Animal Control
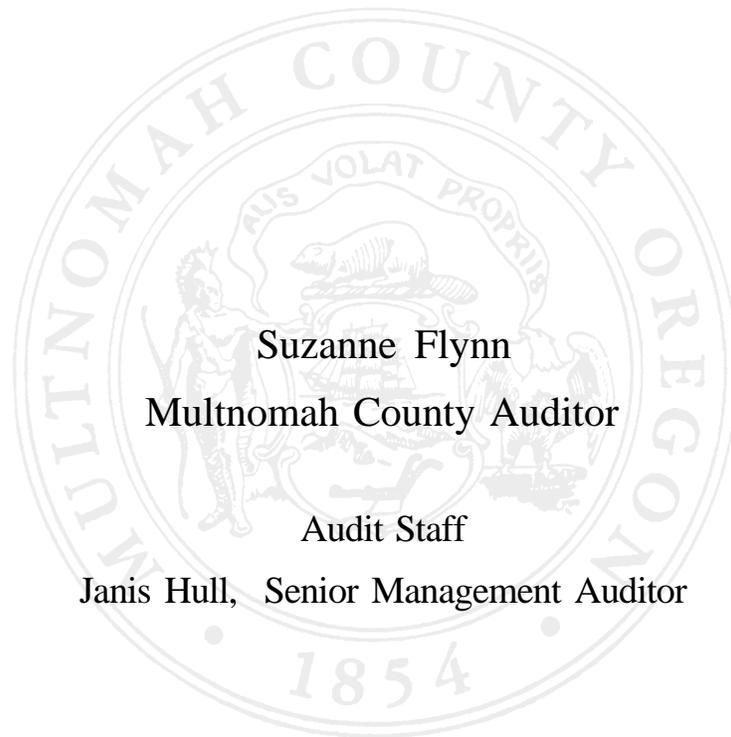
Maximize Use of Resources

January 2002

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MEMORANDUM

Date: 1/5/02

To: Diane Linn, Multnomah County Chair
                Maria Rojo de Steffey, Commissioner, District 1
                Serena Cruz, Commissioner, District 2
                Lisa Naito, Commissioner, District 3
                Lonnie Roberts, Commissioner, District 4

From: Suzanne Flynn, Multnomah County Auditor

Subject: Animal Control Division Audit

The attached report covers our audit of the Animal Control Division within the Department of Sustainable Community Development. This audit was included in our FY01-02 Audit Schedule.

The Division provides services that protect County residents from dangerous animals and animals from abuse and neglect. These two objectives are often in conflict and can result in actions that dissatisfy some citizens.

Although recognizing the difficulty of this work, it is our opinion that management can improve the quality and level of service within current fiscal constraints. The Division needs to remain focused on the core mission and make decisions consistent with that mission. We believe that by applying resources to improve shelter and telephone accessibility, complaint response, and shelter maintenance, citizens will be better served.

We have discussed our findings and recommendations with DSCD and Division management and included their responses in the report. Pursuant to our new practice, we will follow-up in 6 – 12 months and issue a report at that time.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance extended to us by the management and staff of the Animal Control Division and the Department of Sustainable Community Development.

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  c) Click once to activate link

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Summary

The purpose of the Multnomah County Animal Control Division (MCAC) is to protect county residents from dangerous and nuisance animals as well as protect animals from abuse and abandonment. The MCAC represents one of the few County programs that can impact all citizens. It is a high profile agency that deals with very emotional and often conflicting issues such as animal welfare and safety, people safety from animals, people who are very attached to their pets, and pet owners who may not consider their pet's impact on neighbors. It is also an area where citizens disagree considerably on its methods and practices, in part because of its conflicting objectives.

An audit of the MCAC was scheduled three years ago but was delayed to allow for reorganization and the completion of an independent evaluation and the report of a citizen's task force. In the interim, a new director was hired. Initiated as a follow-up on the evaluation and task force recommendations, the audit scope was expanded to examine other areas of concern.

