

City of Sacramento
Personnel and Public Employees Committee Report
915 I Street Sacramento, CA 95814
www.cityofsacramento.org

File ID: 2025-01959

2/24/2026

City of Sacramento Animal Wellbeing Commission 2025 Annual Report and 2026 Workplan

File ID: 2025-01959

Location: Citywide

Recommendation: Review and provide direction on the 2025 Annual Report and 2026 Workplan for the City of Sacramento Animal Wellbeing Commission (“Commission”) and pass a **Motion** either: 1) directing staff to forward the Annual Report and Workplan to the City Council for review; 2) directing staff to update the Annual Report and Workplan based on Personnel and Public Employee Committee recommendations and forward to the City Council for review; or 3) asking the Commission to update the Annual Report and Workplan based Personnel and Public Employee Committee recommendations and come back to the Personnel and Public Employee Committee for additional review.

Contact: Phillip Zimmerman, Animal Care Services Manager, (916) 808-8333, pzimmerman@cityofsacramento.org, Animal Care Services, Community Development Department

Presenter: Phillip Zimmerman, Animal Care Services Manager, (916) 808-8333, pzimmerman@cityofsacramento.org, Animal Care Services, Community Development Department

Attachments:

- 1-Description/Analysis
- 2-City of Sacramento Animal Wellbeing Commission 2025 Annual Report
- 3-2026 Workplan

Description/Analysis

Issue Detail: Advisory bodies of the City are required to provide an annual report for review by the Personnel and Public Employees (P&PE) Committee as outlined in the City Council Rules of Procedure, Chapter 17. The P&PE Committee shall review advisory body annual reports and give staff direction on those reports’ stated projects, priorities, and recommendations. Before forwarding the report to the City Council, the Committee may request supplemental information from staff or the advisory body.

The attached Annual Report and Workplan is being forwarded to the P&PE Committee for consideration.

Policy Considerations: Chapter 17 of the Council Rules of Procedure outlines the Advisory Body reporting process.

Economic Impacts: Not Applicable.

Environmental Considerations:

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): This action is not a project that is subject to CEQA because it is an organizational or administrative activity that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment. (CEQA Guidelines §15378(b)(5)).

Sustainability: Not Applicable.

Commission/Committee Action: On November 12, 2025 the Animal Wellbeing Commission passed a motion forwarding their Annual Report and Workplan to the P&PE Committee for consideration.

Rationale for Recommendation: So that advisory bodies may effectively incorporate their important role, voice, and work to provide thoughtful community recommendations to the City Council on a consistent basis the P&PE Committee shall facilitate the process for advisory bodies to communicate their accomplishments, projects, priorities, and recommendations to the City Council.

Financial Considerations: Not Applicable.

Local Business Enterprise (LBE): Not Applicable.



Animal Wellbeing Commission Annual Report 2025



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Introduction: Establishment, Committee Members and Staff

The Animal Wellbeing Commission was created in 2024 by Ordinance 2024-0036, as a successor to the Animal Care Citizens Advisory Committee.

Creation of the Commission expanded the size of the body, from seven members under the former Committee structure to 13 Commission members, providing for increased participation from people with a wider range of backgrounds, skills and experiences in animal welfare.

Animal Wellbeing Commission Membership

The following members are currently serving as of November 12, 2025, when the report was adopted by the commission:

- Paul L. Hefner – Chair
- Leah C. Morris – Vice Chair
- Hilary Bagley-Franzoia
- Ignacio Barragan
- Denise Bell
- Samantha Christie
- Kathleen Garcia
- Julia Hayes
- Kristie Middleton
- Noemi Phew
- Douglas Snell
- Paula Treat

Animal Wellbeing Commission Staff

The Commission is supported primarily by:

- Phillip Zimmerman, Animal Care Services Manager, Community Development

Staff Contact Information

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Purpose, Powers and Duties of Animal Wellbeing Commission

Under Ordinance 2024-0036 amending Chapter 2.86 of the Sacramento City Code, the City Council established the Commission for the purpose of providing advice and recommendations to the city council on strategies, policies, and programs designed to ensure and enhance animal care services provided by the city.

