

# ADAMS COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER ASSESSMENT

The next evolution

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# Summary

## Goal

Perform an assessment of the Adams County Animal Shelter (ACAS) to identify a path forward for the ACAS as it moves towards becoming an animal service provider, and away from being an animal control function. The goal is to improve operations, reduce costs, increase revenues and improve quality of life for the animals, the employees and the citizens.

## Recommendations

- Transfer 6 of 7 animal control officers and supporting staff to partner with the code compliance function
- Retain 1 staff member to aid in transition and train replacement staff
- Hire 2 animal care technicians
- Hire 1 animal control officer
- Adjust “per animal” rates to reflect the market
  - Adoption fees based on “variable” pricing model
- Increase rates for intake from partnering jurisdictions to improve cost recovery
- Develop an “early intake” fee to improve cost recovery for medical services
- Install the industrial dishwasher
- Reduce overtime and temp labor
- Reduce hours of operation open to the public
- Develop a 3-5 year strategic plan regarding the transition from “animal control” provider to “animal services” provider

**Net Impact of Recommendations**

<i>Revenue Increases</i>	<i>One-Time</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
Market Based Adoption Fees		\$104,875
Jurisdiction Fee Changes		\$103,344
"Early Intake" Fee		\$4,000
<b><i>Cost Avoidance</i></b>		
Dishwasher		\$26,572
Reduced Overtime/Temp		\$92,191
Reduced Hours of Operation	\$5,300	
<b><i>Additional Costs</i></b>		
1 Animal Control Officer		(\$43,430)
2 Animal Care Technicians		(\$79,605)
Install Dishwasher	(\$5,000)	
<b><i>Net Impact</i></b>	<b>\$300</b>	<b>\$207,947</b>

## Background

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The information in this report was compiled through onsite visits, several phone and in-person conversations regarding operations, on-line and in-person research, as well as significant data compilation and analysis. Special thanks to Gabe Rodriguez who provided data analysis, strategic support, and idea generation for this project. In addition, a big thanks goes to Eva McMickle-DeTolve and Norman Wright from Adams County, Heather Cameron with Foothills Animal Shelter, Maria Guevera with Denver Animal Shelter and Jan McHugh-Smith with the Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region for their support during this project.

The ACAS currently provides “animal shelter” functions as well as “animal control” functions. The management decision has been made to transfer the animal control officers (ACOs) over to partner with the code compliance function so cross-training can occur. This means a physical relocation of the officers from the ACAS facility to the Adams County government center. Since these officers perform additional duties when working out of the ACAS facility, this document identifies how to backfill workload needs, opportunities for basic efficiencies, revenue offsets to augment staffing and a recommended path forward.

The ACAS currently employs 27 FTEs, with 7 of these serving in an animal control (or support) function. With the transfer of these ACOs, it is recommended that 1 of the 7 current FTEs remain with the ACAS function and 6 FTEs be transferred. This means “partial functions” previously performed by the ACOs, such as cleaning cages and doing basic work around the facility will not be possible.

There are typically two “paths” for animal facilities. One is to provide “animal control” services, such as handling with stray dogs and cats, or managing the pet population, and are typically what one would think of as a “dog pound”. These facilities tend to have lower adoption rates and typically provide only core animal control and care services. They also tend to have lower costs, but lower quality of life care for the animals. Another model is the “animal services” model, whereby the quality of the life of the animal and community engagement is emphasized, and a greater focus is made on higher-visibility adoption efforts (online, in-person and off-site), community vaccination clinics, pet health services, behavior training, and dynamic service partnerships. These functions tend to cost more, but also have higher cost recovery, higher adoption rates and lead to a higher quality of life for the animals. ACAS has been in a hybrid role for some time, improving animal care and providing innovative programs, but still viewed as a “control” function. The goal of the ACAS is to move away from the perception of being an “animal control” function and develop a path forward as the premiere animal services provider in the eastern plains.

One key recommendation is to create a 3-5 year strategic plan to set a vision and a strategy forward for a transition to this kind of an “animal services” model. In the immediate term, there are some practical recommendations regarding the staffing/workload challenges, operational efficiencies and fee changes that should be implemented as this strategic direction is established.



