response to public concerns. It also creates trust that the shelter is operating to meet their mission rather than being subject to the county's focus shifting to a different priority.
- A more rapid procurement process allows for less inventory waste and faster supplies fulfillment.
- The ability to raise grant and private donor funding in addition to municipal funding (for example, of BARCS' \$5.2M operating budget, \$1.2M is funded by the city; the rest is through direct fundraising).

### Cons

The largest concern around this type of configuration is that the ability to do significant private fundraising both requires subject matter expertise and is already a competitive environment in the greater Baltimore area. Because BARCS, the Maryland SPCA, and the Baltimore County and Harford County Humane Societies are all non-profit shelters, the likely base of private donors is already heavily penetrated meaning shelters are competing for donors. Adding a fifth large non-profit shelter to this region would mean that starting to do 501c3 fundraising would be in a competitive environment in which the newest entrant would have a significant disadvantage.

### Next steps if the administration chooses this model

The setup of this type of relationship commonly includes:

- A detailed operational plan for implementation; this may include an RFI/RFP for outside information
- A lease agreement for either dedicated or shared use of the shelter facility (commonly for \$1 per year) that stipulates which group is responsible for what section of the building
- An operating agreement that specifies the scope and responsibilities of the non-profit v. the municipality
- A transfer ticket system between animal control and the shelter to easily identify which group has current custody and responsibility of an animal. This is done both physically on kennels as well as in the records system to provide fail-safes to ensure animals are not mishandled (for example, an animal that was seized for legal reasons is not adopted to a new owner before the legal case is disposed)

## Appendix A – Concerns from Commission/Constituents

Complaint/Concern	BCAS Response	Project team findings/follow-up action
<p><b>I. Baltimore County Police Animal Abuse Team is not prepared to handle animal control issues</b></p>	<p>ASOs will retain all of their duties with the exception of initial investigations of animal cruelty, which have been transferred to BCPD. The Howard County Police Department and Harford County Sheriff’s Office are responsible for animal control investigations in their respective jurisdictions.</p>	<p>The project team verified that ASOs on the BCAS team continue to handle non cruelty/neglect issues. However, <a href="#">recommendations A and B</a> speak to clarifying the roles and responsibilities and improving operational handoffs between BCAS and AAT</p>
<p><b>II. BCAS refers fewer cases of cruelty, abuse or neglect to its State’s Attorney’s Office than other Maryland counties</b>            BCAS handled 4,302 cruelty cases from 2016-2017, but only “sent fewer than a dozen cases” to the SAO. ASOs were instructed to stop referring cases to the SAO</p>	<p>The cited statistic of 4,302 cruelty cases is not accurate. BCAS handled 1,380 complaints during that time. BCAS is not aware of any national or regional standards for a target percent referral of complaints. Other county animal control departments are structured differently with alternative “accounting systems, reporting structures, and ordinances.” ASOs were not instructed to stop referring cases, they were told to refer cases only to the supervisor of the field services unit and not to other members of the SAO.</p>	<p>The actions from 2016-2017 was beyond the scope of this specific project because the current process has cases referred to the SAO from the AAT, not from BCAS. Overall, the project team does not believe that a percentage of cases being referred to the SAO is the best metric to use to evaluate how well this process is working. If there is concern that cases that should be prosecuted are not, then cruelty cases NOT referred to the SAO should be audited separately.</p>
<p><b>III. BCAS is not following industry Trap-Neuter-Release best practices:</b></p>		
<p>i. BCAS releases TNR cats as far as a mile away from pick-up location            Best practices: release no more than 300 feet from pick-up</p>	<p>BCAS is not always able to return the cat to the exact location where it was found because it may have been trapped on private property and the owner does not want the cat returned. Cats regularly roam as far as a mile from “home”, so BCAS uses a ½ mile as the max radius for acceptable return. When finding a release point, BCAS keeps in mind that cats are not expected to cross major roadways or waterways.</p>	<p>In general, policy decisions were not evaluated within the scope of this project—only management and performance within established policies. Items III i, III ii, and III iii all evaluate policy decisions and are therefore out of scope.</p> <p>However, the project team will note several things:            1) secondary research suggests that BCAS’ assessment of feral cats’ roaming range is accurate. This would indicate that the 300 feet standard is more restrictive than necessary.</p>