The powers and duties of the Commission are as follows:

A. Provide recommendations to the city council on strategies, policies, and programs designed to:

1. Assist keeping people and their pets together through such things as reuniting lost pets with their owners, return-to-home and return-to-owner programs, and owner-surrender prevention programs;
2. Provide quality care for the animals housed at the city's animal care services center;
3. Encourage low-cost spay and neuter services, and identify methods for funding those services; and
4. Ensure the city's animal care services center meets or exceeds standards recommended in the Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Care.

B. Promote awareness of:

1. Programs at the city's animal care services center;
2. Animals available for adoption at the city's animal care services center;
3. The importance of spaying and neutering to avoid animal over-population;
4. The importance of ensuring pets have appropriate medical care, including vaccines; and
5. The animal care services center's volunteer program.

C. Serve as a liaison with the community and provide a forum for public discussion on animal wellbeing and policies relating to animal wellbeing in the city.

D. Advise the city council on city ordinances and state legislation related to animal wellbeing in the city.

E. Annually, report and make recommendations to the city council regarding the status of animal wellbeing strategies, programs, and services in the city and the activities of the commission.

Message from the Animal Wellbeing Commission Chair

Friends and partners,

This year's report comes at a challenging time for animal shelters everywhere. Every frontline shelter team member, animal control officer and veterinary professional who shows up day in and day out for our animals is an unsung hero for Sacramento. Their compassion, resilience, and expertise are the backbone of Sacramento's progress in animal wellbeing.

Our Commission initiatives over the past year have focused on:

- Strengthening facility safety through targeted interim improvements
- Leveraging adoption data to refine outreach and support for prospective pet parents
- Deepening community engagement with clearer wayfinding at the shelter, (allowing adopters to more easily locate adoptable animals) and thoughtful public forums
- Expanding spay and neuter capacity through "Spay It Forward, Sacramento"

These efforts were made possible by true collaboration among city leaders, staff, animal advocates, and community volunteers, guided by data-driven decision making and a shared commitment to enhancing animal welfare and public trust.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication. Working together, we can continue to lay the groundwork for a modern shelter that meets our community's needs and helps ensure a brighter future for every animal in Sacramento.

Sincerely,

Paul Hefner

Key Activities

This report highlights key Commission initiatives in the areas of facility safety, animal adoption analysis, community engagement and ongoing efforts to expand spay/neuter capacity. This year's work built on staff collaboration, data-driven decision making, and efforts to enhance animal welfare and public trust.

Needs Assessment/Interim Improvements

Much of our work built on the Shelter Needs Assessment conducted in 2024, which found the current, small, aging shelter as entirely inadequate to meet the city's needs. The report recommended that Sacramento build a new, modern shelter in a new location, as the current 1.8 acre site is far too small for modern standards. The assessment estimated a new shelter, occupying 6.8 acres, would cost from \$50 million to \$60 million, excluding any land purchase cost.

Given the city's ongoing budget constraints, the Commission focused attention on less costly, short-term measures that could be taken to improve shelter conditions, which were also included in the Needs Assessment. The total estimated cost of these 21 Interim Improvement projects ranged from \$5.3 million to \$7.7 million.

At the invitation of shelter management, Commission members conducted a meeting of all shelter employees, briefly described various improvement projects, and gathered staff feedback to help set priorities for the Commission, which sent forward to the Council's Budget and Audit Committee the following recommendations:

1. Kennel Safety Improvements

Allocate \$20,000 to replace broken, outdated kennel door latches, \$120,000 to replace hazardous guillotine kennel doors, and \$500,000 to remove concrete curbs from kennel buildings to eliminate safety hazards for animals, staff and the public.

2. Medical Clinic Expansion

Allocate \$900,000 to plan, design and build an expansion of the existing shelter medical clinic to improve clinical services and relocate X-ray and laundry facilities to improve efficiency and quality of care.

3. Relocate Parking

Direct Department of Community Development to seek state approval to use surplus Caltrans property east of shelter for animal control and public parking, improving animal safety and freeing needed space for animal exercise yards and temporary facilities.

4. New Shelter Site Evaluation and Selection

Use existing staff and resources within the Department of Community Development to identify and evaluate potential sites for a new, modern animal shelter capable of meeting Sacramento's needs as outlined in the Needs Assessment.