## Comparisons

The team analyzed comparative information, including evaluations through on-site visits, with Foothills Animal Shelter (FAS), Denver Animal Shelter (DAS) and the Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region (HSPPR). Brighton was also contacted, but unable to provide comparative information by the deadline, however it was possible to get basic fee and budget information from the Brighton website. This analysis is challenging because of the differing operating models used by these comparative players, but some information can be gleaned, including limited comparisons, operational best practices and how to successfully deliver services as an animal service provider.



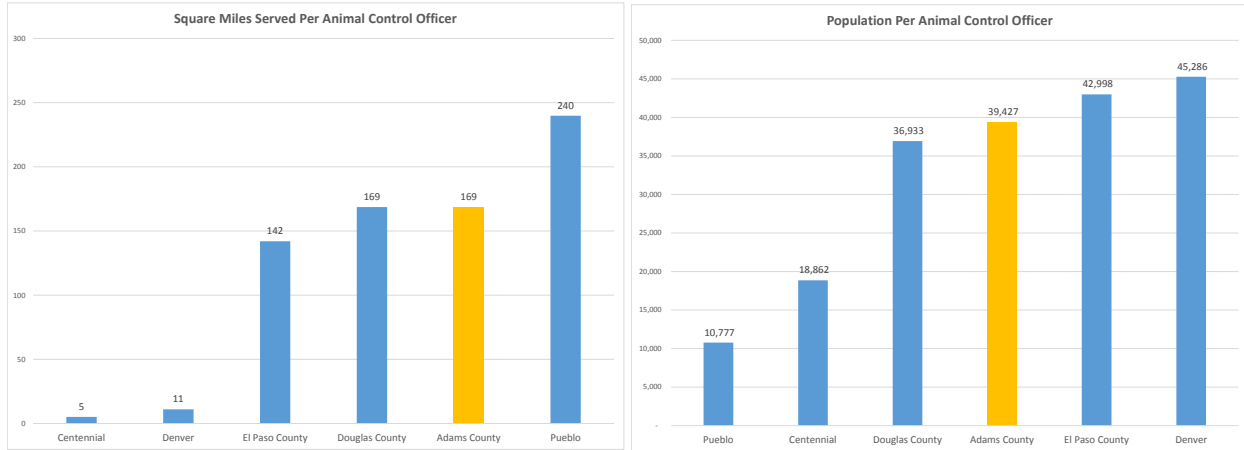
HSPPR and FAS (pictured here) are operated as 501c3 organizations and offer regional solutions for multiple jurisdictions. DAS and Brighton offer services primarily to their municipalities. HSPPR, Denver and Brighton offer animal control services to those areas they serve, while FAS only provides a central, shared operating area for officers when they are at the facility, but does not actually provide the service. There are many models being employed, including more robust and advanced animal service models used by the Dumb Friends League and Boulder County.

When reviewing the current fees used by the various comparison operations, Adams County fees tend to be lower and have room to increase based on the market.

