

MESQUITE

T E X A S

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MESQUITE ANIMAL SERVICES STRATEGIC PLANNING ACTIVITIES - 2019



City of Mesquite

Animal Services Division

Mesquite Animal Services Strategic Planning Task Force (2019)

Status of 5-Year Strategic Planning Efforts

July 23, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Mesquite provides essential public safety and human and animal health protection services through its Animal Services Division (located within Mesquite's Neighborhood Services Department). Mesquite Animal Services (MAS) operates out of the Mesquite animal shelter, located at 1650 Gross Road. The Division has 14 employees, is a General Fund operation, and manages between five (5) and six (6) thousand dogs and cats each year. The FY 2018-2019 budget is \$1.3 million.

The City of Mesquite Animal Services Division has been utilizing a strategic management philosophy since 2015. This operational philosophy (the use of concisely written multi-year strategic plans) has enabled MAS to enjoy Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), thereby enhancing the quantity and quality of services provided to Mesquite residents in the areas of animal welfare and animal control (public health and safety). Both City Administration and the City Council provided focused and significant support to Animal Services in the 2014/2015 through 2018/2019 timeframe by steadily increasing MAS's annual budget. Over this five-year period, the Animal Services Division's budget was increased seventy-three (73) percent, averaging an annual budget increase of eighteen (18) percent.

The City convened a Task Force in 2015 which was comprised of nine (9) citizen-volunteers and five (5) City officials (the 2015/2016 MAS Strategic Planning Task Force). This Task Force completed a citizen opinion survey, then worked several months to complete the 2016-2019 (3-Year) MAS Strategic Plan. The plan contained eight (8) Strategic Goals. Over the period 2016 through 2018, MAS had partial success in attaining the goals established in the 2016-2019 plan.

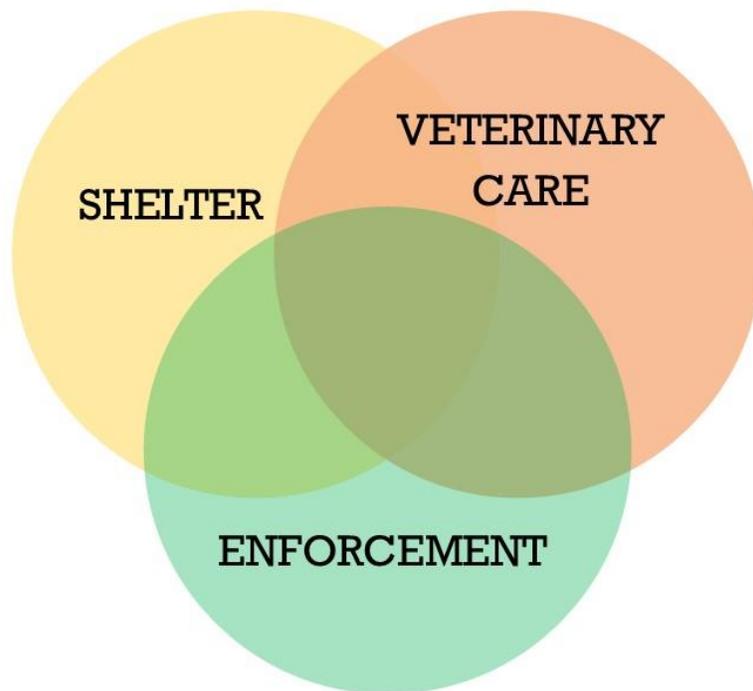
In 2017, a new leadership team assumed responsibilities for operation of the Animal Services Division. The new team brought with it a culture of high-level customer service and a major focus on high "Live Outcomes" for dogs and cats impounded at the shelter. Utilizing a dedicated team of employees, and with the passionate assistance of a large number of volunteers and rescue groups, MAS has made major, annual improvements to its Save Rate and live outcomes. The percentage of dogs and cats leaving the shelter alive has increased from 40 percent in 2012 to 93 percent in 2018 (one of the highest Live Release Rates in the United States).

In late 2018, the City convened another MAS Strategic Planning Task Force, and tasked this group with writing a new 5-Year Strategic Plan. The 2018/2019 MAS Strategic Planning Task Force consists of eight (8) citizen- volunteers (many of whom served on the previous planning group) and four City officials. The 2018/2019 MAS Task Force worked for several months (including the completion of the 2019 citizen opinion survey) and completed the selection of five (5) Strategic Goals and twenty-two (22) objectives as the core content for the 2019-2024 (5-Year) MAS Strategic Plan. From the outset, discussions were focused on creating and improving programs that would enhance five main areas:

1. Community Outreach
2. Field Responsiveness and Enforcement
3. Intake Management
4. Facility and Staff Needs
5. Live Release

It was important to all members of the task force that the goals discussed for each of these addressed an area where the three key areas of the animal services environment: shelter, veterinary care and enforcement overlapped.

