

FACILITY ASSESSMENT

Facility: Overview-History

Adams County Animal Shelter and Adoption Center (ACASAC) is located at 10705 Fulton, Brighton, CO 80601. The facility sits on 4.25 acres in a warehouse-industrial district just north of 104th Avenue between the major intersections of Highway 2 and Highway 85. Although the shelter has a Brighton mailing address, it is actually considered part of Commerce City. The shelter takes in nearly 6,000 animals per year and serves six municipalities, as well as unincorporated Adams County for animal impound services.

The ACASAC facility is just less than 41,000 square feet. The structure, which was originally a warehouse, was redesigned and opened to the public in 2001. At this time, the new shelter was considered an improvement over the prior County shelter, which was located at Dahlia Street and I-76 in Commerce City. Reportedly, the old shelter was much smaller with fewer features in place to care for animals.

For the facility assessment, the Foothills Animal Shelter Assessment team was tasked with answering the following questions:

- Is the building conducive to animal sheltering?
- Does it pose additional challenges to operations?
- Does it negatively impact animal health, animal outcomes?

Facility: Location

Location Positives:

- **Distance from Residential Areas:** Residential areas are located a few miles east and west of the shelter. Given these neighborhoods are a fair distance away, it may eliminate complaints about shelter activity, noise and/or traffic.

Location Challenges:

- **Difficult to Find/Lack of Visibility:** A frequent theme expressed by staff, Animal Control Officers (ACOs), vendors and patrons is how often they hear how difficult the facility is to locate. *This includes feedback from patrons who live in the immediate area, but never realized the shelter was there.

- With only industrial-type businesses in the vicinity, there are few opportunities for the general public to happen across the shelter.
 - Parked trains frequently block the only distant, but open view of the building from the intersection of 104th and Highway 85.
 - The shelter's Brighton address often causes confusion because there is another small animal shelter located within the City of Brighton.
- **Difficult to Access:** A variety of traffic flow challenges negatively impact the ease of coming to and from the shelter.
 - Semi trucks frequently impede access to streets leading to the shelter.
 - Trains to both the east and west of the shelter frequently block traffic.
 - ACOs from several jurisdictions within Adams County report a negative impact on their time efficiency due to the shelter's location in relation to the rest of the County, as well as traffic congestion, and trains.
- **Small Lot Size Limits Growth Opportunities:** The shelter sits on 4.25 acres, with train tracks just to the west, and backs right up to land owned by a chemical plant to the south and a crane company to the east. There is very little room for future expansion, including adding the necessary parking required to adequately service the facility.
- **Potentially Unsafe Location for a "Critical Facility:"** ACASAC is designated as the lead agency in the County to provide emergency housing for citizen pet animals, in case of an emergency or disaster in our community. The shelter may house up to 500 animals and up to 100 people in the building at any given time.
 - **Only One Road In and Out.** Only one paved, drivable road in and out of shelter limits access in emergencies.
 - In 2013 the shelter had to evacuate animals due to flooding on 104th Avenue and the dirt parking lot and animal yards were not usable during this time due to excess standing water.
 - **Shelter sits within a few hundred feet of moving trains.**
 - **Higher -risk area for environmental disaster.**
 - Per Adams County OEM, the Commerce City-Henderson area where the shelter is located, is a higher than normal risk area for industrial/environmental type disasters.
- **Commerce City Pit Bull Ban:** Per Commerce City Code of Ordinances Sec. 4-2011, Pit Bulls and Pit Bull mixes are prohibited.

- While the shelter is able to adopt Pit Bulls to individuals who reside in outside of breed ban, the ordinance restricts staff and volunteers from walking and exercising these dogs off of the shelter’s property.
- **Lack of Sidewalks, Trails or Green Space:** Not only esthetically displeasing, but poses challenges in providing necessary animal exercise and enrichment.
 - **Risk of Dog Walkers and Dogs Being Hit by Vehicles.**
 - Volunteers and staff are forced to walk dogs in the streets frequented by large semi trucks etc.
 - Due to risk, the Adams County Risk Assessment conducted at the shelter in 2014, has recommended *“Limiting dog-walking to fenced-in areas, not on nearby streets or in areas in close proximity to vehicles.”* (2)
 - Some neighboring businesses complain about dogs walkers using their private yards areas.
 - It should be noted there is one open field area on the south side of the shelter parking lot owned by a neighboring business that is full of prairie dogs. Not only is this not our property to use, but the prairie dogs potentially carry fleas and have also been known to carry the plague.
- **Lack of Pet and Community Friendly Environment:** The industrial location is unappealing, unwelcoming and potentially unsafe for both animals and people.
 - Industrial location and lack of natural features negatively impacts the shelter’s ability to attract and retain volunteers, which are vital to effective shelter programming.
 - Lack of outdoor space and parking for outdoor events seriously limits community engagement opportunities.

