

EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP, HUMAN RESOURCES AND STRUCTURAL CAPACITY IN KING COUNTY'S ANIMAL SERVICES PROGRAM



KING COUNTY ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL



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Contents

Table of Images.....	3
Introduction.....	30
Summary Conclusions.....	34
General Overview.....	38
Underfunded and Mismanaged.....	39
Review & Findings	44
Physical Facilities.....	44
Crossroads-Bellevue Facility.....	57
Animal Care	59
Animal Handling.....	64
Intake Examination & Follow-Up Care.....	75
Lost & Found.....	81
Systems of Accountability & Oversight.....	83
Community Support/Outreach Programs.....	87
Volunteers.....	90
Lack of Systematic Planning.....	103
A Cautionary Note.....	104
Crossroads-Bellevue: Before and After.....	106
A Moving Target.....	111
Inhumane Methods of Killing.....	113
“Modest Investments”.....	116
Longstanding Problems.....	120
Options.....	124
Alternative Models.....	125
Appendix:	
No Kill Program Areas.....	127
Companion Animal Protection Act.....	132

Table of Images



The Kent shelter is located in a mostly industrial area away from prime residential and retail corridors which are the backbone of a high volume adoption shelter. As a result, its success depends on comprehensive community outreach programs operating at a high caliber of competency. Unfortunately, the Advisory Committee accurately described them as “paltry at best.” (Page 44)



Potholes flood during rainy weather, and provide for a very bumpy ride at the Kent facility, especially in the area where animal control transport vehicles are bringing animals into the facility. (Page 45)



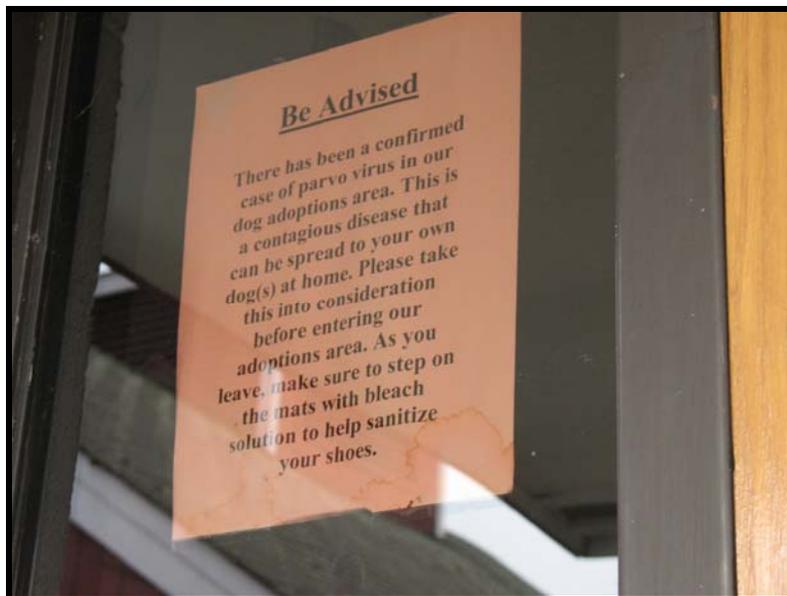
Trash litters the outside of the Crossroads shelter, much of it appearing to be old garbage. (Page 45)



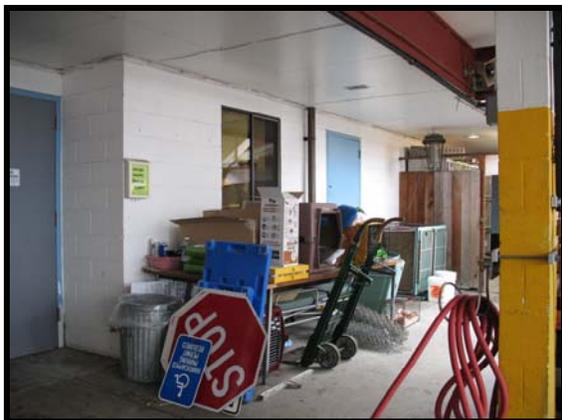
Dozens of cigarette butts, coffee cups, and other trash litter the front, sides, and back parking areas at the Crossroads shelter. This is what first greets visitors of this relatively affluent community. (Page 46)



A trash strewn parking lot and broken shutters (which are absolutely black with filth from the lobby vantage point), haphazardly placed signage, and hours that ignore the goal of increasing adoptions greet visitors to King County Animal Control in Crossroads-Bellevue. (Page 46)



A sign at the entrance to the Kent facility warns all visitors to be wary of adoption and that entering KCACC puts their own dogs at risk. (Page 48)



Broken street signs, 30-gallon trash cans filled to the top with dirty rain water, broken kennels and carriers, construction debris and trash show the state of sheltering at KCACC and belie claims by County Executive staff that oversight includes regular visits to the shelter. (Page 48)



Piles of food on wet (combination of water, bodily fluids, and cleaning chemicals) and dirty floors, right next to buckets of caustic chemicals. (Page 49)



Piles of food on wet (combination of water, bodily fluids, and cleaning chemicals) and dirty floors, right next to buckets of caustic chemicals. (Page 49)



Three dog kennels are either used for healthy dogs to be segregated from disease in the shelter, for sick dogs to segregate them from healthy dogs in the shelter, or for storage, depending on who you talk to. (Page 50)



Dogs are kept in chain link kennels made up of concrete. (Page 51)



Despite a sign that indicated the kennels had been “spot cleaned,” the same piles of feces were evident in the dog kennels hours later calling the veracity of the information and the extent of oversight into doubt. (Page 52)



I arrived for an unannounced visit in January and found a shelter in disarray. (Page 53)



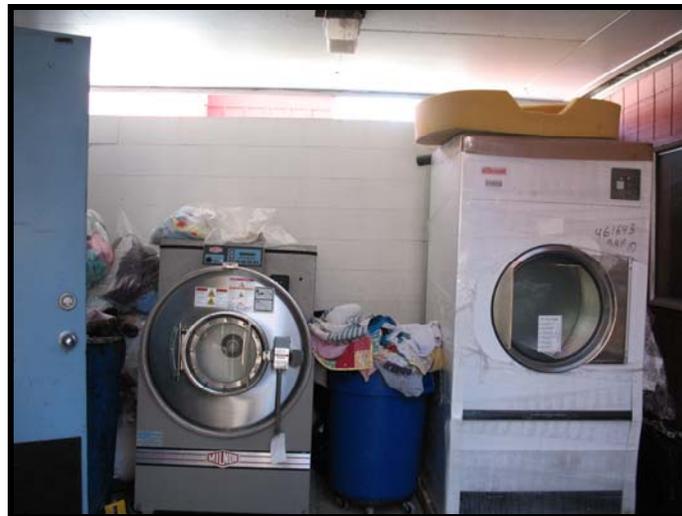
Rather than provide housing conducive to the health and well-being of cats, KCACC houses them in old, dirty, difficult to disinfect cages which were donated by a primate center to KCACC in lieu of discarding them. (Page 53)



Two dogs share a kennel covered in fecal matter and urine. Dogs are fed in feces filled kennels, and staff does not appear to check or follow up to see if the dogs have eaten. (Page 54)



The wall of King County Animal Control's room for the neediest and most at risk animals: sick cats in what passes for the agency's isolation room or infirmary. The room has no ventilation, cooling, or heating, despite promises to do so going back years, and does not even have running water or a sink. Staff has to carry buckets of water and disinfectant from other rooms in order to clean and care for the cats. (Page 55)



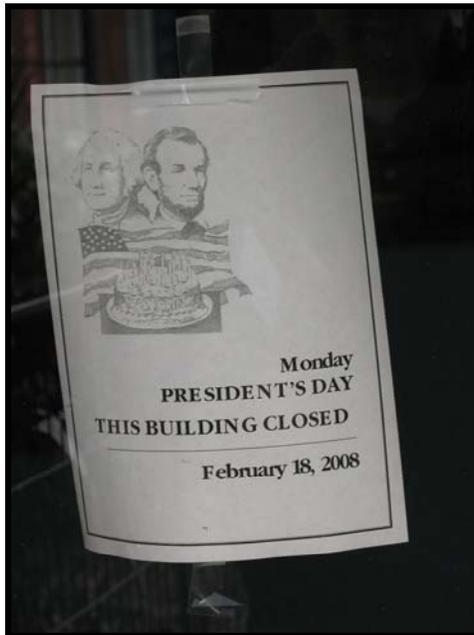
The commercial washer and dryer have been a source of controversy. (Page 56)



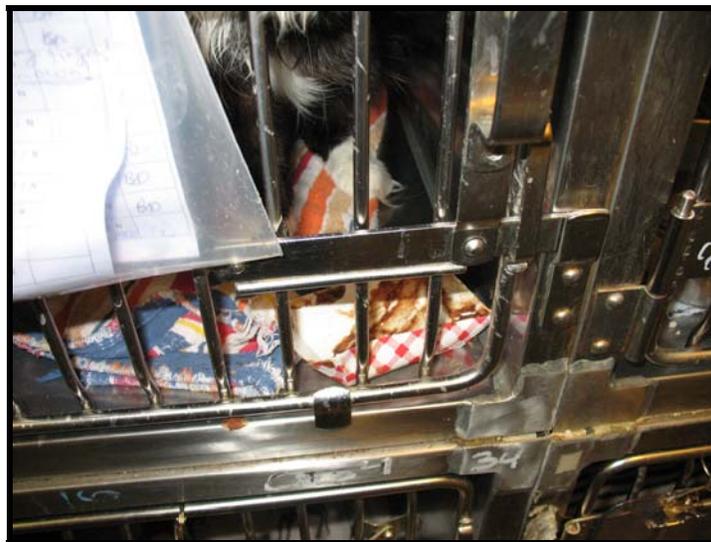
Dog Kennels at Crossroads-Bellevue. (Page 58)



Cat cages at Crossroads-Bellevue. (Page 58)



The shelter was closed on a day families with children were available to adopt animals. (Page 59)



The neediest cats in the shelter are not provided the rudiments of food or water for over 24 hours and possibly longer. Sergeants who are supposed to oversee staff do not provide adequate oversight and sign off on forms without proper supervision. (Page 60)



Sick cat with bloody discharge in KCACC's isolation/infirmiry hovers around an empty food bowl. The cat, and several others, did not have food or water for long periods. (Page 61)



One of many empty water bowls in the isolation/infirmiry room. Staff fabricated records showing animals were eating, drinking, and had been cared for. In addition, the Sergeant on duty "signed off" on their care. (Page 61)



Cats in the isolation room had no food, no water, filthy litter bowls, and no paperwork. (Page 62)



Cats in the isolation room had no food, no water, filthy litter bowls, and no paperwork. (Page 62)



This infirmity cat had food, but it was caked over, old canned food that was untouched. Cats who cannot smell often do not eat, but need to be forced fed while under infirmity care. Nonetheless, this cat had food in his cage, although no water. Staff notes show this cat “eating and drinking” on a day that the cat did not touch his food and had no water to drink. The following day the food remained untouched. The Sergeant on duty claimed to have signed off on “spot check” forms and submitted them to his supervisor for filing. (Page 63)



Cat socialization cards sit unused. (Page 65)