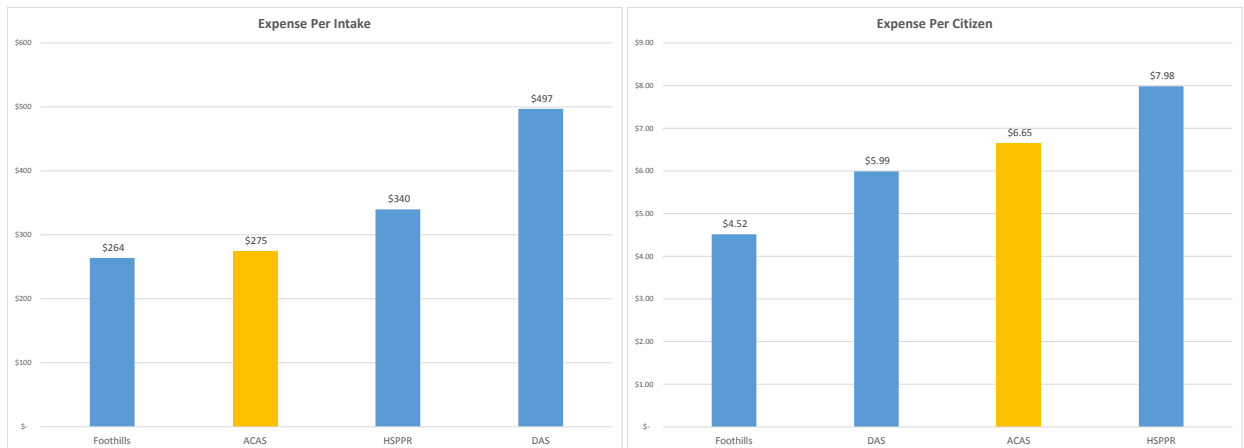
	ACAS	HSPPR	FAS	DAS	Brighton
Dog Adoption	\$ 100	\$44-\$600	\$80-\$500	\$95-130	\$40-\$90
Puppy Adoption	\$ 100	\$150-\$600	\$80-\$500	\$ 150	\$40-\$90
Cat Adoption	\$ 50	\$34-68	\$ 5	\$60-87	\$40-\$90
Kitten Adoption	\$ 50	\$ 78	\$ 115	\$ 95	\$40-\$90
Vaccination Fees	\$ 10	\$ 15	\$ 15	\$20	No info
Spay/Neuter Fees	\$ 30	\$35-85	\$40-\$75	\$25-\$60	No info
License Fees for Spay/Neutered Pet	\$ -	\$ 15	\$ 15	\$ 15	No info
License Fees Unaltered Pet	\$ 25	\$ 30	\$ 30	\$ 15	No info
Cat Impound Fee	\$ 40	\$40-\$70	\$ 5	\$ 45	\$35-55
Dog Impound Fee	\$ 50	\$40-\$70	\$ 65	\$ 45	\$35-55
Microchip Implant Fee	\$ 10	\$ 25	\$ 35	\$ 25	\$20

Figure 1 Fee Table

When reviewing staffing and levels of service, ACAS has a relatively higher level of square miles and population served by its animal control officers when compared with other local jurisdictions with comparable information available. This limited comparison indicates that Adams is not necessarily overserved, and might even be slightly underserved in its animal control functions. As you can see, there is a substantial difference between providing service to a more urban population vs a more rural population, making comparisons challenging. It also indicates that the animal control function should be kept “whole” with staffing during the transfer, hence the recommendation of adding back an animal control officer.



Another important comparison is the cost of providing services to both citizens and animals. Adams County provides services to a spread out population, which makes delivering cost effective services challenging, but ACAS is neither the highest, nor the lowest, of the comparison group. This is a “gut check” on service delivery cost because of the varying degree of services, types of population being served, population density and land area served, but it indicates that ACAS is not out of line with its cost of service.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Information provided by HSPPR, DAS, FAS and ACAS staff and population data available online

## Financials, Revenues and Fees

The Adams County Animal Shelter is currently performing cost recovery at 32.1% in 2013, meaning there was a \$1.2 M subsidy from the general fund for operating this function. Revenues were roughly \$600,000 and expenses totaled slightly over \$1.8 M to operate ACAS. Roughly half of the revenue received comes from adoption fees and the other half from fees paid by jurisdictions for animal intake.

### *Variable Animal Pricing for Adoptions*

The Neighborhood Services team currently has a proposal to move to a “market based” adoption rate for animals and away from a flat-rate structure. The theory is that some animals are more desirable to adopt to the market. Puppies and kittens fetch higher prices than older dogs and cats. This is a consistent best practice among the regional service providers. Based on current volumes and proposed rate increases, the team estimates a projected increase in revenues of slightly over \$100,000. This proposal is a best practice and should be adopted immediately.

### *Animal Intake Fees*

Currently, ACAS receives fees from the sheltering and intake of animals from jurisdictions it supports, including Commerce City, Bennett, Northglenn, Federal Heights and Thornton. The current rate of \$106.15 per animal is significantly less than the market. FAS charges \$200 per animal. Doing a phased increase of this fee is appropriate and will provide cost recovery needed to handle additional staffing at the shelter. A fee increase to \$160 per animal will provide most of the cost recovery needed to offset staffing changes, or an estimated \$103,000 of the needed \$123,000<sup>2</sup>. This fee increase will keep ACAS below market, provide room for changes in the future and create better cost recovery.