5. Finance Plan

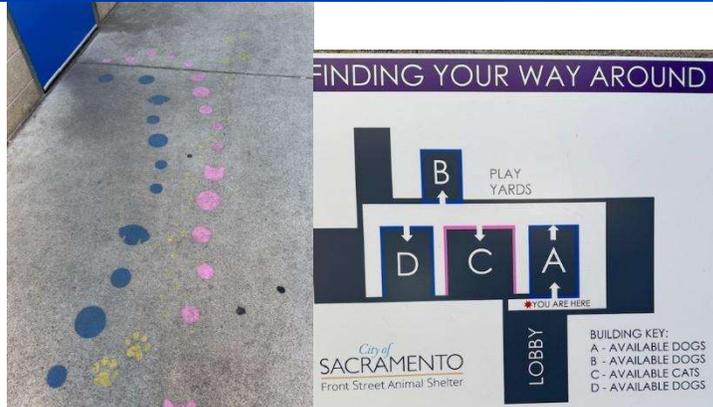
Direct the Department of Community Development and Department of Finance to collaborate with the Animal Wellbeing Commission and City Council to develop a plan to finance a new Sacramento City Animal Shelter, which may include but not be limited to public-private partnerships, or public bond proposals.

Based upon those recommendations, the Council recently approved the allocation of \$408,000 for kennel safety improvements, a first significant step in addressing the ongoing need to greatly improve facility conditions at the shelter.

Wayfinding

The Needs Assessment also identified wayfinding as a difficulty for shelter visitors, confusing the public and hampering adoptions because the many different, disconnected buildings at the shelter frequently led to confusion about how to get from one area to another, either to meet animals or to obtain assistance from staff.

The Commission worked with shelter management and Friends of Front Street to identify a suitable signage and design service provider, who created a detailed plan and installed new, more clear and helpful signage throughout the shelter, improving the experience for shelter visitors and reducing the need for staff and volunteers to continuously provide directions around the shelter.



Adoptions

In 2025, the Commission continued its focused efforts on improving animal adoption outcomes, building upon the foundational work initiated by the former Advisory Committee in 2024.

To further advance adoption outcomes, the Commission established an Ad Hoc Committee on Dog Adoptions. The Committee met regularly with shelter leadership to:

- Analyze shelter adoption data
- Review current research on shelter animal adoptions
- Develop strategies to increase adoption rates and improve animal outcomes

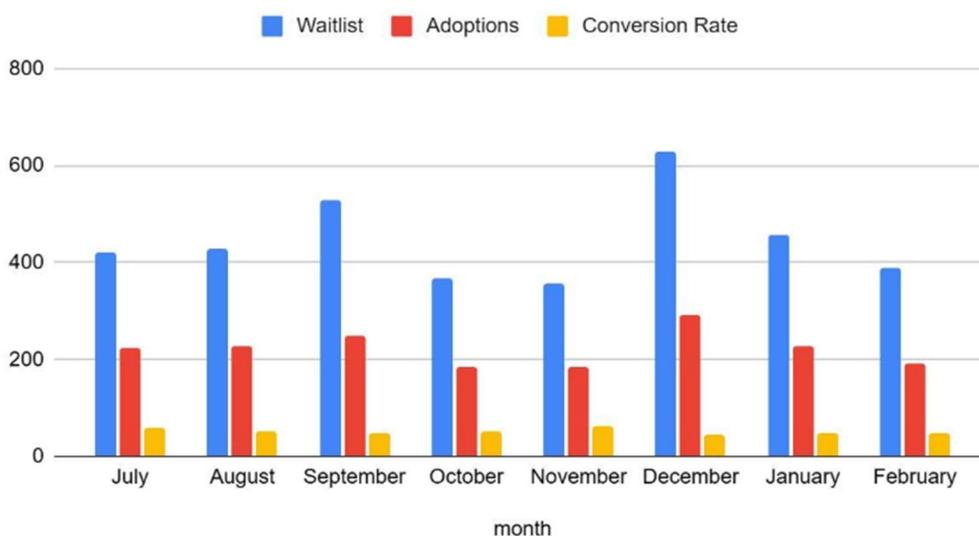
A key area of inquiry was the shelter’s conversion rate—the ratio of animals adopted to shelter visitors—used to assess adoption efficiency and identify barriers to successful placements.