Fig. 1

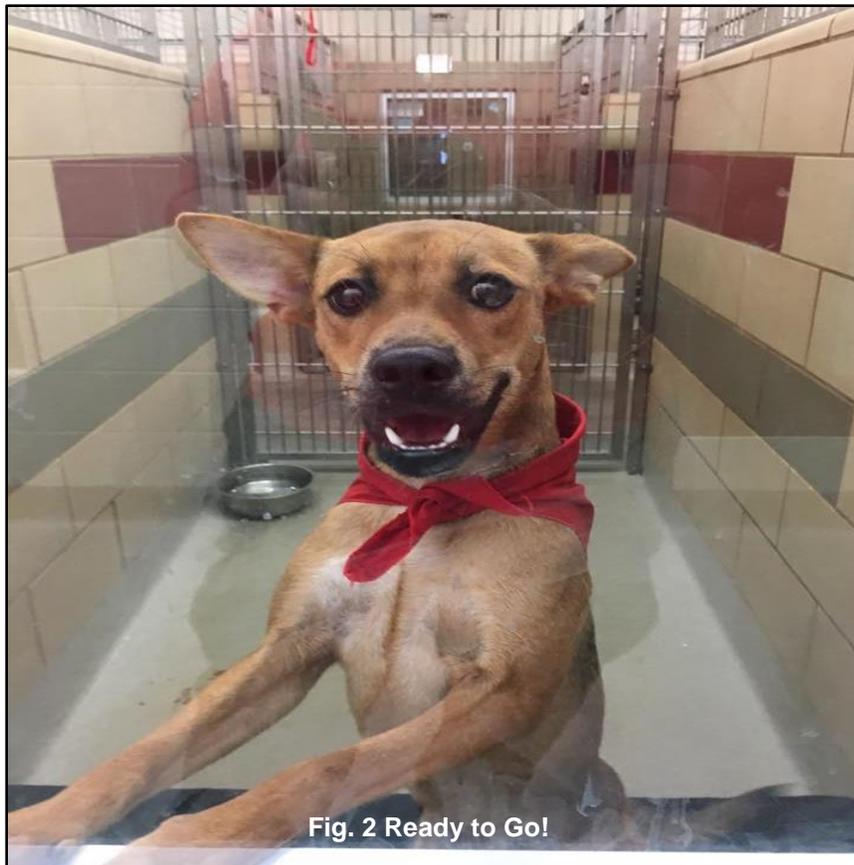


The Goals chosen by the Task Force include:

1. Achieve and sustain a 95% or greater Save Rate
2. Expand the animal shelter to increase capacity for impounded animals
3. Develop and implement a community education program
4. Modernize the animal services ordinances, regulations, and policies
5. Evaluate and align staffing based on demonstrated need

The “Next Steps” in MAS’s strategic management process include:

- Train and orient all animal services employees in all aspects of the 5-Year Strategic Plan
- Train and orient all members of the Animal Services Advisory Board in all aspects of the 5-Year Strategic Plan
- Revise and modernize Mesquite’s animal services ordinance (using a Focus Group consisting of Animal Services staff and advisory board members)
- MAS will consistently benchmark against similarly-sized animal services programs in North Texas cities to obtain evidence-based and best practice data with which to inform current and future decisions and planning
- After receiving final approval of the 2019-2024 MAS Strategic Plan from the City Council, staff will write detailed Action Plans for each of the 22 objectives in the Plan, and will craft precise timelines for initiation and completion of each objective



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Introduction

The City of Mesquite Animal Services Division has been utilizing a strategic management philosophy since 2015. This operational philosophy (the use of concisely-written multi-year strategic plans) has enabled Mesquite Animal Services (MAS) to enjoy Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), thereby enhancing the quantity and quality of services provided to Mesquite residents in the areas of animal welfare and care and animal control (public health and safety). This report captures the ideas, plans, and actions of two successive community Task Forces during the period 2015 through 2019.

The 2015/2016 Task Force began its work in October, 2015. A third-party municipal government consultant (Petty & Associates, Inc.) was utilized to facilitate the new three-year strategic plan. They met on four occasions, and ultimately created the 2016-2019 MAS Strategic Plan. This plan was stratified into High, Medium, and Low Priorities, and is summarized as follows:

High Priority

1. Improve the ability for staff to locate animal owners and reduce the average length of stay at the shelter
2. Change impound fees to encourage responsible pet ownership
3. Provide opportunities to educate the public on responsible pet ownership
4. Increase the shelter's Live Release Rate (LRR) to 90 percent or higher

Medium Priority

1. Provide field response to residents more promptly, primarily on weekends
2. Reduce the number of unwanted litters, strays, and nuisance animals impounded at the shelter
3. Have the ability to provide sterilization and rabies vaccination to adoptable animals inside the shelter

Low Priority

1. Provide a convenient space for residents to visit and adopt pets, increasing the holding capacity for adoptable animals, and promoting a positive adoption experience for residents



Fig. 3 MAS Front Desk staff assists a visitor

During the 2016-2019 time period, attainment of the goals and objectives in the adopted strategic plan was mixed. A detailed synopsis of the Animal Services Division’s work on the eight goals in the plan is included in Appendix I.



Fig. 4 Dogs await adoption in a MAS kennel

In addition to choosing the eight (8) goals described above, the Task Force agreed upon new Mission and Vision statements in 2016, as follows:

Mission Statement: Mesquite Animal Services serves the residents of Mesquite, both animal and human, with professional and compassionate animal care including education, compliance, adoptions, and disease prevention.

Vision Statement: Mesquite Animal Services will be a regional leader achieving exemplary animal welfare through humane treatment, adoption, spay/neuter, 90% live release, outreach and education.