Only one cat had been “cuddled” according to the system of notification in place. However, this occurred the day before my arrival. This card sat on the cage during the entire week I was there, and was still there on Thursday, five days after it was placed on the cage. (Page 66)



The floor of the dog exercise yard allegedly used for strays is impossible to clean, harbors disease, and contained piles of what was clearly old fecal material. Checked daily, the piles of dog waste remained throughout my visit. (Page 66)



Despite construction noise and a sign that the door is kept close due to noise, the door was in fact left open. (Page 67)

[Continued on next page]



A superficially clean cat cage with a large amount of clearly visible dried bodily fluids shows how sloppy protocols are followed at KCACC and also underscores the lack of oversight by supervisors and management. (Page 69)



A dog with kennel cough is not only housed next to healthy dogs, but housed next to newly arrived dogs who are at greater risk because of heightened stress levels (they have not had an opportunity to acclimate to the shelter environment) and may not have been vaccinated against any diseases. (Page 71)



Despite available cats sitting in holding cages outside of public view and ready to be moved into the adoption area, at least a dozen cat cages sit empty both during my visit on January 30, 2008, and for the entirety of the February 18-21 visit. The integrity of KCACC's commitment to give every animal a fighting chance for life depends on keeping animals moving through the system. A system to do this does not exist. (Page 73)



Supervisors failed to notice the empty cat cages in the adoption room, nor the cats marked “OK” for adoption waiting in the stray area for their chance at a new home. (Page 74)



Cat in adoption room being treated with Amoxil. There is no start or stop date on the medication. In addition, staff does not make notations as to whether the animal is responding, and whether the animal is eating, drinking, and defecating normally. Note: “Rx” sticker and medication. (Page 78)



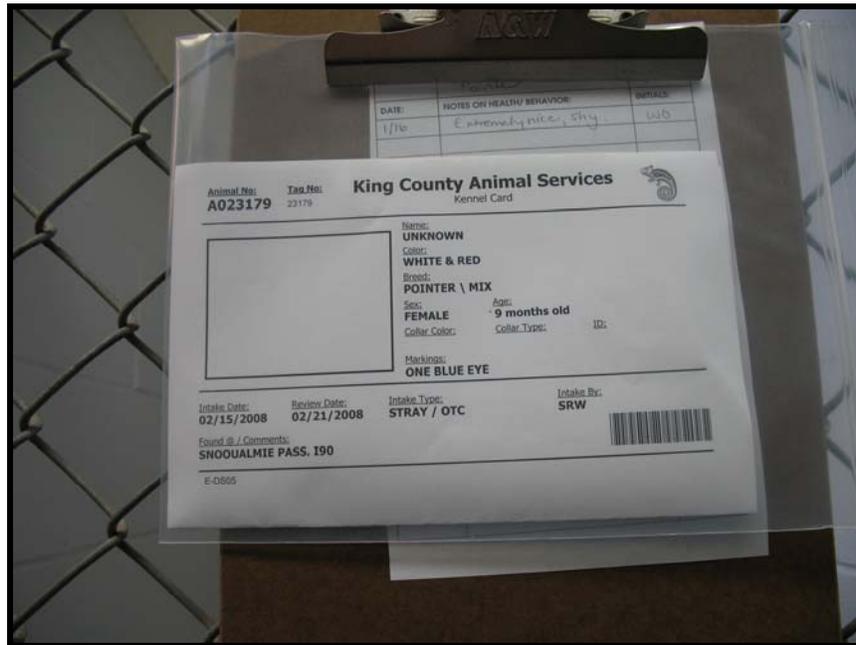
Animal with “Rx” sticker, but no medication. (Page 78)



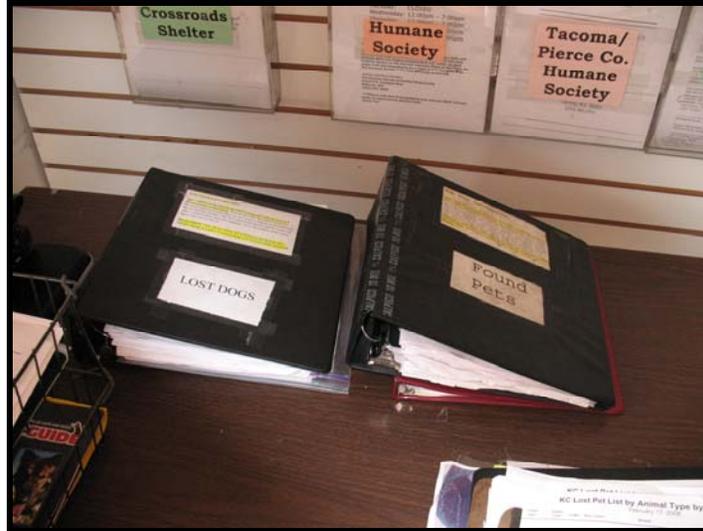
Animal with medication, but no “Rx” sticker. (Page 79)



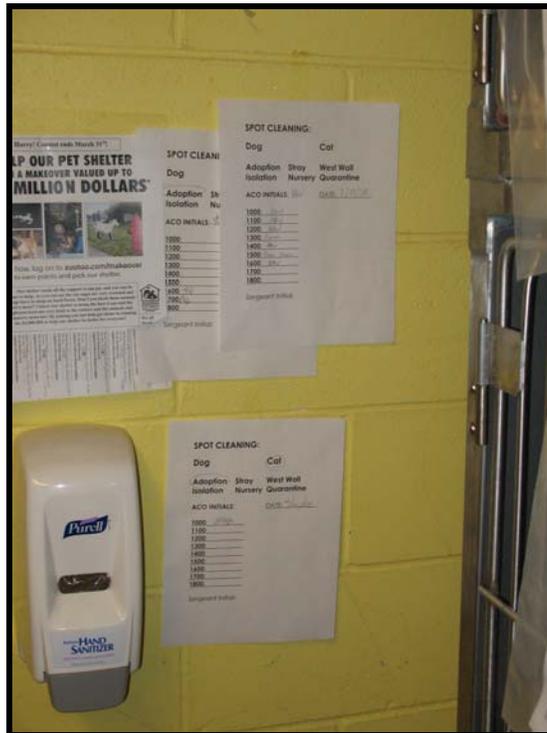
Medication sitting on top of cage, with no instructions, no start/stop date, and no “Rx” sticker. (Page 79)



A kennel card is missing the photograph of the animal. These photographs could allow owners of lost animals to search for them from their home computers. This would help improve KCACC's dismal reclaim rates, but is almost never done. (Page 82)



Lost & Found books are not cross-referenced by staff. (Page 82)



Checklists created ostensibly to ensure accountability and proper care, are left ignored and unsigned by Sergeants on the wall. Here, checklists for three days (the current day was nowhere to be found) sit on the wall. According to management, Sergeants are supposed to do periodic checks, sign off that proper care was given, turn them over to their Supervisor, who is supposed to audit the process to ensure compliance. The system is clearly ignored and broken. (Page 84)



Tukwila PetSmart, near KCACC's Kent facility, and a former KCACC partner adopted out 116 cats in 2007, none of them from KCACC. The cats belong to an "out of county" rescue group because KCACC failed to work effectively with the store. (Page 89)



Empty cages at a KCACC offsite adoption location are a lost opportunity for lifesaving. Volunteers report this as an ongoing problem. (Page 90)



Dog being given a respite from his tiny kennel at Crossroads. Volunteers report holes in the fence were repaired on the eve of my arrival which would allow dogs to be put outside for fresh air. (Page 107)



Before & After: The outside of the Crossroads-Bellevue shelter (left) observed during unannounced visit and (right) cleaned up in anticipation of my arrival. (Page 108)



Dog languishing in his own waste. This is one of many photographs of this nature provided by volunteers and what is described to me by multiple sources as a more “typical” day for dogs at Crossroads-Bellevue. Rules have recently changed from cleaning once per day to cleaning twice per day, but whether this will continue to occur if scrutiny ends is doubtful given lack of systems, lack of oversight, lack of accountability, and history. (Page 108)



The floor of the on again/off again infirmary at Crossroads-Bellevue evidences a high level of neglect of basic standards of cleaning and disinfecting of a modern shelter. Below, the state of the infirmary when I arrived in February. In January, this room was a storage room filled with junk. (Page 109)



The Crossroads-Bellevue Infirmary. (Page 109)



A cat cage in use at Crossroads-Bellevue, situated next to one of the most vibrant communities in the state, if not the United States. The area is home to the headquarters of Microsoft, Nintendo, Costco, and Boeing. It is also near a community of homes belonging to some of the wealthiest people in the world, but does not avail itself of the philanthropy available, nor reflect the community in which it is located. (Page 110)



Cat cage at Crossroads “repaired” with duct tape, which harbors disease. (Page 110)

Introduction

On May 29, 2007, the King County Council (“Council”) adopted a policy directive “to improve the provision of humane animal care and reduce the rate of euthanasia in King County Shelters.” Ordinance 15801 and Motion 12521 mandated that the County Executive put in place a series of programs and services at King County Animal Care and Control (“KCACC”) to meet targets save rates of 85%. Additionally, an Animal Control Advisory Committee (“Advisory Committee”) was impaneled to put together an analysis of the agency and a series of recommendations, and the County Executive was asked to work closely with the Advisory Committee to achieve improved animal care goals and the desired reductions in the level of killing.

During this period, King County Executive Ron Sims was assuring members of the Council that the agency had a “model animal control program” and was a “recognized leader” in animal control. On September 24, 2007, however, the Advisory Committee issued a scathing indictment of the KCACC program and a series of recommendations for what it saw as the foundation for a program to save more lives and improve delivery of animal care services. In its cover letter, the Advisory Committee stated:

One point on which we are unanimous is the deplorable state of KCACC’s shelters. Far from being a “model animal control program” or a “recognized leader in the... animal welfare field,” we found King County’s animal care program to be well beneath the standards that should be expected in a prosperous, compassionate, and generous community such as King County.

The animals in KCACC’s shelters suffer from high rates of disease, improper housing, inadequate exercise and social contact, a lack of basic comforts, and high levels of stress. The outreach programs designed to move these animals out of the shelter are paltry at best, and KCACC has a very low profile within the community. King County does not offer programs that could help stem the flow of animals into the shelter, such as pet retention services and spay/neuter programs for the public and for feral (free-roaming) cats. KCACC lacks the resources to respond to cruelty and neglect calls in a timely and effective manner. [Citations omitted.]

The Committee urged that “immediate action be taken ... to provide the most basic levels of humane care for the animals who depend on us.”

In response, the County Executive issued a 2008 Operational Plan that reiterated its claim of success, disregarded the Committee’s programmatic focus, and provided a more punitive response to a crisis that has already claimed the lives of too many animals. It also put the blame and onus on meeting targets on other community shelters and the public, and then offered a poor prognosis for success, stated that the agency was “unlikely” to meet Council mandates for target save rates.

In response, the King County Animal Care & Control Advisory Committee urged Council to reject the Executive’s 2008 Operational Plan:

Since submitting our September 24, 2007 report that found “deplorable” conditions within KCACC’s shelters, with overcrowding, inadequate facilities, high rates of disease and “paltry” outreach programs, we have been disappointed by the response from the executive branch. Instead of acknowledging responsibility for a program that is a disgrace to King County, apologizing for the neglect and lack of funding from which the county’s animal shelters have suffered for many years, and resolving to take immediate and dramatic action to implement change, the executive’s operational plan and transmittal letter attempt to gloss over the severity of the problem portrayed by the committee.

