



Jessica Vega Pederson Multnomah County Chair

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August 10th, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

I write to you today at the completion of the second phase of our review of Multnomah County Animal Services (MCAS).

As a recap, this review, which began in February, was designed and overseen by my office to develop a comprehensive, strategic reset of protocols and operations at our animal shelter. The first phase of the review included a full accounting of previous recommendations from 2016-2023 – including an update on the status of those recommendations as they related to current policies and procedures – along with an environmental scan of the shelter and a final summary of findings.

We've just completed our work to engage in deep listening with the communities closest to the shelter, utilizing external facilitation by local strategy firm Lara Media. They went out to the community to conduct one-on-one and group interviews with partner agencies, volunteers, fosters, past and current staff, previous adopters and other experts in the animal services field and also gathered extensive feedback from the public through an online survey. The results of this engagement process are attached.

Hearing from these key stakeholders and taking a full account of community thoughts, requests and recommendations is a critical step in building the animal services system we need. I'm grateful to the dozens and dozens of people who took the time to provide their thoughts and feedback.

Key takeaways include:

- Extensive feedback and recommendations to improve outcomes in animal care
- Investments to improve MCAS' facilities
- Suggested revisions to spay & neuter program and veterinary services
- A request for increased internal and external communications

- Training for staff
- New recruitment protocols for staff and volunteers

Everyone involved in leadership at Animal Services appreciates the thought leadership and partnership represented in this engagement process and the resulting report.

The final phase of this process, which has already begun and will be complete in the next month, will develop a final report with recommended actions and work plan. Animal Services will then continue their ongoing work over the next 12-18 months of process improvement until every recommendation has been considered, addressed and implemented.

We are pleased to share the news of a recent hire, Bud Garrison, who comes to us from our group of dedicated volunteers and will help to steer the implementation of the recommendations made in this report and our final report, which will be the culmination of this review process.

Even as we work through the official review, we are making immediate improvements in MCAS operations for the feeding, cleaning, enrichment, and veterinary care of the animals. Specific changes in protocols at Animal Services in these past months include:

- Ten new staff positions designated in FY 2024 budget – seven of which are direct animal care positions – are now in active recruitment, with 5 offers made for animal care specialists in the past few weeks
- Restructured staff teams to a front of the house/back of the house approach, which allows for specialization and enhanced training opportunities for staff
- New enrichment programs that speak to all five senses, overseen by a new Enrichment Coordinator for all animals
- An updated donation policy to create clear guidelines for use of donation funds as well as tiers of budget authority for MCAS director, Department of Community Services director and the Chair
- New systems and checks to ensure accountability in the care of shelter animals
- New joint training to strengthen our response to animal abuse. Specifically, Animal Services staff joined attorneys from the Multnomah County District Attorney's office under statewide expert Jake Kamins to improve practices regarding animal cruelty, civil forfeiture and a number of other critical legal issues related to animal welfare
- Conversion of the Feline specialist position to a Pathway planning position, with a focus on all animals

A complete accounting of changes made to MCAS' operations and policies through June 1, 2023 can be found [here](#).

I am so grateful for the partnership from staff, partner agencies, experts in animal services, volunteers and community members who have been an integral part of this review. With their help, we will reach the goal that truly matters: improving the well-being of the animals in our care and our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Vega Pederson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Chair