Facility: Exterior

Exterior Positives:

- **Low Maintenance:** The construction materials of the outer walls need limited care and there is very little landscaping to maintain.
- **Large Outdoor Dog Yards:** There are four large outdoor dog play yards on the west side of the building used for exercise, enrichment, training and adoption

visits. A covered sitting area for staff and volunteers is located next to these large yards.

- There are three smaller play yards on the east side of the building, which are accessible from the main dog kennel areas.
- **Secure Staff Parking Lot:** A large fenced lot with secure access provides secure parking for staff and room for ACOs vehicles to move to and from the intake bay.

Exterior Challenges:

- **Lack of Street Appeal:** The outside of building is not welcoming and still looks like a much like a warehouse.
- **Backs up to Industrial Businesses:** The shelter backs up right up to a steel company with towering cranes that are visible from the shelter's front lot.
- **Barbed Wire:** Barbed wire along the exterior lots and yards gives a prison-like appearance.
- **Crematorium in Public View:** The shelter's crematorium is located outside and is visible from Highway 85.
 - Projects a negative image of the shelter.
 - Crematory is due for complete replacement due to age.
 - Staffs have to clear snow in winter to get bodies to the crematory.
- **Outside Cooler:** Employees have to clear snow to get bodies to the cooler.
- **Lack of Public Parking Spaces:** There are only 18 paved public parking spaces, which forces patrons to park far from shelter, or in no-parking zones.
 - Parking is often insufficient for public vaccine clinics, adoption special and volunteer trainings
 - **Dirt Parking Lot:** The shelter's overflow parking area is a dirt lot, which can be inaccessible in wet or snowy weather.
 - This is also the parking area used by volunteers, who often do not have open spaces to park.

- **Lack of Shade of Dog Play Yards:** Only one of the dog play yards has a shade cover and yards get extremely hot in the summer for both dogs and people.
- **Low Fencing between Play Yards:** The fencing separating main dog yards is too low. This allows larger dogs to jump into an adjoining yard causing potential safety issues, dog fights etc.

FACILITY: INTERIOR

Interior Positives:

- **Solid Construction:** The concrete design is sturdy and the “bones” of the building appear to be in good shape.
- **Large Structure:** The building is a spacious 41,000 square feet.
 - There are multiple rooms that can be designed for a variety of uses.
 - Wide hallways in adoption areas give ample space for patrons, including wheelchair accessibility and for the movement of animals.
 - Four large front desk stations with ample work space.
 - Six large offices.
 - Two large locker rooms for male and female staff.
 - Ample storage for Facility Department’s maintenance equipment and cleaning supplies
 - Three separate restroom facilities.

Interior Challenges:

- **Non-Welcoming, Institutional Feel:** The interior of the shelter has an outdated and “institutional” feel reminiscent of the old “dog pound” stereotype.
 - Lack of paint, color and wall hangings make shelter look “sad” and “tired.”
 - Interior looks dirty and dingy, even when it has just been cleaned.
 - Animal adoption visiting rooms are unwelcoming, stark, loud and isolated.
 - Chain link dog kennels have a “pound-like” appearance.
 - Environment gives the public false impression animals are inadequately cared for or neglected.

- **Poor Ventilation, Air Quality and Containment:** The facility's open-roof, warehouse design does not allow for proper air flow exchange or cleaning, and contributes to uneven temperatures throughout the building.
 - **Poor Air Circulation:** Per the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, 2010*, the standard should be 10 – 12 fresh air exchanges per hour. (1)
 - **Lack of Ceilings:** Dust and other flotsam cover most surfaces above 7 feet, which can lead to bacterial contamination and disease outbreaks in the shelter population.

- **Environmental Noise:** The open-roof, concrete design combined with a lack of sound baffling makes the noise from barking dogs extremely loud throughout the building.
 - **Noise Impact on People:** It is likely the noise levels at ACASAC often exceed allowable limits in the workplace, and bothersome to staff and patrons.
 - As noted in the risk assessment conducted at the ACASAC in 2014, *"The barking of a single dog can consistently reach 97 dB."* (2) *The ASV quotes research stating "any sound in the 90-120 db...may lead to irreversible hearing loss in humans."*(1)
 - **Noise Impacts Animals and Costs of Care:** As animals have more sensitive hearing than humans, high levels of noise are increase stress in dogs and cats having an adverse impact on both health and behavior.
 - High-stress environment negatively impacts animal adoptions, and increases cost of care due to treating stress-induced illness.

- **Lack of Adequate Health Care Space:** ACASAC has a single surgery room, which adjoins to a small recovery room, but has no designated space for nonsurgical procedures such as vaccinations and animal exams.
 - **Lack of Separate Exam Room:** Per the Pet Animal Care and Facility Act (PACFA) guidelines, *"At any facility where surgical procedures occur, there must be a room whose purpose is exclusively for surgery."* (3)
 - **Too Many Entrances to Surgery Suite:** Four entrances to surgery room, two of which must be blocked off to cut down on foot traffic into this sterile area, to meet PACFA standards. (3)
 - **Lack of Appropriate Storage for Medical Supplies and Controlled Substances:** Increased foot traffic in and out of surgery room, increases chances of contamination, and makes medication storage less secure.