Conversion Rate Analysis

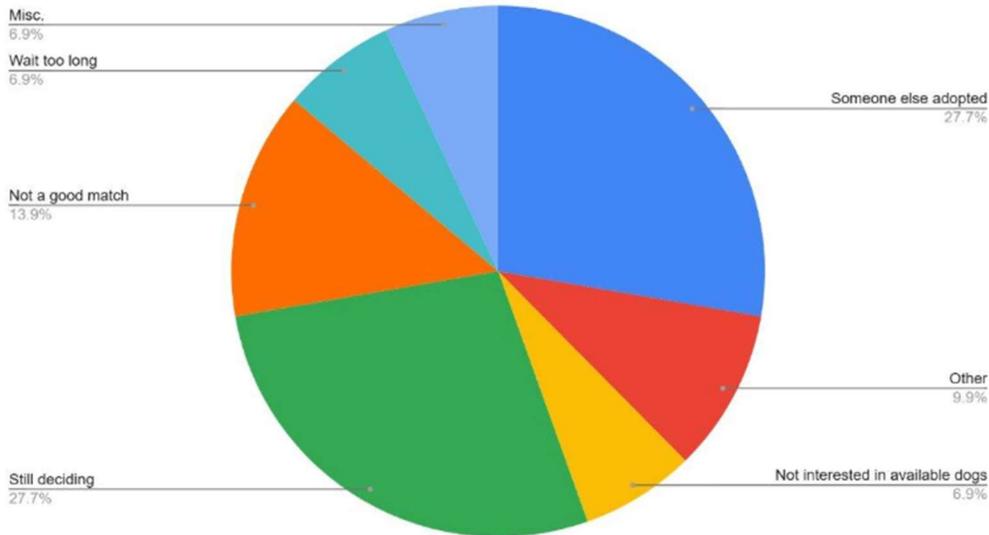
Commission members analyzed shelter visitor and adoption data, revealing that although visitor numbers increase during weekends and “free adoption” events, the conversion rate declines during these high-volume periods. This trend suggests that facility and staffing limitations—particularly the fact that the shelter has only two meet-and-greet areas—impede the finalization of adoptions during peak times.

To address this constraint, the Commission scheduled quarterly training sessions for volunteer adoption counselors to improve efficiency and support during busy periods.

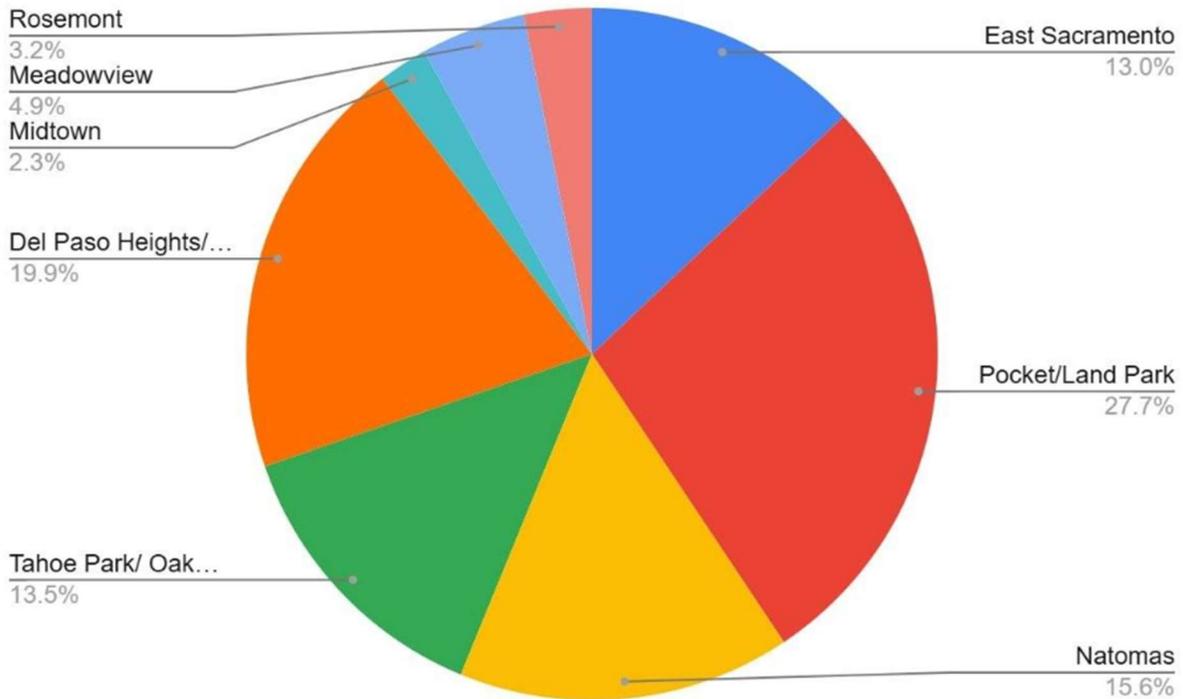
Waitlist, Adoptions and Conversion Rate



Why Did You Not Adopt Today?