### *Vaccination, Spay/Neuter and Animal Medical Fees*

To the extent practical, these fees should be set to do full cost-recovery. Last year, the revenues generated from providing medical services recovered only 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the total budget estimates. This cost recovery should be increased. Fees charged by ACAS are lower than the market rate, based on information contained in Figure 1-Fee Table. An increase of \$5-\$10 for most services will move ACAS to the market. For the purposes of this proposal, estimated increases in medical fees were not calculated because there are other factors to be considered in the increases, such as the new adoption fees and public good. The medical facility pictured here is operated by FAS.



### *Other Fees*

Other fees to be considered include those for the early intake of highly adoptable animals by other shelters. For example, if we receive a “desirable” pet such as a kitten or a puppy, ACAS prepares the animal by performing spay/neuter and vaccination services. Because it is more desirable, the regional “animal service” providers, such as FAS or the Dumb Friends League, will request the animal because of their greater adoption success rates and the animals’ higher “market value”. Based on the new

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<sup>2</sup> Estimate based on 10% loss of current intake levels because of pricing increases and new rate of \$160. Staffing figures are estimates based on average current wages for positions and 30% cost of benefits.

model of adopting animals using a variable rate at ACAS, it would make sense to look at a “cost recovery” fee for when these desirable animals transfer to another location prematurely. If the animal is not adopted after a reasonable period of time from ACAS, the fee could be waived and the animal sent to any willing provider.

For example, a golden retriever puppy is dropped off at the shelter. It receives standard servicing, including vaccinations and spay/neuter services which creates a cost to the organization of materials and staff time. This type of puppy is highly desirable and could be adopted by ACAS at a higher rate. If another regional shelter wants to receive this puppy in the first week, they would have to reimburse ACAS for all medical and vaccination costs. This would be the cost of the vaccinations and other materials and the staff time for medical services. The other shelters will also be able to adopt out this desirable retriever very quickly and for a premium. But so could ACAS as it moves to a newer model of service delivery. If the puppy is not adopted after the first week, all “cost recovery” fees could be waived and it could be transferred to another shelter. This would increase our rate of medical cost recovery and create the opportunity for variable adoption pricing to take hold—and support the transition of ACAS to an adoption center in the region. In the last two years, approximately 200 of these transfers have occurred per year. Assuming 50% of these were transferred because the animal was “highly adoptable”, and assuming that cost recovery averaged \$40 per animal, ACAS could net an additional \$4,000. If the animals are adopted from ACAS instead of being transferred, this could yield an additional \$10,000 from adopting at market rate.

## Operating and Other Recommendations

While this assessment did not evaluate the many nuances of effective animal shelter operations, there are some recommendations that can be made regarding more effective operations given limited resources.

### *Reduce Overtime and Temp services in lieu of permanent staff*

For 2013, ACAS incurred \$112,191 of overtime and temporary staffing costs. This could and should be reduced through the addition of FTEs. These line-items should be reduced to \$20,000 and the remainder can be applied to off-set the Animal Service Tech and Animal Control Officer FTEs. This level of temporary staffing and overtime may have been operationally needed in the past, but moving forward, proper staffing and reduced overtime should be a priority. This reduces staff workload and improves morale as well as “right sizes” the operation.

### *Install the Dishwasher*

I mean, seriously. The dishes are hand-washed because it has not been installed. Based on estimates from ACAS staff and cost information from Human Resources the savings would be \$26,572.<sup>3</sup> The cost of installation is estimated at roughly \$5,000. This is a simple efficiency issue that should be resolved quickly. This is the equivalent of adding back more than ½ of an FTE.

### *Hours of Operation*

Hours of operation can affect the length of holds, so it is important to be careful when considering changes, but reduced hours open to the public would not be inconsistent with other front-range providers such as HSPPR. Brighton operates at 40 hours per week with hours



<sup>3</sup> Savings would be 4 hours per day X 365 days X \$18.20 per hour (Animal Care Tech rate + benefits)

available by appointment on weekends. Alternative schedules, such as limited hours of operation on one weekday can create time for “catch up” while maintaining access for the public and the ability to receive and care for animals. Services cannot be truly “closed” because of the need to care for the animals and accept incoming stray animals. But it is feasible to look at reduced public hours because of staffing limitations. Depending on the reduced hours, staff savings would be realized. Assuming the net hours open to the public decreased by 4 hours per week, this would equate to roughly \$5,300 in staff efficiencies annually.<sup>4</sup> This could be used to increase the employees’ quality of life or re-distribute workload.