The 2019 MAS Strategic Planning Task Force

The citizen volunteers and City of Mesquite employees that comprised the 2019 Task Force include:

Name	Representing
Danni Alcantara	Animal Services
<i>Sonja Canada</i>	Domestic Pets in Mesquite
MaryAnne Chiarelli	Mesquite Animal Pawtners; MAS Advisory Board
Brad Craft	MAS Advisory Board; rescue representative
Patti Dawson	MAS Advisory Board; rescue representative
Tracey DeChant	MAS Advisory Board; Mesquite citizen
<i>Sarah Ehlers</i>	Citizens of Mesquite
<i>Cliff Keheley</i>	City Manager’s Office
<i>Emily Mashburn</i>	Mesquite Animal Pawtners
<i>Dr. Mark Pirrung</i>	Mesquite Veterinarians/Advisory Comm.
Raymond Rivas	Assistant City Manager
Jeanne Saadi	Animal Services (MAS Manager)

Note: Names shown in Italics are Mesquite citizens who also served on the 2016 MAS Strategic Planning Task Force

The 2019 strategic planning task force was formed in late 2018, and commenced regular meetings in April, 2019. A third-party municipal government consultant (Teel Consulting Services, LLC) was utilized to facilitate the new five-year strategic planning process. A summary of the meeting dates and actions of the 2019 Task Force includes:

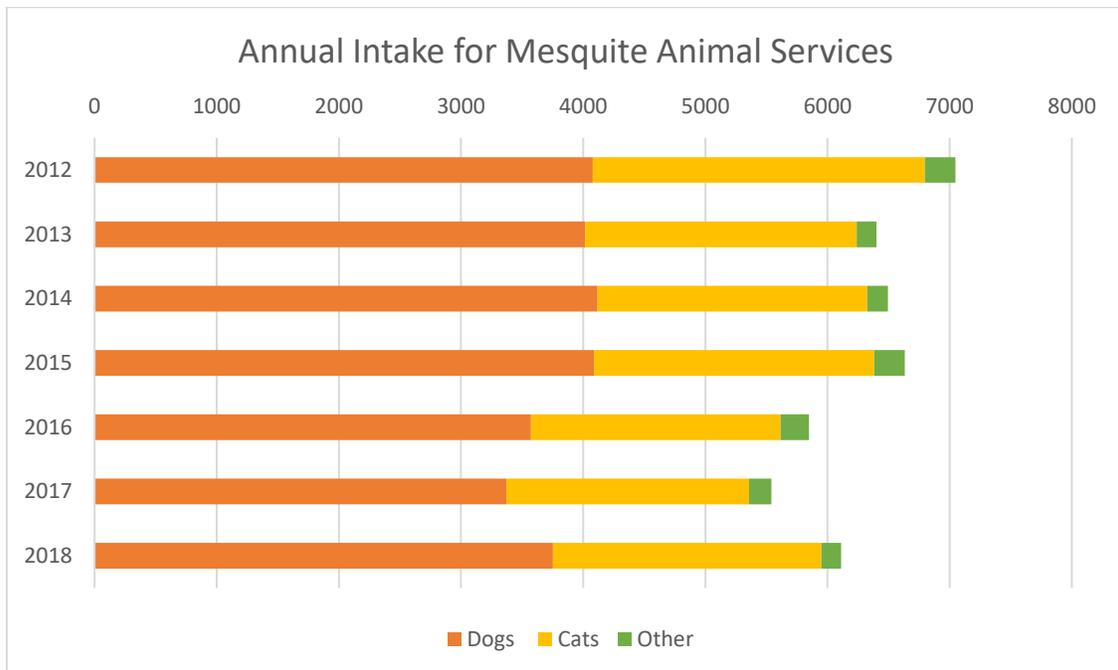
Meeting Date	Actions and Accomplishments
Saturday, April 27, 2019	6-hour “Strategic Planning 101” training session
Wednesday, May 29, 2019	3-hour session; strategic audit completed; selection of strategic goals began
Tuesday, June 11	3-hour final session; 5 Goals with 22 Objectives unanimously approved

Background

Volume of Animals Handled by the Mesquite Animal Shelter

As with some other cities in North Texas, Mesquite Animal Services has begun to see a slight decrease in the total number of dogs and cats managed by shelter staff each year. Figure 4 below includes the total number of dogs plus cats processed through the animal shelter for the past several fiscal years.

Fig. 5 MAS Intake by Calendar Year





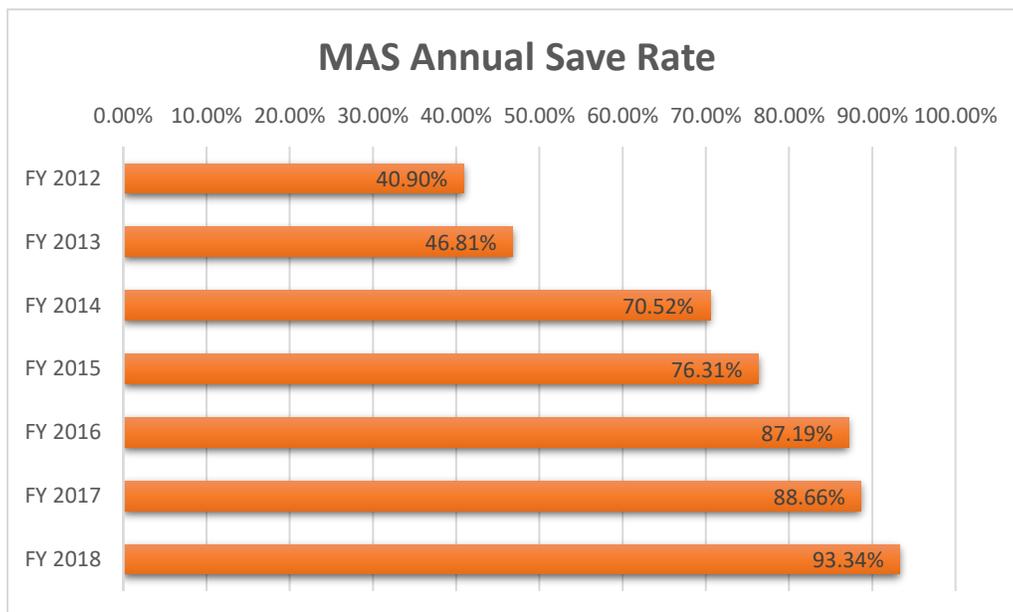
Mesquite Animal Services Live Release and Save Rate Data