Despite management's belief that resources are inadequate, we found that better service could be possible within current funding levels. Revenues have been fairly stable over the past 15 years. Although the pet adoptions workload has increased, workload in animals received has declined. A comparison to four similar animal control agencies revealed that while MCAC had the second highest budget, it was open the least amount of hours.

We found that the MCAC implements new programs or responds to immediate consumer demands without adequate planning and data analysis. MCAC had data available on calls for service, animals that were sheltered, and responses in the field. Our review of that data provided some insights to MCAC operations that could prove invaluable in management planning and decision-making.

Shelter hours did not recognize the reality of working person schedules. Opened only 1 hour after 5:00 pm on weekdays and 4 hours on Saturday, these business hours may discourage adoptions. The availability of parking and appearance of the shelter itself could also be improved. The entryway for the shelter also posed a potential risk to visitors, animals, and staff because incoming animals were not isolated.

Telephone contact with county residents is critical to good service. Our observations revealed that customer service representatives were courteous despite callers who are many times angry and impatient. However, there was no sense of urgency to complete calls so that others who were waiting might be served. There were also times when no representative responded to callers because of breaks, paperwork, and lunch schedules. Management needs to assess the proper response to types of calls. Some calls could be dispensed with much quicker to reduce wait time. Further, the call menu was confusing.

We urge management to reassess and clarify its mission. It might be desirable to place the MCAC in another department that is more closely aligned with its mission, whether it is public safety or public health. Management should improve shelter and telephone scheduling, improve the efficiency of telephone service, develop a data collection and analysis plan, and prioritize service delivery.

Background

The mission of the Multnomah County Animal Control Division (MCAC) is to protect people and animals through the promotion and enforcement of responsible animal ownership. Animal Control operates a shelter for lost, stray and unwanted animals, administers a pet license identification system, and provides information, education and services in the area of responsible animal ownership. The Division also provides State mandated services related to rabies and nuisance enforcement, dog licensing and maintenance of an animal shelter. As part of the Department of Sustainable Community Development, MCAC recently reorganized into two units, Field Operations and Shelter Operations.
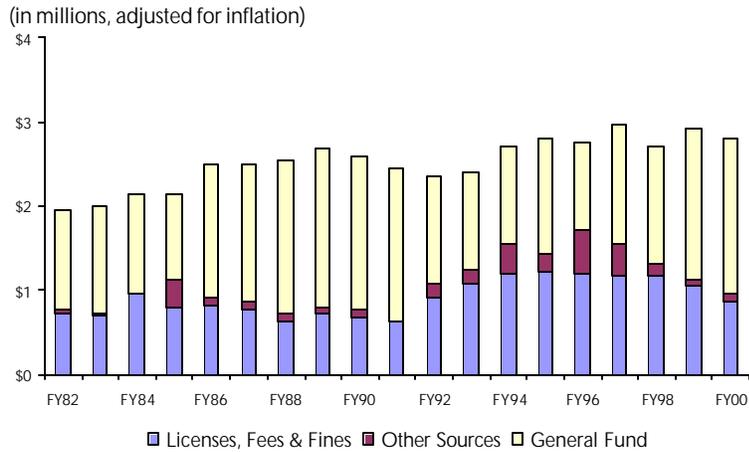
MCAC often deals with conflicting needs. For example, the program can educate pet owners on appropriate pet care and safety while representing citizens that have been inconvenienced or harmed by the same animals. Citizens can become very emotional regarding pets. When citizens are dissatisfied with the service, they often relay this displeasure to Multnomah County Commissioners, which places additional pressure on the program. Even when MCAC is responsive to citizen or County government demands, the solution is often in conflict with others. At times they are literally in a "no win" situation.

MCAC receives funds from the General Fund. The General Fund is supplemented by revenues received from MCAC licenses, permits, and other fees. MCAC also has two small trust funds—an Animal Care Trust and an Animal Control Adoption Outreach Trust. The amount of General Fund contribution, as a percentage of total operation costs, has decreased from 10 years ago, but has increased over the last five. When adjusting for inflation, MCAC total revenues have increased slightly over the last 15 years (Exhibit 1).