- **Inadequate Surgery Prep and Recovery Space:** Limits the number of surgeries performed per day.
 - Dogs and cats are housed in same area greatly increasing stress.
 - **Lack of Necessary Prep Areas:** There is not a pre-surgery prep area for animals, a pack prep area nor and laboratory area to examine samples.
 - **No Separation Between Dental and Surgical Areas:** Increases risk of infection and limits efficiency.
 - **Space Too Small for Expanded Intern Programs:** Lacks sufficient space to fully support a veterinary intern or vet tech intern program.
 - **Insufficient Lighting for Performing Medical Procedures.**
 - **Lacks of Separate Washer/Dryer for Surgery Laundry.** Contamination issue.
 - **Lack of Observation Kennels:** There is not a designated space for veterinary staff to monitor severely sick or injured animals.
- **Insufficient Laundry Space and Laundry Storage:** Shelter's main laundry room is too small with inadequate storage for clean items.
 - **Linens are** stacked in a large open hallway potentially exposing them to fomites and other airborne containments.
- **Improper Animal Housing Design:**
 - Dog kennels face each other, significantly increasing barking and stress.
 - Cat housing areas are too close to the dog kennels, exposing cats to constant barking and increased stress.
 - Many of the cat kennels are inadequate not in size, but design:
 - Lack of levels and solid sides allows cats to make contact with each other increasing stress and potential spread of disease.
 - Bowls that fit into kennel doors spill water and have been removed by the public resulting in theft of small dogs on more than one occasion.
- **Lack of Designated Space for Species Other Than Dogs and Cats:**
 - Lack of designated space to house small mammals, birds, reptiles etc.
 - Lack of barn-type space to appropriately house chickens, pigs, goats and other smaller pet farm animals.
 - Reptiles kept in storage-type, closet area due to lack of space.
- **Insufficient Euthanasia Room:**
 - Parvo kennels in the same space increasing potential spread of disease. *This has been corrected as of spring 2016.

- Euthanasia room too small for use of table. Small animals must be euthanized on floor.
- Zero natural light and insufficient lighting for medical procedures.
- **Insufficient Court-Hold and Impound Areas:**
 - Court-hold dog kennels do not have access to outdoor space, severely limiting exercise options for long-term, fractious dogs.
 - Lack of roof in intake area means cats that get loose can climb up and escape.
 - Lack of separate exam area means animals are examined, vaccinated and weighed in open bay garage, making handling difficult, more stressful for animals and potentially more dangerous for staff.
 - Only three holding kennels for dogs in intake shared by 7 jurisdictions.
 - Zero impound kennels for officers to place newly impounded cats.
- **Interior Carpet:** Carpet is located in the training room, behind the front desk and in all of the shelter's six offices. While these are not animal housing areas, the potential for contamination is high, as staff members, volunteers, ACOs, patrons etc. , who walk through animal housing areas, must also walk in and out of carpeted areas on a regular basis.
 - *Per ASV standards, as carpeting cannot be adequately cleaned, it is not recommended for use in animal shelters. (1)*
- **Lack of Eye Wash Station:** ACASAC staffs utilize a variety of chemicals for cleaning and sanitizing. However, as noted in the Risk Assessment for the Adams County Animal Shelter, September 2014, *"there is not a fixed plumbing eye wash station in the facility."* (2)

Facility: Conclusions

While much effort was obviously taken to make the existing structure as functional as possible, the building was simply never intended for sheltering animals. Therefore, operating out of the current facility poses an array of challenges, which can negatively impact animal care, animal health, efficiency, staff safety and overall public image. This does not mean animals are not being cared for adequately, but rather the facility is not in step with modern animal shelter design and standards. **Furthermore, if all the challenges with the current structure were to be corrected over time, this would still not remedy the numerous issues faced by having the shelter remain in its current location.**

The Assessment Team recommends Adams County invest in a new, modernized shelter to improve the shelter's ability to provide quality care of animals, including decreasing stress and illness, which will help support adoptions and rescue efforts. A new facility will also provide a more safe, efficient and desirable environment for shelter employees, volunteers, animal management officers, patrons and visitors of the shelter. Finally, a more accessible, people and pet friendly location will allow the shelter to better serve its ever-growing community. A new and more appropriate location will allow for future growth opportunities and for future programs and services, which can then evolve over time to meet the changing animal welfare needs and demands of Adams County residents.

References:

(1) *Guidelines for Standards of Animal Care in Animal Shelters*, The Association of Shelter Veterinarians, 2010

(2) *Risk Assessment for the Adams County Animal Shelter*, Prepared by Ron Jensen, Risk Safety Coordinator for Adams County Risk Management, September 2014

(3) *Rules Pertaining to the Administration and Enforcement of the Pet Animal Care and Facilities Act*, 8 CCR 1201-11, Colorado Department of Agriculture, Animal Industry Division

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