One of the most critical measures of a municipal animal services program’s level of effectiveness (with respect to animal welfare and care) has to do with “Live Outcomes.” MAS places a high emphasis on maximizing the number and percentage of dogs and cats that get reclaimed, adopted to a new owner, or provided to a rescue group. Over the past seven (7) years, MAS employees (working with numerous volunteers, rescuers, and humane organizations) have succeeded in greatly improving on a statistic known as “Live Release Rate.”

For the purposes of this report, it is important to denote the difference between “Live Release Rate” and “Save Rate.” For their monthly reports, MAS chooses to report a “Save Rate” figure. The Save Rate denotes not only those animals that have found a live release option (return to owner, adoption, trap-neuter-return or rescue transfer), but also those impounded animals that remain at the shelter as many dogs and cats are staying at the shelter far past their stray hold release dates in order to maximize their opportunity for a live release. By contrast, the “Live Release Rate” denotes only those animals that left the shelter with a live release option divided by the intake plus starting animal inventory for that time period. It does not account for those animals in the shelter not euthanized but still awaiting a live release so we feel it is not as indicative of the lifesaving success of Mesquite Animal Services.

This trend is shown in Figure 6 below:

Fig. 7 MAS Save Rates by Calendar Year



It should be noted that the live release rate from the Mesquite Animal Shelter in FY 2012 was only 40 percent, meaning that nearly two-thirds of all dogs and cats entering the shelter were euthanized. Beginning in 2014, and continuing through the current year, the staff and volunteers at the shelter have dramatically increased live outcomes, achieving a greater than 90 percent save rate in 2018 (which they have maintained for over 24 months). MAS's current live outcome data are now among the highest in the United States.



In fact in a comparative analysis of other shelters of similar size in the North Texas area for 2018, Mesquite Animal Services had the lowest euthanasia rate of responding municipal shelters. The numbers also reflect the overwhelming success Mesquite Animal Services has achieved in building partnerships with both local and national animal rescue organizations in order to achieve and maintain a high save rate.

Fig. 9

2018	Mesquite	Arlington	Grand Prairie	Collin County	Fort Worth	Plano	Irving
Annual Intake	6112	7818	7451	5289	14210	5101	6027
Total Adoptions	1671	2315	1846	2585	7082	2651	1630
Total Rescue	2900	2331	757	1276	2205	0	1161
Overall Euthanasia %	5%	33%	18%	9%	10%	8%	8%

History of Resources Provided for Mesquite Animal Services

The City of Mesquite provides resources for the effective meeting of MAS's mission. A summary of the annual adopted budget and staffing levels for MAS is as follows:

Year	Approved Budget Amount	Staffing Level
FY 2014-2015	\$751,959	10
FY 2015-2016	\$828,338	11
FY 2016-2017	\$1,074,898	14
FY 2017-2018	\$1,286,660	14
FY 2018-2019	\$1,301,290	14



Results of 2019 Mesquite Animal Services Citizen Opinion Survey

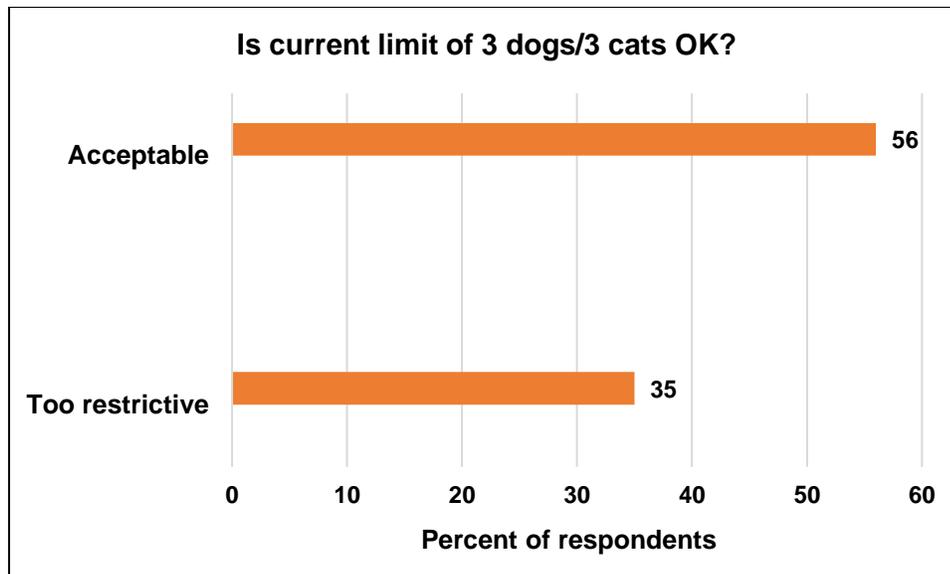
As a component of the 2019 MAS Strategic Planning Task Force efforts, the City of Mesquite conducted a survey of Mesquite residents to capture current opinions on various issues related to animal services. The survey asked 19 questions, spanning a broad range of animal services topics. A total of 487 responses was received. Sixty (60) percent of the respondents have lived in Mesquite more than 20 years, and age ranges of citizens who took the survey were fairly evenly divided from 18 to 65 (or older). The full survey can be accessed at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-RWZJ9FCK7/>

