

Advisory Board Interviews Summary

The following report summarizes the interviews obtained from the SAACS Advisory Board (Board) from March 22, 2022 to April 11, 2022. It includes successes and shortcomings, Animal Care Service-related issues in the community, and suggested areas of improvement.

Role of the Advisory Board

When asked about the role of the Advisory Board, members provided a multitude of responses. Some members feel that the Advisory Board members should be more involved in the community and that the community should be familiar with who their Board member is. Being more active can be accomplished by attending community events, HOA meetings, etc. Other responses suggested that the Board members should be a non-bias representation of their district and councilperson. Different roles of the Board members include educating the public and being more involved in developing ideas at ACS. Ultimately, the role of the Board members should be to serve and educate; and should be a collaborative effort with ACS to ensure the needs of the community are met.

Current Direction of ACS

When asked about the overall impression of whether Animal Care Services (ACS) is heading in the right direction, there was a positive response across all the collected interviews. Board members agree that ACS is heading in the right direction. One board member referred to ACS as the "golden standard" for municipal shelters, while another praised the leadership at ACS. Some Board members expressed that having Animal Care Officers (ACOs) assigned to specific districts has significantly positively impacted the community. Others referred to the innovative programs ACS is implementing, such as the CASA program and the focus ACS has on the community.

Priority Areas

Board members reported that the number of stray animals is a high priority concern in many districts. These concerns come from both citizens as well as Council members. The interviews shared that residents in certain districts cannot comfortably enjoy being outdoors due to the overwhelming number of loose dogs in the community. A consistent theme was identified in the interviews regarding the need to control the stray population while also reducing the humane euthanasia of pets. Board members want to know how ACS can serve the community when the kennels are full. They also want to see the cost of adding additional ACOs in districts with high stray populations and the cost per stray animal. Board members in districts who have assigned ACOs shared the positive impact this type of presence has in their communities. One member felt that assigned ACOs could work closely with individuals who require education and resources.

Board members also shared their concerns and ideas related to spay/neuter and other vet resources. Overall, most Board members expressed a need for more accessible spay/neuter services. Despite having funding for specific zip codes, citizens are negatively impacted by the limited number of slots spay/neuter clinics have available at any given time. Additionally, the limited number of available low-cost clinics and their locations are not convenient to most

residents. One Board member shared that some clinics "upsell" required vaccinations, which they believe should be included along with the sterilization and not as a separate cost for citizens trying to do the right thing. Board members acknowledged the need to work with private vet clinics to offer low-cost services with available City contract funding and the need to have more clinics within the community to allow better access throughout the city. A few Board members also suggested mobile spay/neuter clinics or an option to have animals picked up from their current homes and transported by ACS to receive spay/neuter services. This would benefit those in the community who cannot physically get their pet to a low-cost clinic, regardless of proximity to their residence. Having multiple locations and more options for our citizens would allow more people to have the ability to spay/neuter their pets.

Many Board members expressed concerns about deficiencies in community outreach that they feel ACS is currently facing. Some suggestions to bridge the gap between ACS and the community include organizing block walks, hanging door tags, and sending direct mailers. These efforts would help get the community involved. Some Board members reported a need for more equitable communication from ACS. There is concern that ACS's online communications are not reaching those individuals who most need services, including residents who do not have internet access, speak another primary language, or otherwise do not have access to online materials. This "boots on the ground" approach could help alleviate those concerns. Another method offered was collaborating with CPS Energy and Solid Waste Management Department by having them provide ACS information on their printed materials such as energy bills and bulky/brush pick-up flyers.

Board members indicated a desire for ACS to be known as a helpful resource to the community and to provide more community education. ACS should better publicize its purpose and services to the community, educate the public on responsible pet ownership, and put an end to the misinformation within the community about euthanizing animals. Board members would also like to see the public better informed of how 311 calls are prioritized and handled, as well as what a resident can expect after putting in a call for service.

Being able to enforce the laws was a point of interest for Board members. They asked how ACS would be able to affect real change when it comes to those who purposely break the law. Some Board members mentioned that a change in legislation that affects how pets are viewed, currently viewed as property not family, could help in this effort.

Conclusion – Strategic Themes

Although many of the recommendations provided by the Advisory Board involved tactics to improve operations, many of them touched on themes that will be relevant when developing a strategic plan. The long-term, big picture themes to come out of the Advisory Board interviews include:

- Reducing the stray/roaming population
- Making spay/neuter and low-cost veterinary services more accessible
- Increasing community awareness of responsible pet ownership



- Redefining the community's perception of ACS and increasing awareness of ACS as a resource
- Changing the culture of how pets are viewed in the community

These strategic themes will be used to shape conversations in Phase II of the strategic plan development, where ACS staff will bring together various stakeholders to inform the goals that will ultimately make up the new strategic plan.