Rather, the executive’s response insisted that King County’s euthanasia rates were “competitive” and a “modest investment” would be sufficient to address concerns. Meanwhile, the operational plan conceded that it was “unlikely” that KCACC would be able to achieve the euthanasia targets set by the Council, failing to fund several programs it acknowledged were vital to a model animal care program, and attempting to shift responsibility for meeting the Council’s objectives to private humane organizations.

The Advisory Committee asked the Council to provide only provisional funding to KCACC and explore the option of removing the County from animal control sheltering. On October 8, 2007, the Council “expressed concerns over the executive’s compliance with the intent of this policy directive” as articulated in Ordinance 15801 and Motion 12521, reaffirmed both via Motion 12600, and withheld full funding for KCACC pending Council review of “a preliminary evaluation by an independent consultant hired by the council, [as to] whether the King County animal services program has the leadership, human resources and structural capacity to become a model no-kill program consistent with Ordinance 15801 and Motion 12600.”

Further, the Council correctly determined that a model program requires “highly functional programs, including at a minimum the extensive use of volunteers, community involvement, public relations, pet retention programs, comprehensive adoption programs, rescue group, foster care, medical and behavior rehabilitation, a feral cat trap-neuter-release program, a high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter clinic and leadership committed to these imperatives.”

That analysis was conducted during the months of January, February and March of this year, and included five days of onsite review, a series of community, public, organizational, volunteer, and staff surveys, a series of telephonic and face-to-face interviews, including members of Code Enforcement, Law Enforcement, and others, meetings with representatives from rescue groups, area shelters, Advisory Committee members, County Executive staff, Guild leadership, KCACC management, as well as visits to area shelters. It also included review of thousands of pages of documentation, submitted in response to Information Requests to various County agencies, including KCACC.

It should be further noted that during the course of the analysis, five members of the Advisory Committee, including the Chair, wrote to the Council and the County Executive in a letter dated March 6, 2008 “suspending our active involvement in the King County Animal Care and Country (KCACC) Citizens’ Advisory Committee.” They cited frustration with attempts by KCACC management and policy directors from its “parent” agency within the County bureaucracy, Records and Licensing (“RALS”), to hinder their work, failure to provide basic information, and poor coordination and training. Specifically, they complained of efforts to block the discovery process, by which the Advisory Committee could function effectively and fulfill its role to help guide the agency under the directive of Ordinance 15801 and Motion 12521.

Caveats

There are two caveats to note. First, it is not the purpose of this report to offer recommendations for improvement of KCACC operations. Where these are offered, they are illustrative of what KCACC can and should have been doing to improve shelter save rates, but failed to do so. By virtue of the project’s Scope of Work, that was not asked by Council in this preliminary analysis and it is not provided. Should the King County Council continue funding KCACC, it would behoove the Council to continue with that analysis.

Second, in compiling information about KCACC, conclusions were not drawn from statements alone unless there was independent verification or other tangible evidence. The purpose of this was two fold. First, independent verification or tangible evidence lend the claims credibility. Second, this allowed me to use information while protecting the confidentiality of sources who were hesitant to come forward for fear of reprisals, while ensuring that the information they provided was subject to independent verification.

For example, three members of the Advisory Committee wrote a letter to the King County Council dated November 9, 2007, stating:

We have heard reports from multiple credible sources that KCACC has embarked on a strategy to let more animals die in their cages without treatment, in order to lower its “euthanasia rate” and be able to proclaim a false success.

There are many reasons to find this statement credible. First, it was written by three members of the Advisory Committee. Second, they themselves cite their belief in the credibility of their sources. Third, KCACC confirmed it does not count animals who die in its outcome statistics, providing an injudicious incentive to allow sick animals to die, rather than be relieved of their suffering. Fourth, deaths in kennel have increased. Despite the weightiness of the claims, I was not able to independently verify the veracity of the statement, and therefore I drew no conclusions from them for the purpose of this report.

There was one exception to this general rule. If information was received from multiple sources, and those sources also reported the complaint or event in question to KCACC

management at or near the time the events took place, the respondents were willing to come forward or provided some independent verification (such as medical records) and a face-to-face interview of the complainants warranted a finding of credibility, the information was used and is noted as such.

By contrast, I heard several complaints from volunteers and others that animals often went without basic care including food and water. Many of these volunteers provided photographic evidence. In addition, during the course of my onsite review, I also witnessed animals without food and water over a period of days. Given the pattern of complaints by multiple and independent sources, coupled with my own observations, these claims were deemed credible.

Finally, no anonymously provided information was used, except responses from staff. Since they have a natural disincentive to make untrue negative claims about the program for which they work. However, consistent with the above, information was not used without independent verification or other tangible evidence.

Summary Conclusion

I arrived on January 30, 2008 for the first of two visits. This visit was unannounced. The purpose of the unannounced visit was to see the shelter on a “typical” day, as opposed to a day where the visit was anticipated. Some studies show that performance measures increase by as much as 50% on days a consultant or auditor is present. Not only are staff at their personal and professional best during the course of pre-scheduled onsite evaluations, but it is typical in these circumstances that managers assign their most skilled and thorough employees for purposes of availability of interview and oversight, providing a skewed analysis of day-to-day practice, of the basic competency of day-to-day staff, and of the day-to-day decisions made by staff. This can result in misinformed conclusions and misplaced recommendations. Unless an auditor has an appreciation of how things appear on a typical day, the end result is potentially misinformed.

The second (pre-scheduled) review occurred from February 18-21, 2008.

Notwithstanding the above, the results of a pre-announced review are important in and of themselves, so long as auditors are aware of the effect they have on the analysis and take these into account. If problems exist on days the auditor is present when staff is aware of outside review and after management has made changes to existing practices in anticipation of review, the uncovering of serious deviations from competent practice would signal that day-to-day operations of the shelter are likely to be much worse.

In both cases, KCACC performed at a level of competency beneath the standard of care which should be expected from a municipal animal care and control agency. Animal holding spaces were inadequately cleaned, staff displayed ignorance of basic animal care and behavior, and some animals went more than 24 hours without food and water. Given that, it seems premature to discuss the possibility of KCACC operating as a truly “model” program as defined by both the Advisory Committee and Council mandates. This is because it cannot operate at a minimally acceptable standard of care.

In other words, for reasons outlined in this report, I conclude that the prognosis for KCACC having the “leadership, human resources and structural capacity to become a model no-kill program consistent with Ordinance 15801 and Motion 12600” is grave.

It would appear as though the King County Executive has not made KCACC a priority. The Executive branch has not asked for any significant new funding for KCACC over the past several years, has not spent the funds that it has (more than \$500,000 now sits in a KCACC donation fund that has not been used to improve operations as intended), and according to County Facilities management, has made a calculated decision that the current physical facility at Kent is not worth fixing. In addition, it did little to follow up on a 1997 King County Audit finding that showed incorporated cities underfunding the agency by as much as \$700,000 per year, and has not made cost recovery a priority in contract negotiations.

The Executive branch has overlooked and ignored well over a decade’s worth of neglect and poor leadership at KCACC, even while repeatedly stating that King County was a “recognized leader in the animal control and animal welfare field.” Now that the issue

has been brought to the forefront by the King County Council, the County Executive continues to show only a minimal interest and has been slow to respond to requests for shelter reform. Supervision of KCACC has been relegated to mid-level bureaucrats who appear to only be interested in propping up current shelter leadership, and making only minimal changes necessary to quell public scrutiny.

The Executive's 2008 operational plan fails to address the No Kill goals set by the council and there is little evidence to suggest the efforts necessary to achieve these goals will be made. Instead of admitting that they are simply unwilling to adopt a No Kill policy, Executive staff members instead try to assert through the use of misleading statistics and faulty analysis that it is unlikely it will meet the goals set by the council. Also telling is the fact that the Executive's operational plan makes no acknowledgement of the serious problems discussed in the advisory committee's report, or any acceptance of responsibility for these problems.

Indeed, in response to the advisory committee's findings that the shelters were deplorable, the Executive's top recommendation was to impose a zero tolerance pet licensing scheme on the public—a policy to be found nowhere in the advisory committee's 47 recommendations and which is likely to deteriorate further the already poor esteem in which KCACC is held by the public, while doing nothing to lower death rates. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the Executive continues to attempt to claim that KCACC is not only satisfactory, but successful. This denial poses a significant obstacle to any improvement.

Promises of improvement have not been forthcoming, nor has the agency availed itself of the significant additive resources which the community has made available to the agency. From PetSmart in Tukwila to Microsoft in Bellevue, from volunteers and foster parents, to organizations, rescue groups, local shelters, and law enforcement agencies, support and services have been "enthusiastically" offered to KCACC, only to be lost as a result of failure to follow-through on the part of KCACC management and supervisors who refuse to adopt a systems approach to organizational management, choosing instead to foster a "free for all" environment where those who are favored get benefits, those who are not are challenged, and the animals whose lives require thoughtful and thorough care are left to be handled by employees who are untrained, unsupervised and under-supported by management and leadership in their attempts to learn how to implement industry best practices.

KCACC's problems are far reaching and include:

- Dismal shelter conditions and animal care protocols, resulting in inhumane care;
- Continual outbreaks of disease that indicate lack of proper cleaning and vaccination protocols;
- Animals allowed to suffer for lack of medical treatment;
- Lack of accountability and transparency regarding shelter policies and practices;
- Records that are incomplete and/or inaccurate; and,

- Missed opportunities to save the lives of animals or properly respond to calls for service.

The same problems that plagued the shelter ten years ago plague the agency today. Animals are not being fed, care is poor, and suffering is the norm. Instead of acknowledging problems and working to correct them, the County Executive and RALS have taken the position that the shelter is doing a great job, and continue to claim that only “modest” investments are needed. In this environment, there can be no reasonable expectation of success going forward.

It is true that the shelter needs significant capitalization, if not a new facility. It is true that the shelter is under-staffed. It is true that more operating resources are needed. But these will never make the agency a “model” shelter, because the County Executive fails to acknowledge the seriousness of the problems at the shelter; claims adoptions are at all-time highs, even while failing to move animals into adoption cages; claims that the shelter is a national model, even while staff fail to feed, water, or even provide minimally acceptable care to the neediest of animals; and claims it has done much to correct poor relations with volunteers, even while celebrating as improvement a wholly revocable Memorandum Of Understanding similar to agreements which were in place and then revoked in the past.

King County’s motto is to provide “efficient, effective and innovative service.” KCACC is neither efficient, nor effective, nor innovative. Since there is no reasonable expectation that, with this structure and in this environment, KCACC will ever be “efficient, effective, or innovative,” the King County Council should find a provider who will be.

Citizens have a reasonable right to expect their shelter to meet minimum standards of care and the County Executive should be accountable and actively engaged to ensure these expectations are met. The answer is not to allow this to continue or to abandon the goals, the answer is finding someone who will meet the mandates of Council.