A brief summary of the results of 487 responses is as follows:

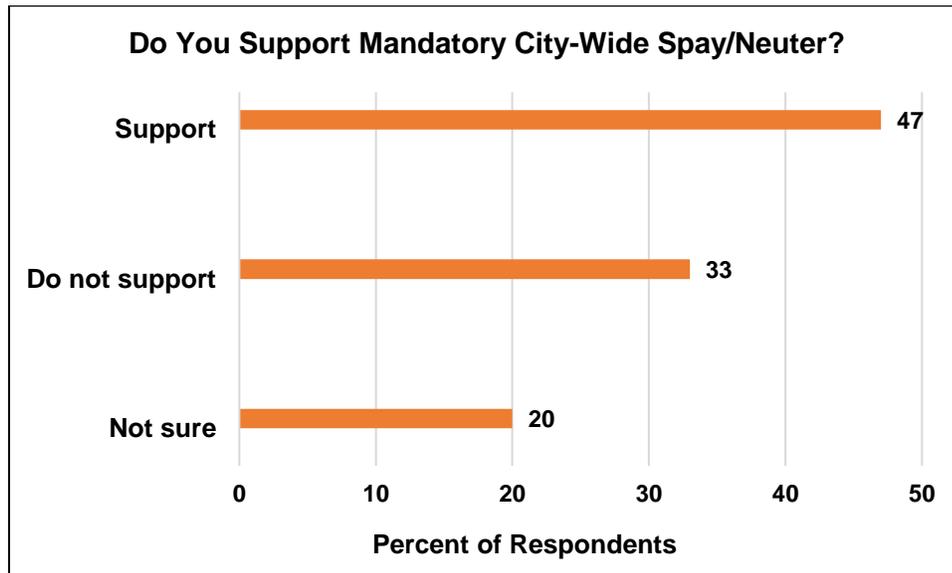
- With respect to Mesquite’s current maximum limits for dogs and cats (no more than 3 dogs and 3 cats), 56 percent agree that the current limitation is acceptable; 35 percent believe the current limit is too restrictive; and 9 percent believe the City should have more stringent pet limits

Fig. 10



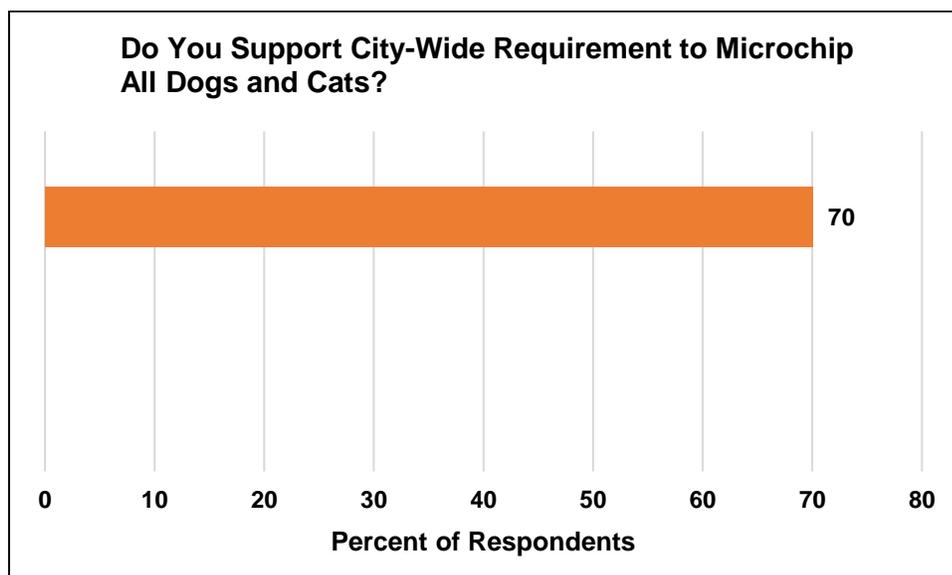
- Forty-seven (47) percent of respondents indicate support for mandatory city-wide spay/neuter of dogs and cats, while 33 percent do not support this requirement. Twenty (20) percent were not sure