<p>ii. BCAS releases every TNR cat 24 hours after surgery Best practices: older and/or pregnant cats should be released no sooner than 48 hours</p>	<p>The goal is to release TNR cats as quickly as possible based on their medical needs and other factors. Some cats are kept longer than 24 hours, but some are kept less than that – lactating mothers that have kittens in the wild. The BCAS TNR coordinator is aware of the best practices and trained with the originator of those standards, Best Friends Society.</p>	<p>2) While best practices are often a good starting point for animal care operations, it does make sense that the BCAS medical staff choose to vary from those guidelines based on the medical needs of individual animals.</p>
<p>iii. BCAS provides sick TNR cats with only “basic TNR package” medical treatment Other counties provide additional treatment to cats through their TNR programs</p>	<p>The goal of the TNR program is to decrease shelter intake and euthanasia, which requires a great number of spay and neuter surgeries. The goal is not to provide “all required medical care” to the many unowned feral cats in Baltimore County. BCAS veterinarians do their best to evaluate animals to ensure that only “healthy, altered and vaccinated cats” are released.</p>	
<p><b>IV. BCAS requires a notarized affidavit to be submitted by a witness/victim before it will investigate “any complaint.”</b></p>	<p>Affidavits are not required to begin an investigation. Affidavits are required to issue menacing or dangerous dog declarations and to issue violations with civil monetary penalties and possible other sanctions. BCAS ASOs are not sworn officers, but they may be in other counties, which is why they might not need sworn affidavits.</p>	<p>This process has been looked at several times by County OpEx and the explanation offered by BCAS has been found to be true. In previous project efforts, it was found that if an ASO is able to directly observe the behavior in the complaint, a violation can be issued primarily. However, if not, an affidavit is needed as a charging document to pursue further action/investigation. It may also be pertinent to note that there are certain situations in which even Baltimore County police officers are not permitted to directly issue charging documents and a constituent must file charges directly with the district court.</p>

<p>V. BCAS salaries are higher than those for similar positions in other Maryland counties.</p>	<p>Not addressed in this Report or interviews with BCAS staff.</p>	<p>As of 2/25/2019, this has been difficult to compare (although the project team is still looking for comparable data on other jurisdictions. The project team found the following publicly available salaries for directors of other Maryland animal shelters (however there may be delay in how up to date this data is):</p> <p>Baltimore County: \$181,000 (up to date)  Anne Arundel: \$86,503  Baltimore City: \$117,988  Harford: \$79,317  Montgomery: \$161,288 (under Police)</p>
<p>VI. BCAS managers are manipulating live release statistics</p>		<p>In discussing this concept with BCAS, the leadership has indicated total flexibility in measuring and reporting whatever statistics the commission finds appropriate to publicize performance. In fact, in October 2018, BCAS engaged County OpEx for assistance re-calculating LRR without excluding owner requested Euthanasia. That being said, the project team has several recommendations that will address these concerns and the operations that affect them:</p> <p><a href="#">Recommendation C</a> is to review and formalize animal surrender communication (written and verbal).  <a href="#">Recommendation E</a> is to consider recording constituent surrender conversations to ensure there is accountability with BCAS staff.  <a href="#">Recommendation L</a> is to re-define performance goals and set up a structured method and location to publish the results.</p>
<p>i. Forcing staff to pressure people surrendering animals to request their animals are euthanized (owner requested euthanasia).</p>	<p>BCAS believes the improvement in live release statistics is due to additional resources that are now provided to surrendering owners which include surrender prevention programs, low-cost vet care, private rescue options as well as new intake SOPs.</p>	
<p>ii. Giving TNR cats intake numbers so when they are released they count toward TNR and live releases.</p>	<p>Not addressed in this Report or interviews with BCAS staff.</p>	
<p>VII. BCAS does not provide adequate enrichment to animals that are not available for adoption - enrichment includes, walks, toys, play time.</p>	<p>BCAS provides enrichment to animals that are not available for adoption by reading aloud to them and providing toys, music, scent enrichment and treats. Non-adoptable animals that are safe enough to be handled, will be done so by staff members only.</p>	<p>This is not an area of performance that currently has defined metrics or goals. If that is necessary to ensure animals are receiving adequate care, it should be defined through the process in <a href="#">Recommendation L</a>. However, Recommendations <a href="#">E</a> and <a href="#">H</a> also discuss volunteer involvement in general as well as specifically with regard to the enrichment of administrative hold animals.</p>