Ten years ago, KCACC’s veterinarian complained that,

The basics of animal health care are not being provided for the animals at the Kent shelter. On any given day, one third to one half the animals available for adoption have not been vaccinated. Severely ill or injured animals enter the shelter without any notation that they may need veterinary care. In spite of clear and repeated instructions, surgery scheduling is often incomplete and inaccurate. I have often discovered animals in filthy conditions, without proper food, or forgotten for days in a back room or out of the way cage. Daily, I discover lost animals or lost paperwork. I commonly encounter resistance to my recommendations regarding cleaning procedures, vaccination policy, and disposition of animals. Overall, the general level of care for the animals, and the tracking and identification of animals is haphazard and inadequate.

When I encounter these problems, I bring them to the attention of management, often with recommendations for their solution. Despite my repeated efforts to communicate the importance of providing these basics of health care, these errors and inadequacies remain largely unchanged after 3 years. The result is that basic animal care is not being reliably provided for the animals by King County, and animals that enter the shelter quite possibly will be neglected and forgotten.

The letter is dated October 23, 1998. It might as well have been written in 2008. The issues and problems remain to this day. And there is no reason to believe that under the current structure, they won't also apply ten years from now.

KCACC has failed the animals, and there is no credible evidence to the contrary, if history and present actions are any guide, that it will not continue to fail the animals in the years to come.

General Overview

The King County Animal Care and Control agency was established in 1972 and the current shelter in Kent was built in 1975. During the 1970s, it is reported that the agency's primary focus was on controlling stray dogs and selling licenses. This focus did not change until the early 1990s when a "heated" debate ensued about the future of the agency.

A Citizens Advisory Committee was impaneled to create a series of recommendations for the agency in order to reduce rates of shelter killing, prevent animal cruelty, punish animal abusers in the community, and improve animal care and treatment in order for KCACC to become a "model" agency. These translated into goals, some of them thoughtful, others not so thoughtful, but nonetheless which included reduction in rates of killing, a punitive licensing scheme, including door-to-door canvassing, and several other recommendations.

By 1997, service area population increased to over 1 million residents, an in-house shelter animal spay/neuter clinic opened, the satellite facility was moved to what is called the "Eastside Pet Adoption Center" ("Crossroads-Bellevue facility") and, KCACC reports that "immunization of all incoming shelter dogs and cats began."¹ For the last decade or more, the County Executive's Office has portrayed the efforts of the 1990s as a success. While efforts of the 1990s to mandate spay/neuter of all animals leaving the shelter were an initial step to reduce the shelter's population, the agency never followed through with extent of the former Advisory Committee's recommendations. Despite the ongoing claim that the agency is a national model of compassionate care and control, in truth the program never did make the necessary changes to support this claim.

Many of the recommendations and goals of the 1992 Advisory Committee have not been implemented, animals are not being provided with the rudiments of food, water, and medication, cleanliness is spotty, accountability is non-existent, and too many animals continue to lose their lives. There is credible evidence that animal mistreatment by staff has gone unpunished, animal cruelty cases are not being thoroughly investigated or prosecuted, incorrect execution of temperament testing by uncertified staff condemns animals to death, lack of timely medical care for animals has resulted in increasing rates of animals dying in their kennels, lack of any standard of customer service has alienated community members, open hostility from staff towards volunteers and other stakeholders has resulted in deep-seated mistrust and mutual animosity, inconsistent and needless killing of animals continues, and, cruel methods of killing have plagued the agency.

Although, the County Executive highlights reduced rates of killing as an example of significant progress, the data is not reliable or credible. For example, animals who come in already dead (DOA) have been counted as intakes, but not counted as dispositions.

¹ In fact, as will be seen, the agency does not vaccinate all impounded animals to this day, notwithstanding the claims made by the County Executive.

As a result, the numbers of animals killed as a function of intakes is skewed, making it appear that the shelter is doing a better job than it is *as a percentage of total intakes*.

In addition, the shelter does not count the numbers of animals who die in kennel in “save rate” reporting. Not only does this provide an injudicious incentive to allow animals to die, rather than to be killed if their medical condition warrants it, but the rates of animals dying in kennels which KCACC has been experiencing is always a function of poor care and inadequate monitoring of the animals. Since KCACC is a poorly functioning shelter and as even staff has admitted, “there are few systems in place at King County Shelters to prevent the animals who arrive healthy from becoming sick; in fact, many practices at the shelter make illness nearly inevitable...” this is real cause for concern.

Furthermore, KCACC also does not count animals ostensibly killed at the request of their owners in disposition statistics. Even though KCACC claims it does a health and behavior assessment to make the determination as to whether this latter category of animals are truly non-savable, this is highly suspect, given the agency’s lack of competency in these areas, as well as RALS’ inability to produce any sort of documentation or report that supports this claim.

Moreover, animals sent into foster care are listed as live dispositions, but there is no follow-up to see if the animals are adopted out of foster, except when the foster parent follows up and reports on their own initiative. In fact, foster parents reported that KCACC often never follows up again once they receive the animals. One foster parent stated that although she found homes for the litter of kittens she fostered, KCACC doesn’t know. If they had died, they wouldn’t know because once she received the kittens, she never heard from KCACC again.

Finally, KCACC has had significant problems with data entry, including duplicate entries, lack of entries, and erroneous entries. The data management system has little reliability. With these other factors considered, the decline in killing may in fact not be as significant a decline as KCACC would have the Council believe.

Underfunded and Mismanaged

One area in which everyone interviewed (KCACC management, supervisors, staff, volunteers, and other community stakeholders) is in agreement, is that the agency has been neglected from a resource allocation perspective. But not all are in agreement about whether more resources will alleviate the primary obstacles to success. According to most of the staff and KCACC management, problems can be fixed with more staff, more resources, and better physical facilities, but this is not grounded in fact or logic. Not only is KCACC mismanaging the resources it does have, it has failed to fully avail itself of supplemental resources made available to it from pet loving members of the community: volunteers, corporate philanthropy, local organizations, community businesses, individual donors, and more.

As noted below, the agency has not made cost-recovery in its contracts with municipalities a priority even as the King County Auditor found:

If the County had been reimbursed appropriately by incorporated cities for animal control services provided in 1996, incorporated cities would have contributed about \$700,000 more to the Current Expense Fund. (Report Number 97-04.)

It has not adequately explained its decision not to allocate funds from donations totaling better than \$500,000. It has mismanaged relationships resulting in a loss of support from Tukwila PetSmart, Friends of KCAC, and volunteers. It is mismanaging the foster care program and relationships with the Humane Society of Seattle/King County, the King County Sheriff's Office, and Code Enforcement. And it is asking the public to make donations for items KCACC has no intention of using. As a result, this is an agency that is incapable of leveraging resources to create systems that would allow it to run as an efficient and effective agency.

Nonetheless, it is true that KCACC has been run without adequate resources by the County Executive. The Guild, for example, has taken the position that staffing is too low based on models that use officer to citizen ratios in service areas. While this is perhaps the most popular method of determining staffing levels, it is not the most accurate. Population ratios are used by groups like the National Animal Control Association ("NACA") because they tend to result in high field officer to population estimates. Groups like NACA are opposed to the types of community-based sheltering philosophies that No Kill represents. They also tend toward a heavy bias in favor of punitive-based enforcement philosophies, such as the Executive's "No Tolerance for Licensing" campaign, that are responsible for citizen-shelter discord and result in high rates of impounds and killings.

Moreover, the Guild is correct that an increase in service area population has not kept pace with increases in resources adequate to the job and as a result, the County Executive, RALS, and KCACC management continue to push the staff "to do more with less," without giving them the resources (including staff, management, training, tools, systems, and systems of accountability) to do the job humanely and effectively.

For example, kennel cleaning staff is the backbone of animal shelter operations. Each shelter and animal care facility must be staffed each day with the appropriate number of kennel personnel to ensure that every animal is properly cared for in a safe and humane manner. Shelters and animal care facilities must maintain an appropriate daily feeding schedule for each animal in its care and ensure there is adequate staff and time to complete all the other duties and responsibilities of caring for sheltered animals, including but not limited to medication, laundry, dishwashing, lost and found, stocking and inventory of supplies, janitorial, and supplemental waste removal throughout the day.

It is the responsibility of every animal shelter and animal care facility to meet or exceed

the minimum standards of animal care for all impounded animals by maintaining a staffing level that ensures that the minimum animal care standards are adhered to on a daily basis. And it is clear that two officers caring for all dogs and two officers caring for all cats is insufficient, as is the case at Kent, especially during busy summer months.

But kennel staff impact shelter operations more than this. If an employee cuts corners and does not clean and sanitize water bowls daily leading to a parvovirus outbreak, or an employee does not scrub cat cages leading to spread of respiratory infections or panleukopenia, large numbers of animals will be needlessly killed. Saving lives requires a shelter to keep animals healthy and happy, make the shelter more inviting for the public, and allow animals to move through the system as quickly as possible. Animals who become sick reduce a community's ability to save lives.

And while it is impossible to completely eliminate disease-causing pathogens in a shelter environment, a good cleaning and disinfecting protocol can vastly reduce their impact. Unfortunately, the limited number of staff, the lack of oversight of staff, and the practices of staff, not only fail to reduce disease transmission, they actually help ensure its spread. Even KCACC staff acknowledges that:

Frankly, there are few systems in place at King County Shelters to prevent the animals who arrive healthy from becoming sick; in fact, many practices at the shelter make illness nearly inevitable...

However, cleaning is not limited to cat cages and dog kennels. Pathogens can be spread by air, and tracked by human and animal traffic throughout the shelter. This requires lobbies and hallways to be cleaned daily by shelter staff trained to clean in a shelter environment—not just janitorial or facilities crews who have generic policies for County buildings. This did not occur during my review, and does not appear to occur with any degree of regularity, if at all, at KCACC.

KCACC complained that it does not have the staff to do this, but a good cleaning protocol reduces workload over time by allowing animals to remain healthy and therefore move quickly through the shelter system. In addition, saving lives is a shelter's primary mission. This can only be accomplished if animals can be kept healthy. Finally, all shelter animals deserve cleanliness and proper care—even if they are scheduled to be killed.

In addition, in order to save more lives, a shelter must ensure that animals move through the system as quickly and efficiently as possible. Unfortunately, at KCACC, adoption cages remained empty throughout the week I was present even as animals in stray and non-viewing areas closed to the public housed cats who were ready to be moved and should have been moved, but for failure on the part of staff to do so, and no systems to ensure that they did. Even as Supervisors signed off on “checklists,” they failed to notice the 15 empty cages which could and should have been filled with “adoptable” cats.

Finally, a cat or dog sitting in a filthy kennel undermines a smile and “hello” at the door. Good customer service not only means being courteous, friendly, and responsive to the public, it means working hard and keeping the shelter clean, something KCACC was unable to show it does *with systematic regularity* (there is no doubt that the work is hard and that some staff do so). Regardless of days and times that the shelter is open to the public; shelters are a 365-day per year operation. Even on days the shelter is closed (such as holidays), animals must be cared for, fed and cleaned. The responsibility for this falls on the kennel attendants.

In addition, where field services ensure public safety, rescue animals in distress and provide important balancing between animal “care” and animal “control,” and where animal caretakers (i.e., kennel attendants) keep the animals clean, healthy and safe, office support staff/adoption and intake counselors are the primary “eyes, ears and faces” of the organization. They answer telephones, greet people at the door, impound and adopt animals, match lost with found pets, license pets, handle cash, and perform data entry and other clerical duties. In many shelters, they also help oversee inventory.