Big Dog Adoptions by Neighborhood



Post-Visit Survey Initiative

At the Committee’s recommendation, the shelter implemented a text-message survey for visitors. Early findings indicated that many potential adopters were either undecided or had missed the opportunity to adopt a specific animal due to prior adoption.

This insight led the Committee to emphasize the importance of the virtual adoption experience. In response, shelter staff and volunteers prioritized:

- High-quality photography of adoptable pets
- Detailed online pet biographies, which can be created quickly using [rescuewriter.ai](#)

Behavioral Enrichment for Adoptable Dogs

Based on research indicating that dogs displaying engaging behaviors are more likely to be adopted, shelter volunteers have begun teaching adoptable dogs to:

- Fetch a toy of their choice
- Lay calmly at the feet of potential adopters

These behaviors aim to increase the dogs' appeal and adoption likelihood.

Targeted Marketing Strategies

The Committee conducted a demographic analysis of dog adopters to refine marketing efforts. Recommendations included:

- Targeting millennial adopters with appropriate messaging
- Focusing outreach on neighborhoods with historically high adoption rates

Post-Adoption Support Recommendations

The Committee reviewed academic research on post-adoption support, including:

- Scheduled phone follow-ups
- Behavioral training and enrichment
- Educational materials and digital resources
- Peer-support networks for new adopters

While many of these initiatives require significant resources, the Committee identified several potential volunteer-led strategies:

Volunteer-Led Initiatives

- **Post-Adoption Telephone Support Program:** Volunteers would contact adopters of large adult dogs at regular intervals to offer behavioral guidance and support.
- **“Dibs for Dogs” Program:** For a small fee, adopters could reserve appointments to meet and adopt animals immediately after their stray hold expires. Modeled after a successful program in Riverside County, this initiative could reduce animal length-of-stay and shelter operating costs.

- **Staff-Favorites Bulletin Board:** Located near the shelter entrance, this board would feature photos and biographies of overlooked animals, increasing their visibility to potential adopters.

Spay/Neuter Capacity

Throughout the year, Commission members, shelter leadership and animal advocates have increasingly called for an increased emphasis on the urgent and ongoing need for greater numbers of companion animals to be spayed or neutered.

Evidence abounds that the current availability of spay and neuter veterinary services in our community is inadequate, as evidenced by long waiting lists for people seeking low-cost spay/neuter for their pets, the high number of non-altered stray animals taken in by the shelter each year, and the ongoing challenge associated with altering shelter animals prior to adoption.

The Commission took an initial step to encourage more pet owners to spay and neuter their animals by recommending that the city increase the number of dogs allowed per household from three to four, but only if all the animals in that household have been spayed or neutered. In addition, Commission members began an outreach effort to veterinarians in the city to gauge interest in participating in a low, fixed-fee program for providing spay and neuter services.

In addition, the Commission worked to support the shelter's efforts to begin providing free spay and neuter services to the community by creating "Spay It Forward, Sacramento." The Commission partnered with Friends of Front Street and the shelter's leadership to raise funds to partially offset the cost of a two-day August Animal Balance spay and neuter clinic. Animal Balance is an international non-profit organization that provides intense, 2-3 day MASH services (Mobile Animal Sterilization Hospital) for high-quality, high-volume, spay-neuter care provided in a temporary surgical space, based on military style field hospitals. The effort generated funds from Commission members and received generous donations from Mayor McCarty and Councilmembers Pluckebaum, Maple, Talamantes and Kaplan.

Community Engagement

In 2025 the Animal Wellbeing Commission deepened its commitment to transparency, education, and collaboration through a number of community engagement activities. Our goal was to meet residents where they are, listen to concerns, and share information about shelter services and animal welfare programs.

Neighborhood & District Outreach

Commissioners actively participated in neighborhood association meetings and district-specific gatherings. These forums provided space for dialogue, education, and trust-building with residents.