<p>VIII. BCAS will only pick up stray pets if a person requests the animal be picked up within 24 hours of finding it. After 24 hours, the person will have to bring the animal to the shelter.</p>	<p>Conversations with the Assistant Field Services Supervisor indicate that this concern is not at all an accurate depiction of their policy. There are many cases in which pickups will occur more than 24 hours after the animal is found (sometimes at BCAS request for scheduling/resourcing purposes). Most notably, BCAS allows people to see if an animal's disposition/health is right to be adopted into their own home. BCAS will still send an ASO to pick-up that originally stray animal if it is not a good fit.</p>	<p>This was not a circumstance that the project team had an opportunity to observe primarily, because it does not happen very often. Their stated policy seems reasonable; if there are persistent concerns that this policy is not being properly followed, those concerns should be tracked and responded to according to <a href="#">Recommendation I</a>.</p>
<p>IX. BCAS does not allow members of public to enter stray hold room (which "can prevent the reunion of owners and missing pets.")</p>	<p>BCAS does not allow members of the public to enter the stray hold room, but will bring animals to the shelter lobby, or in cases of aggressive animals, the outdoor kennel so owners can see the animal. Members of the public are not allowed in the stray hold room because animals in there may be too dangerous to interact with and the room is routinely being sanitized.</p>	<p>Allowing access to this room is a policy decision that could be revisited. Many shelters allow open access to rooms like this; it requires structure and monitoring, but is feasible. See <a href="#">Recommendation H</a> as well.</p>
<p>X. BCAS needs to examine its procedures concerning identifying dogs as dangerous rather than menacing</p>	<p>BCAS and the Office of Law drafted an update to laws related to menacing and dangerous dogs in 2017, but it was not formally introduced to the County Council.</p>	<p>This was a policy question and therefore outside the project team's scope.</p>

<p><b>XI. BCAS fails to properly enforce a county law requiring that all stray animals go to BCAS</b> (where owners may be reunited with the animal during the stray-hold period)</p>	<p>BCAS makes all attempts to ensure that stray animals are brought to the shelter for the stray hold. However, BCAS does not have the authority to seize the animal.</p>	<p>The project team also did further research with industry subject matter experts on this type of law. Overall there is a fair amount of skepticism about the effectiveness about this type of law for the following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There’s no evidence that it offers significant improvements to animal redemption results.</li> <li>2. Few constituents are aware of it, so it is not being followed by the majority of people who would find stray animals.</li> <li>3. It creates logistical issues for other non-profit shelters in the area that ARE compelled to follow it</li> <li>4. It was written in a time before social media pet-finder platforms and apps were prevalent; that is no longer the case. Utilizing platforms like findingrover.com or findtoto.com or pawboost.com is likely to have equal (if not better) results than centralizing animals in a single place</li> <li>5. The overwhelming consensus amongst industry professionals is that the goal for best animal care is to keep them out of shelters whenever possible. Allowing those finding animals to “foster” if they are willing and utilizing digital platforms to find owners rather than physical shelters would be an improvement to animal care</li> </ol>
<p><b>XII. Volunteers feel they are disrespected, unappreciated and disregarded by management at BCAS</b></p>	<p>Not addressed in this Report or interviews with BCAS staff.</p>	<p>The project team did not specifically look at policies or practices between BCAS and its volunteers. However, it does acknowledge that, if volunteers feel this way, then there is, at minimum a problem with communication between BCAS and volunteers. The team has included <a href="#">Recommendations F, G and H</a> to address current concerns from the volunteers and acknowledges that future concerns be tracked through the structure outlined in <a href="#">Recommendation I</a>.</p>
<p><b>XIV. Current and former employees describe a toxic work atmosphere.</b></p>	<p>BCAS has undergone considerable change in the past couple years in terms of staff, processes and technology. BCAS believes that the work culture used to be toxic, but has shifted to a “cooperative and innovative one.”</p>	<p>Assessing this concern was not possible within the timeline of this effort thus far. The project team has been privy to several concerns from former employees, but in order to assess the health of the working environment, the county may wish to engage in a full scale climate survey of BCAS. The question is too significant to try to assess solely based on the feedback of separated employees.</p>