These duties are not simply ministerial. A good adoption/intake counselor can make the difference between someone surrendering their pet and someone resolving environmental, behavioral or medical problems that allow them to keep the pet. While many of the reasons animals are surrendered to shelters are unavoidable, others can be prevented—but only if shelters are willing to work with people to help them solve their problems. Saving all healthy and treatable pets requires communities to develop innovative strategies for keeping people and their companion animals together. And the more a community sees its shelter as a place to turn for advice and assistance, the easier this job will be. In addition, they can make the difference between a good and potentially failed adoption through careful screening and thoughtful counseling. Once again, these efforts were haphazard and lethargic in King County, and as it relates to pet retention, virtually non-existent.

Where cities or agencies only count the calls for service, volume of animals, population ratios, and other benchmarks within a community to determine optimum staffing, officer safety, citizen safety, quality of programs, No Kill goals, and major types of service delivery are not factored into overall staffing needs. In animal care and control work, goals, responsibilities, and expectations also need to be a consideration for future planning. Staffing a shelter involves trade-offs and common sense. Therefore, the service spectrum in each sheltering program varies according to the management style and philosophy of the director, established goals for lifesaving, policies of government and community expectations. None of these have been addressed by the County Executive, because there has been no systematic effort at meeting goals. Instead, the County Executive repeatedly expressed that KCACC is already a model program when in fact the program cannot be considered a model by any current standard, Failure to acknowledge that KCACC is in need of serious systemic reforms prevents the County Executive from indentifying solutions that would contribute to the development and implementation of a real model program.

But regardless of the method used or not used, there can be no question that KCACC is understaffed. Not only is the agency understaffed, but the staff is poorly utilized, not valued, and not held to standards, and this has led to chronic poor performance, lack of proactive efforts to improve, and a culture of defeatism. In fact the bar has been set so low that supervisors boldly state they have done all they can, even when the shelter is not feeding or providing fresh water to sick animals who need it the most. More than that, this materializes itself as dead animals, high stress levels among both the people associated with the agency and the animals, and therefore higher than normal rates of disease and inappropriate behaviors.

This is not a condemnation against any particular staff member. Staff has not been given appropriate training, and they do not appear to have the skill set to apply situational rationality to the situation, which exacerbates the deficit between the standards sought by the Council and the reality of poor care. This leads to feelings of hopelessness on the part of the staff, and a feeling that the public scrutiny and Council directive to improve the shelter is nothing more than a witch hunt.

The County Executive has failed to prioritize the animals and staff at KCACC and this is the foundation of the ongoing problems found at KCACC. The working conditions at KCACC are a recipe for poor morale and poor performance.

The end result is that staff who care are so overworked and have to deal with so many animals because others can't or won't, that no opportunity is created for them to bond with individual animals in a way that volunteers do, so that these animals have no champions within the organization. As a result, staff do not follow-up when animals need it, supervisors assign jobs to staff without the tools staff need to complete them, checklists are filed but not audited giving only the appearance of accountability, and the animals continue to suffer with problems the agency should have resolved a decade ago. And when changes are made, they are fleeting and superficial.

That is why it should be no surprise that staff, supervisors, volunteers, rescue groups, community shelters, and other stakeholders who responded to surveys and interviews gave KCACC management, RALS, and the County Executive poor performance marks.

KCACC Review & Findings

Physical Facilities

KCACC's main shelter, located in Kent, WA, was built in 1975 as a facility to warehouse and kill dogs in an area far away from prime residential, retail, and financial areas of the County. It is an area that can be classified as "rural" and "industrial" or "light industrial." The shelter is located across the street from a Federal Express distribution center and near Boeing, Inc. Because of its poor location for adoption purposes (prime commercial, retail, and residential corridors as opposed to industrial or farming corridors), the success of the shelter relies on community outreach programs, which the Citizens Advisory Committee accurately described as "paltry at best." Sadly, I found this to be true also. In addition, given the deficits of location, the shelter must make a concerted effort to be clean, friendly, and welcoming. This, too, was not the case.



The Kent shelter is located in a mostly industrial area away from prime residential and retail corridors which are the backbone of a high volume adoption shelter. As a result, its success depends on comprehensive community outreach programs operating at a high caliber of competency. Unfortunately, the Advisory Committee accurately described them as "paltry at best."

The outside grounds of both the Kent facility and its satellite Crossroads-Bellevue facility were dirty and in disrepair. The Kent facility's parking lot had enormous pot holes (and during my visit was flooded because of poor grading).



Potholes flood during rainy weather, and provide for a very bumpy ride at the Kent facility, especially in the area where animal control transport vehicles are bringing animals into the facility.

Coffee cups and other trash littered the outside of both facilities (although Kent was far cleaner than Crossroads). And although I did not visit Crossroads until later that afternoon (and they were expecting my visit), the outside grounds there were nothing short of filthy.



Trash litters the outside of the Crossroads shelter, much of it appearing to be old garbage.



Dozens of cigarette butts, coffee cups, and other trash litter the front, sides, and back parking areas at the Crossroads shelter. This is what first greets visitors of this relatively affluent community.



A trash strewn parking lot and broken shutters (which are absolutely black with filth from the lobby vantage point), haphazardly placed signage, and hours that ignore the goal of increasing adoptions greet visitors to King County Animal Control in Crossroads-Bellevue.

A national animal welfare agency has indicated that,

A community's animal shelter is the heart of an animal care and protection program and facilities and grounds should be maintained so that they are attractive and welcoming to the public. The... maintenance levels of the physical building itself can be—or can appear to be—reflective of how strong and caring the internal programs are.

First impressions are lasting and as visitors approach the shelter, the impression they receive should be positive and inviting. At KCACC, this was not the case. I was greeted by pot holes, a flooded parking lot, trash and cigarette butts, filthy and broken shutters, and (at Kent) a sign discouraging adoptions and warning me that visiting put my own dogs at risk. It states:

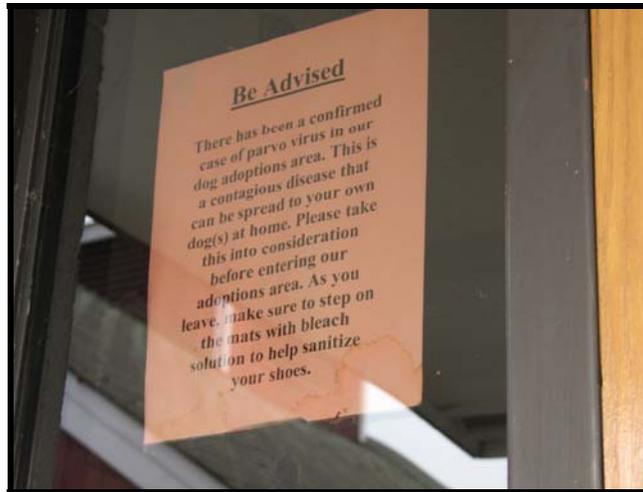
Be Advised. There has been a confirmed case of parvo virus in our dog adoptions area. This is a contagious disease that can be spread to your own dog(s) at home. Please take this into consideration before entering our adoptions area. As you leave, make sure to step on the mats with bleach solution to help sanitize your shoes.

There were no mats with bleach solutions in public areas of the shelter, and it was not merely informative, but prophetic: while individual cases of parvovirus will always exist in a shelter environment, epidemics of the disease are almost always caused by poor cleaning and handling protocols, both endemic problems that plague KCACC. Moreover, despite its chilling effect on adoptions, KCACC management stated on January 30 that the sign was no longer relevant, and had not been since the summer, and should have been taken down. I was told it would be taken down immediately. This did not occur. I arrived over two weeks later on February 18 and was greeted by the same sign. It remained on the door when I left on February 21.

Entering the lobby did nothing to alleviate concerns. When I entered the Kent facility, I was also greeted by a filthy floor and the stench of urine and fecal matter. At the Crossroads facility, not only was there trash everywhere, but the shutters were broken and nearly black with filth on the inside.

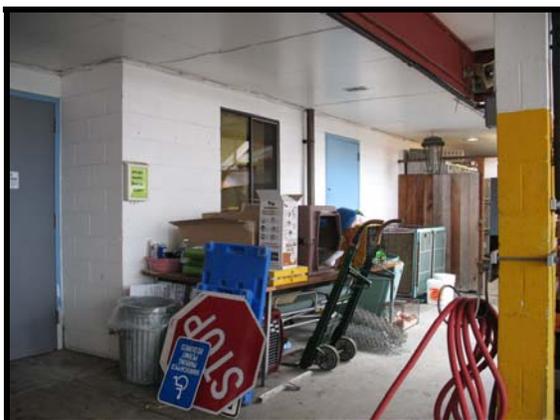
The shelter is grossly inadequate. It was built for use as a dairy farm and has never been upgraded to provide for the humane housing of domestic animals. There are approximately forty or so usable dog runs which were housing nearly twice that many dogs during my review and many more during busy summer months. Because of the nonexistent proper air flow, the dog area had an overwhelming stench that made it difficult, if not unhealthy, to breathe. In addition, all rooms and animal holding areas were inadequate (with the possible exception of the Surgery suite), there were improper draining systems, and lack of ongoing maintenance to keep the shelter in repair. According to County Facilities management, despite these limitations, the County Executive has made a calculated decision that the current physical facility at Kent is not worth fixing.

But, as shown below, a new facility alone will not change the prognosis for the Council's goals as articulated in Ordinance 15801 and Motion 12521. The reason for this is primarily two-fold. First, nationally, the promise of substantial improvements in rates of lifesaving on building a new facility has not been borne out. Second, if a shelter is not utilizing existing resources and failing to provide the most basic rudiments of care, or even mismanaging the potential offered with existing resources, there is no basis to believe they would not do the same by simply relocating the same culture of neglect to a new location.



A sign at the entrance to the Kent facility warns all visitors to be wary of adoption and that entering KCACC puts their own dogs at risk.

In back areas (although outside of public view), the Kent shelter was in a state of disarray, with piles of junk, bags of dirty laundry, and embarrassed representations by KCACC management that they were in the process of "cleaning up."



Broken street signs, 30-gallon trash cans filled to the top with dirty rain water, broken kennels and carriers, construction debris and trash show the state of sheltering at KCACC and belie claims by County Executive staff that oversight includes regular visits to the shelter.



Piles of food on wet (combination of water, bodily fluids, and cleaning chemicals) and dirty floors, right next to buckets of caustic chemicals (left, and corner right).

This is the same area where animal control trucks unload animals arriving from the field, and where they are supposed to clean out the holding areas for animals in the truck bays with detergents and chemicals. On top of this wastewater mix (which potentially includes chemicals, detergents, and animal bodily fluids), food is piled up in bags waiting to be used for shelter animals, a source of possible and potentially dangerous contamination.



Piles of food on wet (combination of water, bodily fluids, and cleaning chemicals) and dirty floors, right next to buckets of caustic chemicals.

In this back area are three outside kennels. I asked if they were temporary housing for dogs as officers unloaded trucks, but KCACC management told me that they were used to house dogs going immediately to rescue to keep them out of the shelter so that they would not be exposed to disease. I was later told by a representative of Friends of KCAC that they have been used to house dogs with parvovirus to keep shelter dogs from being exposed to disease. And finally, I was told by a staff Sergeant that they were used only for storage.