Fig. 11



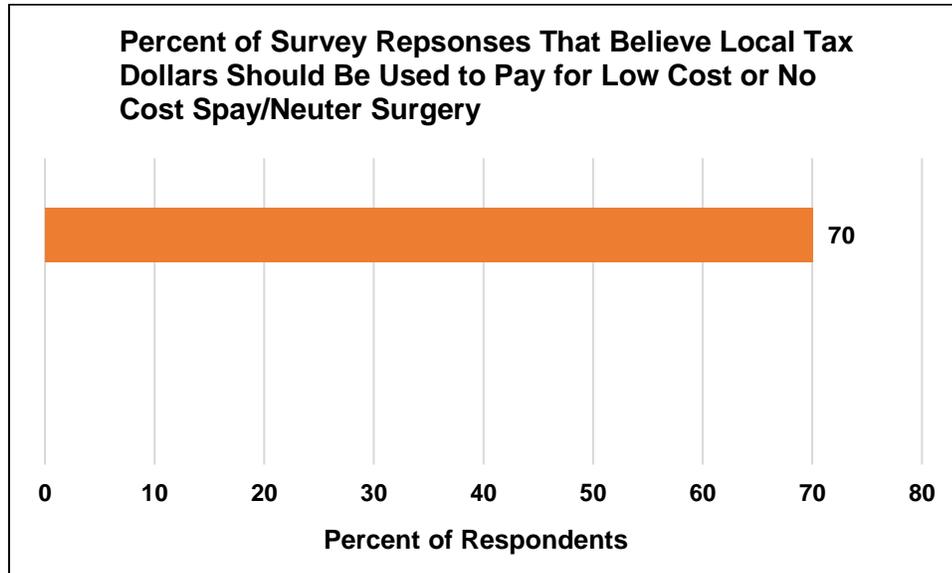
- Seventy (70) percent of respondents would support an ordinance requiring that all dogs and cats in the city be microchipped

Fig. 12



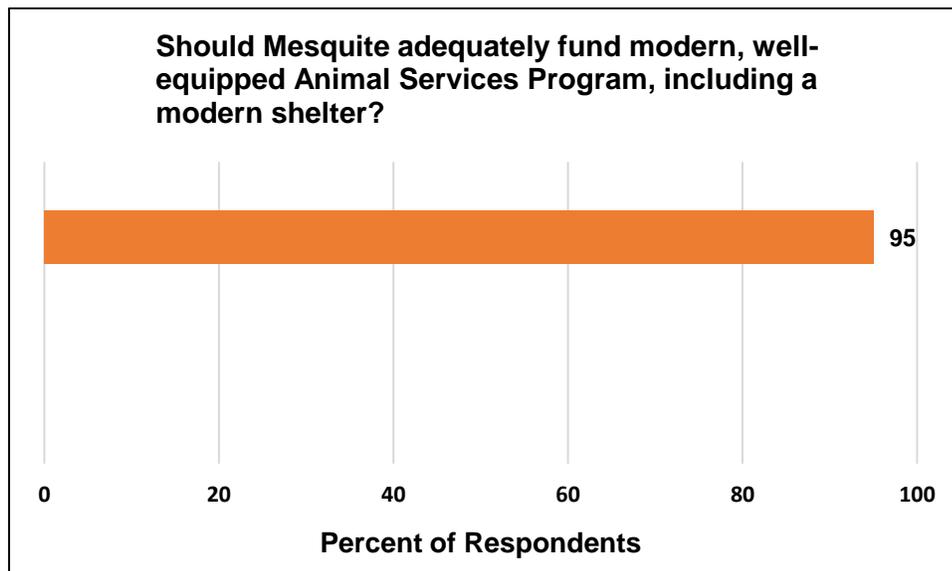
- Seventy (70) percent of respondents agree that local tax dollars should be used to help fund low cost or no cost spay/neuter surgeries for low income pet owners

Fig. 13



- Ninety-five (95) percent of respondents agree that it is important for Mesquite to properly fund and manage a modern, well-equipped and staffed Animal Services Program, including a modern animal shelter

Fig. 14

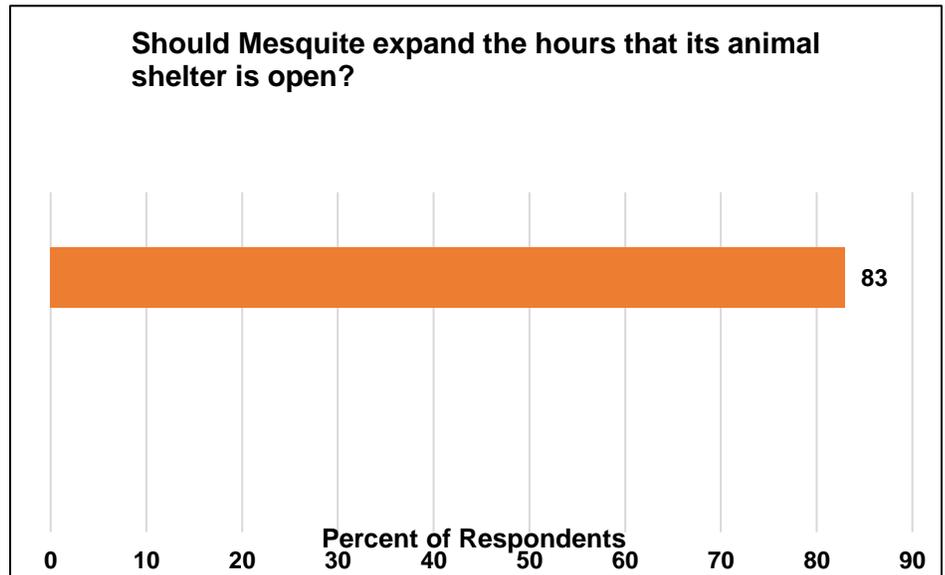


- Eighty-three (83) percent of respondents desire the shelter hours to be expanded, versus the current shelter hours

Note: Current animal shelter hours open to the public are:

- *Monday: 11:00 – 5:30*
- *Tuesday: 11:00 – 5:30*
- *Wednesday: Closed*
- *Thursday: 11:00 – 5:30*
- *Friday: 11:00 – 5:30*
- *Saturday: 1:00 – 5:30*
- *Sunday: Closed*

Fig. 15



Additional important results captured by the 2019 animal services citizen survey include:

- Using a 5-Star rating (5 being the best), 32 percent rated MAS with 4 stars, and another 31 percent gave the Division 3 stars
- 41 percent of respondents support changing the ordinance to allow 3-year dog/cat registration when their veterinarian uses the 3-year efficacy rabies vaccine
- 41 percent of surveyed citizens would like to see a "Lifetime Registration" available if their pet has a microchip
- Services that the majority of the respondents believes MAS does well include:
 - Customer Service
 - Adequate and Fair Adoption Fees
 - Adequate and Fair Animal Registration Fees
 - Creating an environment in which citizens feel safe from stray animals while walking in their neighborhood

- Areas in which the majority of respondents would like to see change include:
 - Expansion of days of the week and hours of the day that the shelter is open to the public
 - Decrease in Animal Services Officer field response times and availability
 - Spay/neuter assistance programs for owned animals

In addition to the information obtained through the 2019 Mesquite Animal Services Citizen Opinion Survey, there were four animal services-related questions included in the **2018 Community Survey**. Mesquite utilizes a company called ETC Institute to perform a statistically-significant, random survey of its citizens each year. The 2018 survey had 866 responses. The questions regarding residents' opinions about Mesquite Animal Services, and the survey results are:

1. Satisfaction with enforcement of loose dogs and unrestrained pets – 46% were satisfied
2. Satisfaction with responsiveness of Animal Services employees – 48% were satisfied
3. Satisfaction with quality of care provided at Mesquite Animal Shelter – 56% were satisfied
4. Satisfaction with current regulations concerning animal welfare – 51% were satisfied



Fig. 16 MAS Officer Lacy Stinson and some rescued puppies

Methodology for Creation of 2019-2024 MAS Strategic Plan

The City of Mesquite executive leadership team began the process of creating the next iteration of strategic planning in late 2018. The twelve city officials and citizen volunteers identified above (2019 MAS Task Force) began an intensive planning process in April, 2019, and completed their core work at the completion of the Task Force's third meeting on June 11, 2019. After completion of a comprehensive strategic audit (a thorough assessment of the current and near term internal and external issues facing Mesquite Animal Services), Task Force members chose five (5) high level strategic goals as the core activities for the years 2019 through 2024. In addition, the members analyzed identifiable categories of work (i.e. strategic objectives) which would be necessary to effectively attain each of the five goals. Ultimately, twenty-two highly specific, fully measurable objectives were crafted as the core efforts necessary for success. All goals and objectives written by the Task Force are identified below:

5-Year Strategic Plan Components Chosen by the 2019 MAS Strategic Planning Task Force

1.0 Strategic Goal #1: Achieve and Sustain a 95 Percent Save Rate

Objectives

- 1.1 Acquire a Mobile Adoption Vehicle (MAV)
- 1.2 Create and Implement an Off-Site Adoption Program
- 1.3 Create and Implement an Intake/Diversion Management System
- 1.4 Create and Implement a Foster Program
- 1.5 Evaluate and Expand the Rescue Program

2.0 Strategic Goal #2: Expand the Animal Shelter to Increase Capacity for Impounded Animals

Objectives

- 2.1 Select an Architect to Perform a Shelter Expansion Feasibility Study
(including feasibility of constructing veterinary operatory for use by
City Veterinarian or Contract Veterinarian)
- 2.2 Complete the Shelter Expansion
- 2.3 Evaluate Long-Term Facility Needs

3.0 Strategic Goal #3: Develop and Implement a Community Education Program

Objectives

- 3.1 Hire a Community Outreach Coordinator
- 3.2 Create and Implement a Marketing and Communication Plan
- 3.3 Increase Citizen Awareness Through Regular Animal Services Staff Presence at
Community Events
- 3.4 Create and Implement a Responsible Pet Ownership Program

4.0 Strategic Goal #4: Modernize the Animal Services Ordinance, Regulations, and Policies

Objectives

- 4.1 Evaluate Current and Potential Regulations Related to Animal Adoptions, Reclamations, Rescues, and Euthanasia
- 4.2 Evaluate and Consider Licensing with Mandatory Microchipping Requirement
- 4.3 Evaluate and Consider Feasibility of a Mandatory Spay/Neuter Ordinance Provision
- 4.4 Align Animal Services Departmental Policies with Strategic Plan Objectives
- 4.5 Evaluate and Consider Potential Changes to Current Domestic Pet Limits
- 4.6 Evaluate and Consider Potential Changes to Current Dangerous Dog Ordinance Provisions

5.0 Strategic Goal #5: Evaluate and Align Staffing Based on Demonstrated Need

Objectives

- 5.1 Perform a Staffing Benchmark Analysis Against 1) A List of Benchmarked Cities and 2) Relevant National Standards and Recommendations
- 5.2 Evaluate Level of Staffing Sufficient to Optimize Animal Shelter Hours of Operation
- 5.3 Evaluate Level of Staffing Sufficient to Optimize Effectiveness of Field Operations
- 5.4 Identify Available Technologies Which Are Capable of Enhancing Effectiveness in Shelter Operations and Field Operations

Next Steps

Of primary importance to Animal Services leadership and staff is establishing with all internal and external partners that the Strategic Plan is a living document and all decisions for policy, procedural, structural, staffing and project changes or additions need to be supported by the goals outlined within the Strategic Plan. For this reason, all Animal Services staff will be given a copy of the finalized document and a staff meeting will be held to solidify future plans, ask for input and suggestions from key players and begin the process of selecting team members who will be essential in the implementation of action plan steps for each objective and goal. A similar process will be repeated with the Animal Services Advisory Board. The Strategic Plan document will also be posted on the City's website for public review.