## Path Forward

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There are many paths forward to be considered, and the primary goal should be to create a 3-5 year strategic plan to guide the transition and prioritize action items. Here are a few items that should be considered and reviewed for potential.



### *Rebranding and Marketing*

One of the primary challenges is changing perceptions and gaining the right kind of attention through a rebranding effort. This rebrand should include the name, improved signage in and around the facility, improvements to the website and improve the ease of online adoption and licensing. In addition, aesthetic improvements to the facility are needed to send a different message, such as the “donation tags” hanging in the lobby of the Denver Animal Shelter, inviting visitors to donate and providing whimsical art. The facility will need renovations to meet a new service need and a capital needs assessment should be performed as part of the 3-5 year plan. In that process, installing an open-to-the-public dog park in the adjacent property should be considered. If the park is well-designed, this could be a draw to pull in the public and get greater visibility on the animals in the facility. Because the unique nature of the industry, money should be made available to “pilot” ideas for effectiveness in the care of the animals and service to the public. For example, vaccination clinics require staffing, but can be a valuable way to engage the public. Same with roving animal adoption efforts, and other public engagement opportunities.

### *Licensing*

Licensing of pets can be a strong revenue stream with the right ordinances, partnerships and incentives. The Foothills Animal Shelter received \$860,000 in 2013 through licensing activities, or 32% of its total income. This is the funding they receive from the governments they serve. DAS and HSPPR also employ licensing as part of their revenue strategies, but it is not as significant of a funding source as FAS. In fact, DAS had an audit report in 2011 that suggested the licensing function in Denver is redundant with other enforcement efforts and a greater focus should be made on microchipping.

Consistency in the regions licensing policies is critical to a successful licensing program, and provides significant potential as a revenue source and as a service to the citizens and their pets. Licensing rates for the comparison groups were 19-25% for dogs and 1-2% for cats. Licensing compliance rates varied by jurisdiction, because of ordinance differences, marketing pushes and enforcement efforts. Working with regional players to adopt licensing standards and enforcement was a model used very successfully for FAS. A modified model could be adopted for Adams County, and learning about ordinances in and around Adams County would allow ACAS to understand the best way to standardize policies.

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<sup>4</sup> Savings would be 4 hours per week X 52 weeks X \$25.38 per hour (front counter rate + benefits)



### *Brighton Partnership*

Brighton currently operates its own facility and its own animal control services. The 2014 Budget for Brighton for Animal Control Services is \$210,997. There is an opportunity for a deeper dive into partnering with Brighton to provide them with Animal Control and Animal Sheltering services. This “insourcing” opportunity could create valuable synergies, simplify jurisdictional issues, improve operational efficiency and reduce costs for Brighton. This could also be a high-visibility location for an “in town” adoption center, or a reduced cost to Brighton. There are many opportunities for efficiency in a partnership, depending on more detailed discussions of operations.

### *Advisory Board*

Consider the creation of a board of regionally influential people and jurisdiction representatives that can help to guide the organization as it grows towards becoming more of a service provider and away from being viewed as an animal control function.

### *Organization*

There are several different models for how the comparison organizations are structured. Given staffing changes and a change in mission, a reorganization of resources should be considered to better align with the path forward.

### *Best Practices*

In this assessment, each of the comparison shelters’ directors was asked about its favorite best practices. HSPPR was proud of its disaster readiness and its transfer program with southeast and southwest Colorado shelters struggling to place homeless animals. FAS was proud of many of its dog and cat enrichment services, as well as its operational flexibility for an emergency or hoarding case. Denver was proud of its first-of-a-kind LEED facility. Adams County can learn from these service providers as it crafts a 3-5 year strategic plan and ACAS should find ways to propose, and the county should find ways to fund, innovative pilots on service delivery that make it “uniquely Adams”.