Receiving different answers in different circumstances or over time was a recurring theme during the evaluation, and a complaint by community stakeholders. Organizational respondents to the survey, volunteers, rescue groups, even staff members complained that they received different responses to the same inquiries depending on political expediency, or based on what KCACC management thought they wanted to hear. As will be discussed as it pertains to the room where animals are killed (the “euthanasia room”), this pattern of misinformation not only made it difficult to get basic information about shelter operations, but also prevented capacity building which would improve operations.

The front lobby of the Kent shelter is a tiny room, with three functions, none of which has enough space to function effectively, nor enough staff to handle the influx of demands. It is here where intakes are processed (owner surrendered animals and stray animals brought in by the public), where adoptions are processed, and where redemptions (lost and found) are handled. In addition to assisting the public and processing animals, the single staff member assigned is supposed to answer telephones.



Three dog kennels are either used for healthy dogs to be segregated from disease in the shelter, for sick dogs to segregate them from healthy dogs in the shelter, or for storage, depending on who you talk to.

This is an impossible situation. Even with assistance (the staff member pages another officer during peak periods), this area is chronically understaffed for the volume of work involved. (I heard front desk officers paging multiple times in frustration because other officers did not hear or respond to the calls for assistance.)



Through this area is the “public” area where animals available for adoption are housed: one room containing one bank of kennels for dogs, a small hallway with six condo-type cat cages, and a cat adoption room with two banks of stainless steel cages facing one another. The dog kennels are made up of traditional chain link fencing with concrete walls (much of it porous, filthy and discolored). Open trenches containing waste water, urine and fecal material are shared between kennels in the rear putting the dogs at significant risk for cross contamination and disease, but after years of complaints, County Facilities crews were finally in the process of covering these, due in large part to the recent report of the Advisory Committee and in advance of a visit by a veterinary team from U.C. Davis. While the covering of the drains was a welcome addition, it should be noted that a veterinarian formerly affiliated with KCACC reported that he requested that these be covered nearly a decade ago, but KCACC management did not do so until recent public uproar over the quality of care at the agency.

Upon my arrival on January 30th and review of the kennels, I saw dogs standing in their own fecal waste. Three hours later, despite a sign that required staff to do “spot cleaning,” and signatures indicating that it had been done at 10 am, 11 am, and 12 pm, the same feces remained in the kennels (calling the veracity of the information and the extent of the oversight and follow-up) into doubt. (This sheet was not present when I first arrived, but was on the wall between the time I left the area, went into the administrative part of the shelter for a meeting with management, and then returned for an “official” tour.)



Despite a sign that indicated the kennels had been “spot cleaned,” the same piles of feces were evident in the dog kennels hours later calling the veracity of the information and the extent of oversight into doubt.

Few of the dogs outside of public view had dog beds, some did not even have blankets, and none (except one) had enrichment items like toys or treats. Most had to lie down on concrete floors with no soft bedding of any kind. None of the dogs in the adoption room had anything but kennel beds. Shortly after I arrived, while I was in the administrative area of the shelter, a half dozen toys were carelessly strewn about (almost all “fell” in one kennel but a couple landed in the second kennel, as it appeared that someone simply opened the door to the dog adoption room and literally threw the toys in). For some reason, when I returned a short time later that afternoon, all the toys had been removed again.

Through a narrow hallway, with six large cat condo-type cages, a door separates the public area of the shelter, from stray, quarantine, and other non-public rooms. Two banks of cat cages, with a small number of cats in one, share a room with a large number of stray dogs (many of whom were barking), providing a very stressful environment for the cats. About five cats were in the cages, all huddled in the back of the cages, with their ears back, a sign of high levels of stress. Studies show that the biggest indicator for disease outbreak and anti-social behavior is the stress level of the animals. In this environment—combined with ignorance of basic principles of animal handling and behavior among the staff as discussed below—these cats are at heightened risk for being unfairly and inaccurately labeled as “unadoptable” and being killed for “behavior” reasons, or—combined with lack of vaccinations, poor cleaning and handling protocols—getting sick and being labeled as “unadoptable” and being killed for “health” reasons.



I arrived for an unannounced visit in January and found a shelter in disarray.

Like the trench drains, KCACC was making improvements in the conditions of the shelter for animals by moving the cat cages out of this area and into rooms currently occupied by field officers. While these new areas have no drains, and had standing water during my February visit as a result, in terms of stress, it was a marked improvement for the cats. Notwithstanding, cats housed in “stray” areas away from public view were nonetheless housed in small filthy cages, with caked on dust, grime, dirt, hair, and bodily fluids on the front cage-type doors.



Rather than provide housing conducive to the health and well-being of cats, KCACC houses them in old, dirty, difficult to disinfect cages which were donated by a primate center to KCACC in lieu of discarding them.

A “euthanasia room” sits adjacent to the cat stray area and has been the subject of much debate, centering on both method of killing and the practice of allowing animals waiting to be killed to watch other animals being killed. (I was told by KCACC management that the cages would be removed before my visit in February, but that did not occur.) In this room sits a table where animals are killed, a bank of cages, and a sink. A second door leads to the unload bay in the back, which provides easy access to the cooler, where the bodies of dead animals are stored pending removal.

Because of the shortage of staff, a lack of oversight by management and supervisors, and lack of systems for proper care, dogs were forced to eat and drink in filthy kennels covered with fecal waste and urine. A staff of two was responsible for caring for approximately 70 dogs during my visit, providing no time or effort to remedy this basic care and comfort issue.



Two dogs share a kennel covered in fecal matter and urine. Dogs are fed in feces filled kennels, and staff does not appear to check or follow up to see if the dogs have eaten.

But by far the most inadequate and problematic area of the shelter belonged to animals who needed it the most: sick cats in what passes for King County Animal Control's infirmary or isolation room ("infirmary").



The wall of King County Animal Control's room for the neediest and most at risk animals: sick cats in what passes for the agency's isolation room or infirmary. The room has no ventilation, cooling, or heating, despite promises to do so going back years, and does not even have running water or a sink. Staff has to carry buckets of water and disinfectant from other rooms in order to clean and care for the cats.

This is a small room which was converted from a storage area or large closet. There is no entry from the main facility, except by a door leading to the outside. The floors and walls are filthy and in disrepair, there is no ventilation, heating, or cooling, except by what is provided by a plug in radiator-type heater, and there is no sink and no running water. Veterinary staff reports that they have to bring in two buckets (one filled with water and the other with disinfectant) when they clean and provide care for the cats. This is neither reasonable, efficient, effective, nor sanitary.

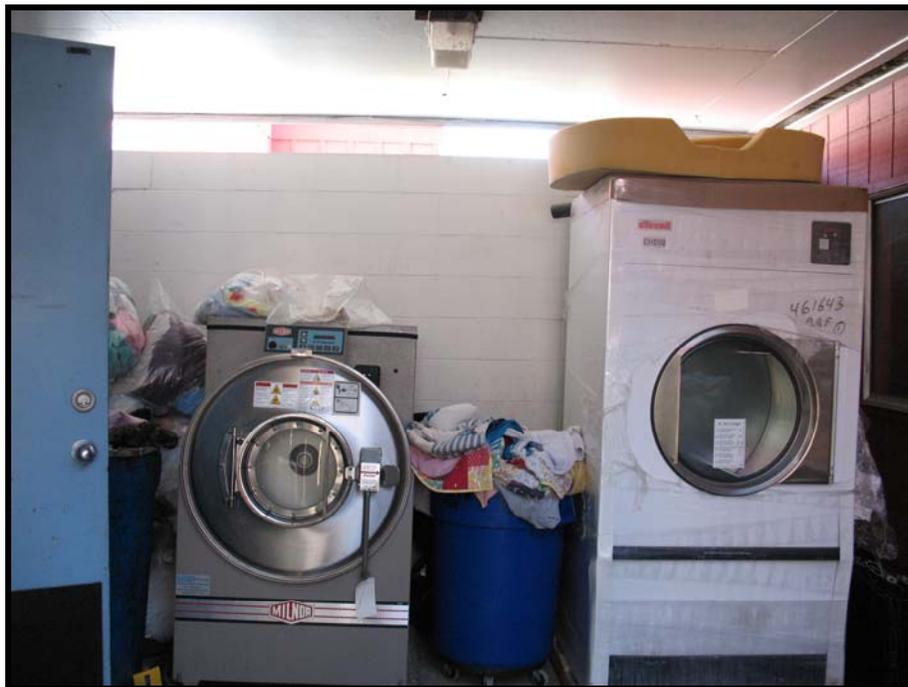
Moreover, I never saw either bucket, even during times when staff was cleaning or medicating the animals. These cats have a standard of care that cannot, under the best of circumstances, even be described as an afterthought. Animals in the infirmary are living in inhumane conditions. During my visit in February, these cats went over 24

hours—and quite possibly longer—without water, food, and cleaning (or potentially medication), as discussed below.

Nor has this area been a priority for KCACC management and/or the County Executive, despite promises to the contrary. In an e-mail dated August 5, 2005, over two years ago, KCACC management assured Friends of KCAC that the infirmary was being enlarged and modernized, including new Heating, Ventilation and Air Condition (“HVAC”) systems, because “the plan has been approved and we do have the money in our budget to do it. We are on the Facilities project list. The remodeling project will include extending the HVAC system to the isolation room. The room also will be enlarged.”

This assurance came in response to a plea asking for progress since “It has been almost a year” since the promise was made. As of February 2008, and despite the assurances, this still has not occurred. Not only is ventilation still a problem, but the cats in that room are being heated by a plug-in heater, which is not monitored in the evening, posing a health and safety risk.

Separating the kennel areas of the shelter from the administrative area and spay/neuter clinic is a breezeway, containing cat cages exposed to the elements, which I was told was used “in nice weather” for sick cats, but which others claimed housed cats even during periods of inclement weather. There is a large unused commercial washer and dryer in this area, which has also been the subject of much public debate over its lack of use, and a Council mandate to have them installed. Next to these unused appliances are piles of mostly dirty laundry.



The administrative area is carpeted (it was filthy and filled with stains; at one point a dog had defecated all over the hallway, leaving stains), and also used as a call center and employee meeting and break area. There is a small area that is used for volunteers to take cats out of their cages and socialize with them, but this requires volunteers to carry the cats across the shelter, through the dog area or through the unload bay, through the breeze way, and into the administrative building. This area is also carpeted and also dirty, an area of potential contagion since it would be impossible to disinfect, let alone clean.

On the opposite side of the administrative building is a spay/neuter clinic. The area has its own entrance and lobby, but it is used only for in-house and foster animals, and has difficulty meeting the demands of these populations as it is. The clinic was the cleanest area of the shelter—a testament to the commitment of the skeleton crew of two (one veterinarian and one veterinary technician)—and thankfully so, as this area is primarily used for surgery.

Crossroads-Bellevue Facility

I subsequently visited the Crossroads-Bellevue facility. The staff member on duty was expecting my arrival since I left Kent and informed staff I was heading up there. Contrary to the reports I have since received about the “normal” state of the shelter from volunteers, the animal areas were relatively, though superficially, clean and all dogs had blankets.