The team involved in crafting the Strategic Plan identified the need for a revision of all Chapter 4 Ordinances as being one of the most important objectives as the ordinances have not been updated in several years. For this reason, a focus group comprised of shelter staff and Animal Services Advisory Board members will begin meeting in September, 2019 to develop comprehensive revisions and additions to Chapter 4 ordinances that will better align us with our neighboring cities and plan for future growth, better enforcement and our continued focus on compassionate care. A draft deliverable for this task will be ready for Council review in January, 2020.

Animal Services and City Leadership will review the current staffing structure to ensure it is sufficient to meet the long-term goals of the Strategic Plan with or without the addition of extra staffing. A key element in ensuring the goals are met and that change continues to move forward is ensuring all staff members are being used most effectively, identifying talents and opportunities for key players and utilizing volunteers to their fullest potential.

Animal Services leadership will continue to analyze data from within the shelter and comparatively with similar-sized municipal shelters in North Texas to project for future growth based on changes within and around the City. These projections will be essential in identifying the need for shelter expansion or alternative methods of increasing available space for changing capacity needs.

Animal Services Division staff, after receiving final approval of the 2019-2024 MAS Strategic Plan from the City Manager's Office and City Council, will craft detailed Action Plans for each of the 22 objectives [i.e. the 22 objectives are well-defined and measurable work actions that will ensure attainment of the five (5) strategic goals]. In addition, the Animal Services Manager and her staff (with guidance from the Assistant City Manager) will create timelines within the five-year cycle of this new strategic plan for the initiation and completion of each of the 22 objectives.

APPENDIX I

2016 Strategic Plan Goals vs. Accomplishments

- 1) Improve ability for staff to locate animal owners and reduce the average length of stay at shelter
 - a. Require microchipping of animals released from the shelter (excluding rescue)
 - b. RESULT: NOT IMPLEMENTED**
 - c. Implementation planned pending ordinance revisions
 - d. Length of Stay 2014: 5.8 days, 2015: 6.5 days, 2016: 9.5 days, 2017: 11.3, 2018: 9.5 days
 - e. Note: increase in length of stay can also be attributed to managing shelter space to reduce euthanasia and increase live release rate.

- 2) Change impound fees to encourage responsible pet ownership
 - a. Proposed change: \$10 for wearing tags/registered chip; \$10 for current city registration. Repeat offenders would not be eligible for discounted fees
 - b. RESULT: NOT IMPLEMENTED**
 - c. Return to Owner rate 2014: 18%, 2015: 17%, 2016: 20%, 2017: 21%, 2018: 16.7%
 - d. National Return to Owner rate: 9.5%

- 3) Provide opportunities to educate the public on responsible pet ownership.
 - a. Offer a responsible pet ownership class involving adopters, new pet owner residents, first time offenders (deferred adjudication option for Court to consider).
 - b. RESULT: NOT IMPLEMENTED**

- 4) Increase the shelter live release rate to 90% or higher.
 - a. Allow the practice of Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR) within the City.
 - b. Allow residents to continue to trap animals considered a nuisance and investigate additional clarifications.
 - c. Use registered colony caretakers to monitor feral colonies and establish parameters
 - d. RESULT: PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**
 - i. Ordinances need to be revised to reflect policy regarding TNR and free-roaming sterilized cats
 - ii. Colony caretaker management has not been maintained on shelter end
 - iii. TNR implementation has been very successful and supported by residents
 - iv. Shelter save rate has maintained a 90% or higher rate since July, 2017.

- 5) Provide field response to residents more promptly, primarily on weekends
 - a. Add one additional Animal Control Officer position to allow for more responsive evening and Saturday field service. Offer regular Sunday field service.
 - b. RESULT: IMPLEMENTED**
 - i. Have increased Field Officer positions from five (5) to eight (8) and added a Field Services Supervisor.
 - ii. Schedule now includes full coverage from one officer on Saturdays and on-call coverage for priority calls after hours and on Sundays/Holidays.
 - iii. Seasonally, will offer regular coverage until 7:00 p.m.

- 6) Reduce the number of unwanted litters, strays and nuisance animals impounded at the shelter
 - a. Require residents to spay/neuter reclaimed pets (first time offense) over the age of six months.
 - b. Offer an annual in-tact permit for residents who do not wish to spay/neuter
 - c. RESULT: NOT IMPLEMENTED**
 - i. Impounds for cats have been reduced due to aggressive TNR practices, but dogs have remained steady or increased from 2014 to present because there are few local low-cost or no-cost spay/neuter assistance options and no restrictions for not getting it done.

- 7) Have the ability to provide sterilization and rabies vaccination to adoptable animals inside the shelter
 - a. Pre-sterilize highly adoptable animals before adoption when possible.
 - b. Sterilize animals before releasing to adopter.
 - c. Vaccinate adoptable animals against rabies to do off-site events.
 - d. **RESULT: IMPLEMENTED** through use of veterinary contract with local vet

- 8) Provide a convenient space for residents to visit and adopt pets, increasing holding capacity for adoptable animals, and promote a positive adoption experience for residents.
 - a. High traffic retail space in Town East or other busy retail area.
 - b. RESULT: NOT IMPLEMENTED**
 - c. We have increased participation in offsite adoption events and have been in discussion with mall manager about events and locations there.