We maintained a strong presence at Front Street Shelter tabling events across the city, including:

- National Night Out
- District food truck nights
- Emergency preparedness fairs
- Senior residential community visits
- District adoption events

These engagements allowed us to connect directly with families, seniors, and youth—sharing resources, promoting adoptions, and encouraging responsible pet ownership.

Civic & Interdepartmental Collaboration

To strengthen understanding of shelter operations within City Hall, we arranged and hosted guided tours of Front Street Shelter for:

- City Councilmembers and their staff
- Representatives from various city departments
- Interested community members

These tours offered firsthand insight into shelter infrastructure, intake protocols, and outcome tracking—laying the groundwork for informed policy discussions and collaborative solutions.

Monthly City Mixers provided another valuable touchpoint, where Commission representatives shared shelter updates, distributed educational materials, and invited attendees to visit the shelter and get involved.

Language Access & Inclusive Communication

Recognizing Sacramento's linguistic diversity, we completed translations of shelter brochures into six languages. These materials are now available on the shelter website and will soon be printed for wide distribution—ensuring that all residents can access critical information about services, adoption, and animal care.

Community Health & Best Practices

We proudly supported large-scale spay/neuter and vaccine events in partnership with groups like Animal Balance and San Diego-based teams. At these clinics, we distributed shelter literature and emphasized the importance of accessible, low-cost sterilization services for both owned and community animals.

To inform our own strategic planning, Commission members toured other shelters across California, engaging with leadership on:

- Facility design and capacity
- Staffing models and hours of operation
- Spay/neuter throughput
- Volunteer engagement
- Euthanasia policies and outcome transparency

These exchanges continue to shape our recommendations for Sacramento's shelter system and reinforce our commitment to humane, data-driven reform.

Resources Expended

The estimated cost to support the Animal Wellbeing Commission in 2025 was \$77,935. This estimate does not include City staff time to support tours by elected officials or attend community meetings. It also does not account for Commission member time.

In 2025 we are scheduled to complete nine meetings. Below is a breakdown of City expenditures to support the commission.

The estimated cost per year for meetings is as follows:

	Meetings	Hours	Rate	Total
Staff report creation and review – department staff	9	4	\$117	\$4,212
Staff report review – city attorney staff	9	3	\$216	\$5,832
Agenda review, preparation, and publishing – city clerk	9	10	\$35	\$3,150
Meeting presentation preparation	9	2	\$117	\$2,106
Meeting attendance – department staff	9	2	\$117	\$2,106
Meeting attendance – city attorney staff	9	2	\$216	\$3,888
Meeting attendance – city clerk staff	9	2	\$58	\$1,044
Meeting attendance – IT staff	9	2	\$53	\$954
Meeting attendance – building security	9	2	\$33	\$594
Post meeting tasks: minutes, legislative document processing, attendance tracking	9	3	\$35	\$945
Commissioner stipend processing (quarterly)		12/year	\$42	\$504
Commissioner stipends (6 committee members)	9	5	\$50	\$2,000
Total Meetings Cost				\$27,335

Appendices

Animal Care Services Informational Brochure (Russian)

Animal Care Services Information Brochure (Vietnamese)

2026 Animal Wellbeing Workplan

POWERS & DUTIES	Projects	Involved Commissioners	Comments
A. Provide recommendations to city council on strategies/policies/programs to:			
1. <i>Assist keeping people and pets together</i>			
2. <i>Provide Quality Care for animals housed at the city's shelter</i>			
3. <i>Encourage low-cost spay/neuter services; identify funding</i>			
4. <i>Ensure shelter meets/exceeds standards, Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines</i>			
B. Promote Awareness of:			
1. <i>Programs at the shelter</i>			
2. <i>Animals available for adoption</i>			
3. <i>Importance of spaying & neutering</i>			

<p>4. Importance of ensuring animals have medical care/vaccines</p>			
<p>5. Shelter volunteer program</p>			
<p>C. Serve as a liaison with the community/provide a forum for public discussion.</p>			
<p>D. Advise the city council on city ordinances and state legislation related to animal wellbeing in the city.</p>			
<p>E. Annually, report to the city council on recommendations and activities of the commission.</p>			
	<p>Annually -- present prior CY year report to P&PE Committee</p> <p>Annually – Commission reviews/approves final report by last annual Commission meeting in November, moving it to P&PE Committee of City Council</p>	<p>Chair & Vice Chair draft</p> <p>Commissioners review and approve final version</p>	