The Crossroads shelter was built as a veterinary clinic and was never meant to house animals as an intake and adoption facility for an open admission municipal shelter. Although the kennels for dogs were clearly inadequate in size, and while I heard a lot of complaints about the lack of space, the main problem at Crossroads is actually poor utilization of existing space and poor protocols. A storage room filled with unusable junk was available and it would in fact re-emerge as an (unused and filthy) infirmary during my February visit.

There are two hallways for dogs, one housing “available” or “adoptable” dogs, and the other for strays. Each hallway has banks of dog kennels facing one another, although one entire row on the adoption side is so small as to be unusable. Instead, they are either empty or used as storage spaces for fans, unused dog beds, hoses, dog and cat carriers, cages, and other items, or simply left empty. As a result, there are only nine usable adoption runs, of which five were empty when I arrived (two were being used for storage and three were simply empty).

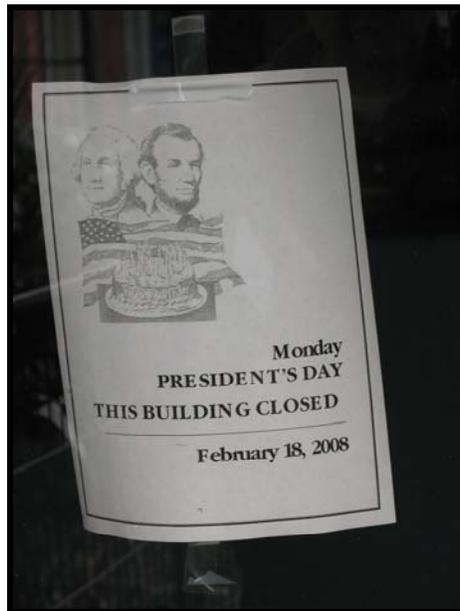


While all of the cats had food, water, and bedding, ten of the 29 cages were empty. This represents lost opportunities for lifesaving if animals are in the system and able to be adopted as they are at Kent. Given the number of animals at the Kent shelter, some can and should have been transferred to Crossroads-Bellevue for adoption. While none of the cages housing cats were messy, they also could not be classified as “clean” by standards necessary to control disease. The cage doors had dust, grime, hair, and bodily fluid build up. Some of the cages were in a state of disrepair (such as holes and duct tape repaired deterioration), which made it easy to harbor pathogens and impossible to properly sterilize even under the best of circumstances.



Under all of these circumstances, it is clear that KCACC was operating at a sub-standard level of care. Given that this is an agency which has been in operation for thirty years, with many employees who have had a long history with the organization, this was incredibly disappointing and not at all what I should have found. This is especially true given the intense public scrutiny of the agency and given that it came over fifteen years after the first Advisory Committee issued a series of recommendations, and months after the second issued a stunning indictment.

I would return for a pre-announced four day review two weeks later. Given that staff was aware of my arrival, I should have found cages and kennels cleaner, animals getting proper care, KCACC operations running more efficiently, and senior managers, supervisors, and line staff at their personal and professional best. I did not. That I did not, and the level of incompetency I discovered, form the basis for the conclusion that while there can be no doubt that KCACC's facilities are inadequate and wanting, they are not the primary limiting factor for lifesaving success.



Animal Care

I arrived at the Kent facility on February 18, 2008. Although it was President's Day, when families with children in school were at home and therefore a potentially high rate adoption day, the shelter was closed. At 11 am, I asked the Sergeant on duty if the field service staff were busy with many calls and I was told that he had "not checked messages yet," despite the hour of the day.

By noon, over four hours into the work day, none of the animals in the infirmary had been given their morning medications (even though many of them were prescribed medication two times per day), cages were still filthy, most lacked water, and no food was evident except for what appeared to be crusted over wet food that had not been

eaten from the prior day or the day before that. Several of the cats had their eyes and nose crusted over and/or bloody due to illness. When cats aren't able to smell, they often do not eat. This is dangerous and if it is a chronic problem, could lead to secondary problems, including Hepatic Lipidosis, and could explain the rising numbers of animals dying in their kennels. The eyes and noses of the cats should be cleaned multiple times per day with a warm wet cloth as needed. Unfortunately, this had not been done at all.



The neediest cats in the shelter are not provided the rudiments of food or water for over 24 hours and possibly longer. Sergeants who are supposed to oversee staff do not provide adequate oversight and sign off on forms without proper supervision.

The notations of care were dated 2/17, however, the lack of water indicated to me that they had not potentially had water for a couple of days (the shelter is closed on Sunday and has minimal oversight). In short, no care had yet been provided, even though these were the animals most in need of it.

By the early afternoon, there was still no food and water. However, given that the day was not over, and I was leaving before staff, I assumed that staff was caring for these animals last to avoid contaminating healthy animals, as indicated in written shelter protocols and confirmed by staff. I was wrong.

I checked this area first thing the following day, the animals still had no food or water and the cages were still filthy (potentially for two full days into the following morning). A small handful of them had caked, dry wet food that had obviously not been touched for two days, some still had the same empty food containers in the exact same location, yet had notations from the staff member assigned that she had viewed them "eating and drinking" on February 18. The notation was a fabrication. I informed and physically showed oversight staff.



Sick cat with bloody discharge in KCACC's isolation/infirmery hovers around an empty food bowl. The cat, and several others, did not have food or water despite staff notations to the contrary.



One of many empty water bowls in the isolation/infirmery room. Staff fabricated records showing animals were eating, drinking, and had been cared for. In addition, the Sergeant on duty "signed off" on their care.



(Above and below.) Cats in the isolation room had no food, no water, filthy litter bowls, and no paperwork regarding their illness, needs, and care instructions.





The above infirmary cat had food, but it was caked over, old canned food that was untouched. Cats who cannot smell often do not eat, but need to be forced fed while under infirmary care. Nonetheless, this cat had food in his cage, although no water. Staff notes show this cat “eating and drinking” on a day that the cat did not touch his food and had no water to drink. The following day the food remained untouched. The Sergeant on duty claimed to have signed off on “spot check” forms and submitted them to his supervisor for filing.

In addition, although internal KCACC protocols require mothers with newborns to be cared for first, and spot checking guidelines were “put into place” because of concerns by the veterinary team of U.C. Davis over inadequate oversight according to KCACC management, by 1 pm, the mother and newborns in the “nursery” had not been fed. Neither staff nor the on-duty Sergeant had noticed the lack of food. Since this room was already cleaned, I asked the veterinary technician, who was on a day off but came in on her own time to meet with a foster parent, to provide food for the cat for fear she might go 24-hours or more without being fed.

After my initial review, and when the infirmary cats still had not been provided care into the afternoon, I informed oversight staff again. Later, the on-duty animal control officer assigned to the room apologized and indicated that she has “seen it before.” She later informed me that she found the water bowls empty and when she gave the cats water, many of them drank a lot, which was unusual, also indicating lack of water. This occurred despite an on duty Sergeant who was supposed to sign off on the “Spot

Cleaning” sheets. The following date during a staff meeting, this Sergeant indicated he signed the sheets and passed them on to his superior. Clearly the oversight process was not working.

The conditions and lack of care for these animals is troubling. It is disconcerting that the very agency tasked with enforcement of animal care laws fails to provide a minimum standard of animal care. This is cause for serious concern and warrants further investigation. And what makes it all the more problematic is that it comes after a visit by a veterinary team of U.C. Davis who, according to KCACC management and veterinary staff, specifically informed KCACC management of problems and lack of oversight (which they described to members of the Advisory Committee as “heartbreaking”) and of very real concern that animals in the infirmary were not getting proper care.

Rather than work to correct the problem, a staff member involved admitted that it was decided that they would document how much time staff spends in the infirmary to show that the opposite was true, but even this plan failed during the implementation phase for failure to create the forms necessary to do so. Yet, despite this prior knowledge, and despite the fact that staff knew I was arriving to review the shelter, and despite a review by U.C. Davis just prior to my visit that uncovered problems with care in the infirmary, the animals in the nursery and the infirmary were not getting fed, and the latter were not cleaned; nor were they provided water and potentially the medications they were prescribed to get better.

Nor are these problems an aberration. These are similar to problems past and current volunteers have been complaining about for years. These are similar to problems that the Citizen’s Advisory Committee documented. These are problems observed by members of the public. These are complaints that have been made by staff. These are problems U.C. Davis observed and informed KCACC management of.

Animal Handling

Even under the best of circumstances, it would be difficult to design a more stressful or frustrating environment for an animal than a shelter. Many of these animals are used to living in homes or on the streets, and some of them come into the shelter in a compromised physical state. To bring them into a shelter with strange noise and smells, as well as inconsistent handling techniques, poor protocols, and lack of effective cleaning, adds to the stress and can lead to anti-social behaviors or illness, which at KCACC, like at many shelters, has resulted in higher shelter kill rates and subsequently lower shelter save rates.

First, while a shelter cannot eliminate some of these problems altogether, it can do many things to reduce stress, through thoughtful handling, socialization, and enrichment protocols. It is therefore crucial that shelter employees take reasonable precautions not to add to animal stress and, conversely, to take reasonable steps to help lower it. Second, while pathogens will always exist in a shelter environment, staff can put in place a comprehensive vaccination, cleaning, and disinfecting program to substantially reduce

rates of disease, and efficiently move animals through the system. KCACC does neither of these things well.

At KCACC, animals receive little enrichment, and very little socialization, “people” or out of kennel/cage time except as provided by volunteers, who were mostly absent during my review (except at Crossroads), which leads to anti-social behavior and increases stress.



While I did see volunteers during my visits to the Crossroads facility socializing the cats, few cats at the Kent shelter appeared to benefit from volunteer socialization and as discussed below, several individuals complained that they found it difficult to become a volunteer. Despite a system of “I was cuddled” cards to show which cats were socialized, as of February 21 (Thursday morning), none of the cards had been used that week, with one cat having an “I was cuddled” card on her cage, which was present the Monday I arrived and was dated “Sunday.”



Only one cat had been “cuddled” according to the system of notification in place. However, this occurred the day before my arrival. This card sat on the cage during the entire week I was there, and was still there on Thursday, five days after it was placed on the cage.

When asked about toys and enrichment strategies, KCACC has historically stated that they clog the drains and were difficult to clean. However, during my January 2008 visit, County Facilities crews were in the process of covering the trench drains. In addition, KCACC has had two large commercial washer and dryers available for years, but has not made them operational, the dishwasher in the food preparation area has a bleach attachment to both wash and sanitize, the existing washers can be used, and toys can be washed and disinfected by hand. As a result, and given that the trench drains were largely covered when I returned in February, I should have seen them during the February visit, but this did not occur.



The floor of the dog exercise yard allegedly used for strays is impossible to clean, harbors disease, and contained piles of what was clearly old fecal material. Checked daily, the piles of dog waste remained throughout my visit.

In addition, volunteers were not permitted in the “stray” dog areas, preventing the dogs, some of whom have been at the shelter for six months, from getting needed socialization. Staff indicated that some of the dogs in this area have play yards which the dogs use while the staff is cleaning their kennels, but this too is largely a fiction as most staff did not do this. (And the area remained uncleaned during my four days of review).

Moreover, during the course of my visit, there was lots of construction noise in the “food preparation/laundry” area as County Facilities crews were putting in new shelving. The noise of electric tools was very loud and I had to cover my ears while passing. Despite the fact that animals have much more sensitive hearing, no effort was made to protect the cats from the noise.