Animal Control's largest expenditure was for personnel. According to budget documents, FTE increased by 27.6% from FY96 to FY00. However, FTE decreased again in FY01 for an overall increase of 8.6% from FY96 to FY02. When controlling for inflation, actual personnel services expenditures decreased 1.6% during this same period. This may be attributed to MCAC not filling vacant positions. In FY2000 almost three-fourths of expenditures were for personnel. Currently the MCAC has 45.5 FTE and a budget of $3,186,083.

MCAC Revenue

Exhibit 1

(in millions, adjusted for inflation)

Bar chart legend: Licenses, Fees & Fines · Other Sources · General Fund

Comparison to Other Jurisdictions

We compared MCAC operations with four similar animal control agencies:

- Jefferson County Animal Control and Protection in Louisville, Kentucky

- City of Fort Worth Animal Control in Fort Worth, Texas

- Jacksonville Animal Care and Control in Jacksonville, Florida

- Salt Lake County Animal Services in Salt Lake City, Utah

In comparing all five animal control agencies, MCAC served less than the average number (544) of square miles at 435. The estimated population of the area MCAC serves was comparable to the average of the five agencies.

MCAC's budget was the second highest at $3.0 million with Salt Lake County having a higher budget of $3.4 million. Management suggested that population increase should be taken into account in comparing jurisdictional budgets. We found per capita expenditures again placed the County in the middle compared to the other jurisdictions. Of the reported budgets, the percent spent on payroll was slightly below average for MCAC at 75% (average = 78%). While MCAC had fewer adoption and kennel employees, it had more clerical and office employees than the other jurisdictions (Exhibit 2). All the jurisdictions had a similar number of Animal Control Officers.
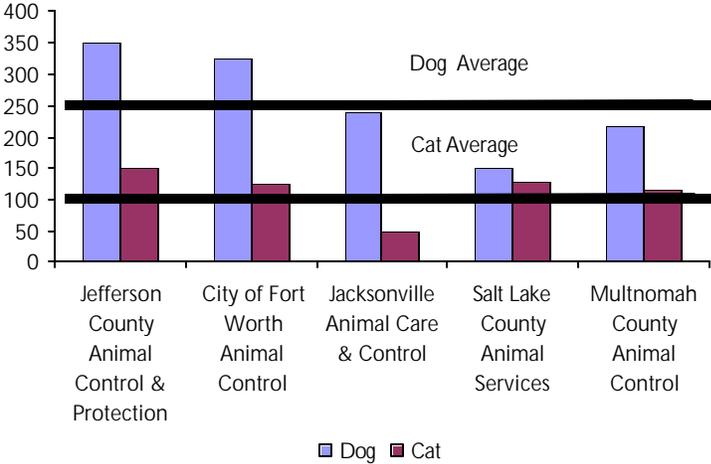
Comparison of
Number of Employees

Exhibit 2
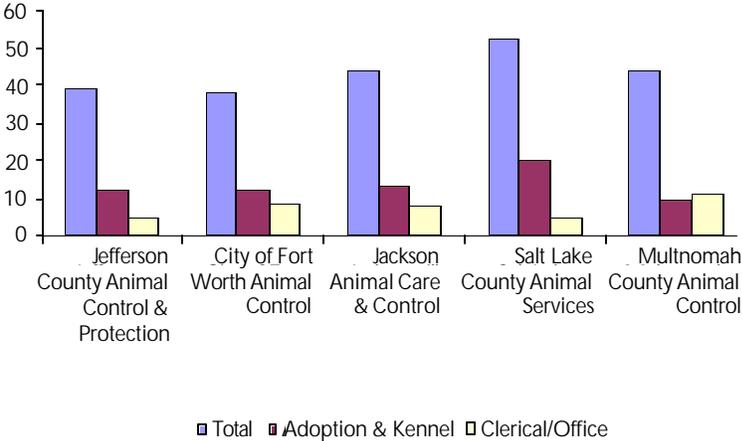
MCAC's shelter was older than those of the comparable agencies, 29 years compared to 18 years average. It was also one of the smallest in square footage at 13,515 square feet. The average was 16,732. MCAC also had below average kennel space for dogs and average cat capacity (Exhibit 3).