In the hallway immediately adjacent to this room, cats sat in condo-type cages and were all covering. (The door was open.) Immediately next to this is the cat adoption room. Despite a sign by the door that reads: “The door is kept closed to keep the noise level low,” the door was also left open during the construction.



Despite repeated public concerns about the need for basic comfort and enrichment items, volunteers and others have repeatedly complained that the shelter was not using available dog beds and toys, which had been purchased by community members and which KCACC encourages donations of via their “wish list.”² While most of the kennels on the “adoption” side had beds during my February visit, I did notice that beds were inconsistently used throughout the shelter. Of the 25 kennels which had dogs in the

² In addition, KCACC began stockpiling items donated for sale in the future, in spite of the fact that these donations are being sought under the false claim that they will be used to enrich the comfort of animals at the shelter. As late as March 13, a wish-list on the KCACC website was asking for donations of “Igloo brand dog houses,” “Pop-up Tents,” and other items KCACC had no intention of using in the shelter. (<http://www.kingcountry.gov/safety/AnimalServices/animalwishlist.aspx>, last checked March 7, 2008.)

“stray” area on my first day there, only two had beds. And while some of the dogs were given a blanket, the vast majority was not provided one. When I asked staff why some dogs had blankets or beds and others did not, I was not given thoughtful answers (e.g., “This dog will try and eat the blanket”), instead I was told that they would “get the dog one.” In addition, although none of the kennels had toys during my January visit except as noted earlier, some kennels had toys on the day I arrived on February 18, but these all disappeared by day two and did not make an appearance again before I left.

This inconsistent and non-use of enrichment items was a consistent complaint by volunteers. According to an Advisory Committee member:

Although sufficient Kuranda beds have been donated for each kennel to have one, they appear to only be used when KCACC is aware that guests, such as the press or the advisory committee, are coming. In our visit, only one kennel had a bed, while the others were heaped behind the kennels, or hanging from the side of the chain link.

Some volunteers report that they approached management repeatedly and as long as five years ago to purchase beds for the dogs so that the dogs did not have to lie on the floor, which was often covered with fecal matter. After repeated assurances that management “was working on it,” the purchase never occurred. In 2005 and 2006, the beds were finally purchased by a group called, “Friends of KCACC.”

Unfortunately, the beds were not used or assembled for some time. When volunteers asked if they could assemble them, they were told that this would violate Guild-KCACC labor agreements. After they were finally assembled, they were not used until recently, when heightened public scrutiny forced the issue. Even during my visit, however, the use of the beds was inconsistent, and I found many dogs forced to sleep on concrete floors.

Aside from lack of enrichment and socialization, an important tool in keeping animals healthy is a thorough cleaning protocol. As part of my operational review, I was provided cleaning protocols which, if implemented thoroughly, could have been successful at reducing rates of disease. During the course of review, I repeatedly asked RALS oversight staff in charge of providing information requested as part of this review, that if actual practice in the shelter deviates from written policies, they are to describe the deviation and explain the variance. This is the first time in my experience reviewing shelters that standard protocols were not accompanied by a statement of variance. King County RALS and executive leadership have taken the position that there is none; that in fact, KCACC is following all official policies in actual practice. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Cat cages had smeared bodily fluids (this could not only be seen on the stainless steel cages, but also on clipboards and other cage attachments) even after cleaning. In addition, cat cages had dust and dried bodily fluids on them evidencing neglect. While stand-alone cages in the hallways were being cleaned, I observed cats being removed from their cages and placed into a temporary cage, which was reused without cleaning

between cats; and in many cases, cats were not removed from their enclosures during cleaning. The process was perfunctory at best.

In order to prevent disease transmission, there are six sides (the floor, ceiling, three sides, and front door) of a cat cage which need to be cleaned and disinfected. Cleaning and disinfecting less than all six may give the appearance of cleanliness, but it does not control disease transmission.



A superficially clean cat cage with a large amount of clearly visible dried bodily fluids shows how sloppy protocols are followed at KCACC and also underscores the lack of oversight by supervisors and management.

As noted earlier, while it is impossible to completely eliminate disease-causing pathogens in a shelter environment, a good cleaning and disinfecting protocol can vastly reduce their impact. Unfortunately, the practices of KCACC not only fail to reduce disease transmission, they actually help ensure its spread.

To begin with, cleaning and disinfecting is not the same thing. Cleaning is accomplished with a detergent that removes dirt and debris so they do not interfere with the disinfecting process. Disinfecting is accomplished with a chemical solution that destroys

microorganisms. Some commercial disinfectants used by shelters are compromised in their effectiveness by organic material such as feces and hair, which is why it is important to thoroughly clean before they are applied. Adequate and thorough cleaning is necessary to maintain a healthy shelter population. Combined with good ventilation (and a comprehensive vaccination protocol), they can dramatically reduce illness.³

However, cleaning is not limited to cat cages and dog kennels. Pathogens can be spread by air (though this is less likely), and tracked by human and animal traffic throughout the shelter. This requires lobbies and hallways to be cleaned daily by shelter staff trained to clean in a shelter environment—not just janitorial or facilities crews who have generic policies for county buildings, as is the case at KCACC.

Except for the first day of my visit when the floors were professionally cleaned in anticipation of my arrival (as chairs were still standing on top of desks when I arrived), the lobby floor where dogs, cats, other animals and people enter was filthy and appeared to be uncleaned during my entire visit.

For animals coming in from the public, this is where the first exposure to disease begins. Once that occurs, the use of vaccinations (which is also spotty at best) can provide very little protection. The chance of the vaccine preventing disease may be 90% or better if given the day before exposure, but will drop to less than 1% if given the day after exposure. In addition to poor care and cleaning, in order to keep animals healthy and save more lives, KCACC must ensure that animals move through the system as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, since there is no process for doing so in a systematic manner, animals sit in their cages/kennels unavailable for public adoption or transfer to rescue groups because no one is ensuring that they are made available at the earliest possible time.

Studies indicate that every day a cat sits in a kennel increases the cat's susceptibility to disease by 5%. The longer a dog sits in a kennel, the greater the risk of both disease and anti-social barrier behaviors. Despite claims by managers, it is apparent that there is no

³ All kennels, cages, and runs must be cleaned daily with (hot) water and a broad-spectrum disinfectant proven to be effective against various bacteria and viruses common in a shelter environment (including distemper and parvovirus). Each enclosure should be cleaned, scrubbed, and disinfected before a new animal enters. Aside from a rotating system that includes commercial parvocides for dogs, I recommend a combination of chlorine bleach mixed with water (in a 1:32 dilution). That translates into ½ cup of bleach for every 1 gallon of water. It is important that only one or two people do the measuring so there is consistency. (With higher concentrations of bleach, you can see respiratory irritation that actually contributes to disease.) And it is vital that it is mixed up fresh daily and covered in an opaque container as its effectiveness over time is limited. This concentration works to kill parvovirus in dogs and calicivirus in cats, the two most difficult to kill agents of most interest in a shelter environment. (However, the efficacy of the disinfectant is compromised unless all fecal/organic matter is removed and the area cleaned with a detergent before hand.) In addition, animals should not be exposed to free standing water, detergents, or disinfectant. During cleaning, animals should be placed in separate holding areas or in carriers; animals should never be left in the cage or kennel. Enclosures should be completely dry before animals are returned to them.

daily monitoring of animals in cages which is necessary for animals to move through the system efficiently. In fact, no systematic policy for moving animals was in effect.

When I arrived on January 30, I found 14 empty cat cages in adoption, about 1/3 of all available cages. I also found sick cats housed next to healthy cats (and sick dogs housed next to healthy dogs), including possible ringworm cases, respiratory infections, and other highly contagious diseases.

In fact, KCACC routinely puts sick and highly contagious animals (respiratory infections, kennel cough, ringworm, etc.) next to healthy animals and has taken to treating animals in their kennels, regardless of their location. According to KCACC management, this is necessary because of a lack of available isolation space for dogs and because the alternative would be simply to kill these animals. But that is not entirely accurate. First, Friends of KCACC, as discussed more fully below, offered to fully pay for a modular home to be used as the infirmary, which KCACC rejected.



A dog with kennel cough is not only housed next to healthy dogs, but housed next to newly arrived dogs who are at greater risk because of heightened stress levels (they have not had an opportunity to acclimate to the shelter environment) and may not have been vaccinated against any diseases.

Second, dog kennels in the back are being tied up unnecessarily because animals aren't efficiently moving through the system, and some dogs have been sitting there for months with no plan of action despite the fact that no court cases are pending and the dogs are subject to disposition. KCACC management refuses to make decisions on

animals because of fear of outside scrutiny, officers are not following through on animal cruelty cases, and long term dogs tie up needed space.

Third, the shelter has not utilized space effectively or made (until very recently) modifications to the existing facility (including promised modifications), nor updated the facility to keep pace with the goals of the 1992 Advisory Committee, but instead falsely claimed it had already reached “model” shelter status. Finally, KCACC has underutilized volunteers and rescue groups, who can foster these animals for purposes of recovery.

As late as March 1, 2008, five months after the Advisory Committee report, a local group expressed frustration that KCACC was not calling them to help with sick animals, noting that “animals are getting sicker the longer they are in there... I would like to help the animals but if we are to work together a process must be established and adhered to.” One simple part of the process was calling the group for help, which KCACC seems unwilling to routinely do.

When asked about the empty adoption cages in January, management indicated that they had “a lot of adoptions today already” the same excuse they would give in February. This either shows management’s lack of basic knowledge about the operations of the shelter or its willingness to provide politically expedient answers. In February, I watched as the same cages remained empty throughout my four day onsite review, while available cats cleared for adoptions, continued to sit outside of public view, even though they could have and should have been moved to adoptions expeditiously.

The integrity of KCACC’s commitment to give every animal a fighting chance for life depends on keeping animals moving through the system. The current system of neglect by kennel staff, and the total lack of supervision to the movement of animals allows dogs and cats to sit for extended periods, to be exposed to disease for longer than necessary, to get sick and be killed as “unadoptable,” while KCACC misleads the public into thinking the empty cages mean that animals are getting adopted. A system of animal movement and daily walk through by supervisors is a mandatory minimum to move every animal who can be moved through the system at the earliest possible time. This system does not exist.

Because there are no real systems in place, and supervisors do a very poor job of overseeing animal handling and care, animals do not move through the system expeditiously unless a staff member takes it upon themselves to do it. Although I was there for four days, it was not until the end of my visit (February 21) that someone took it upon themselves to move some cats into the adoption room. During the first three days of my visit, there were 15 empty cat cages.



Despite available cats sitting in holding cages outside of public view and ready to be moved into the adoption area, at least a dozen cat cages sit empty both during my visit on January 30, 2008, and for the entirety of the February 18-21 visit. The integrity of KCACC's commitment to give every animal a fighting chance for life depends on keeping animals moving through the system. A system to do this does not exist.

There were plenty of cats in the stray areas so that every single one of the adoption cages could have been kept full in order to maximize adoption prospects, including A23102, a cat who arrived on February 13, was evaluated and marked "OK" to adopt but as late as 2/20 was still in the "unavailable" area, outside of public view. (See also A023147, who had a notation as "friendly," reviewed and passed for adoption on 2/18, still sitting outside of public view on 2/20, A023150, and many others).