Dog and Cat
Shelter Capacity

Exhibit 3

The adoption rate (percent of animals deemed adoptable that get new owners) and stray reclaim rates (percent of lost animals reunited with current owners) were not available for the cities of Fort Worth and Jacksonville; however, compared to the other two jurisdictions, MCAC's are higher. MCAC's adoption rate is about three times higher than the other two jurisdictions. Looking at MCAC rates historically, the rates for adoption and stray reclaim have been increasing.
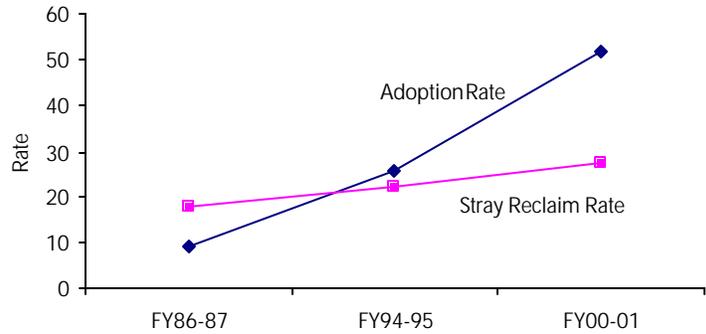
Adoption and
Reclaim Rates

Exhibit 4

*Note: Adoption rate for FY86-87 & FY94-95 may be low--they do not include animals euthanized at owner request or animals transferred out. Current methodology for calculating adoption rate removes animals that are euthanized at owner request or transferred to other shelters.

In reviewing dispatch data for the months of January and May 2001, we found that field officers responded to high priority requests for service, such as a loose and aggressive dog, within 15 minutes and low priority calls were responded to within approximately 24 minutes. These response times are calculated from the time the call is dispatched—not when the call comes in. In total, MCAC field officers responded to more than 13,500 complaint calls in FY01.

Scope and
Methodology

Initially, our audit began as a follow-up to two studies concluded in 2000. We reviewed each of the recommendations with MCAC staff and made a determination of their progress. While we found that several recommendations had been implemented, additional overall organizational issues were apparent. As a result, after completing the follow-up, we expanded the scope of the audit to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the County's Animal Control Division.

We reviewed MCAC's responsiveness to the National Animal Control Association (NACA) and Task Force recommendations. We found they had been responsive to most of the recommendations. They had responded to the recommendations they had funds to address, began work on some of the more financially demanding recommendations, and had not taken action on some of the lower priority recommendations. The Auditor's Office did not support several of the NACA recommendations and, therefore, found it appropriate that MCAC had not taken action. We identify the recommendations we felt still needed to be addressed in the audit report.

We interviewed shelter employees, field officers, dispatchers, management, animal activists, contractors, and other stakeholders. Auditor staff also observed field officers in the field, shelter

operations, and the dispatch process. Auditors regularly toured the shelter facility and listened to incoming telephone calls. The Auditors reviewed an architectural map of the facility to examine utilization.

Our background review included reports and evaluations done by other agencies. We began with the NACA May 2000 evaluation and its 76 recommendations. We also reviewed the June 2000, Multnomah County Animal Task Force Report and recommendations. In addition, we reviewed animal control audits from other jurisdictions, a past Multnomah County audit, and a 1994 Multnomah County Cost, Fees and Revenues report by David M. Griffith and Associates, Ltd. (DMG) with a section on MCAC.

We reviewed the Multnomah County Code and ORS statutes related to MCAC. We also collected and reviewed past MCAC annual reports, year-end reports, and various office literature. We did a historical scan of newspaper articles.

FY01 data were collected from the MCAC software, PetWhere. We entered and analyzed MCAC dispatch data for January and May 2001. We collected FY01 telephone statistics and shelter visitor counts— although some of this data were incomplete. We also reviewed a visitor study done by MCAC in 1997. We collected and reviewed the customer satisfaction data from the MCAC website.

In addition to comparing to other jurisdictions with the use of Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) data, we collected and reviewed industry information. We queried the Humane Society of the United States, Rutgers University School of Law—Animal Rights Law Project, National Animal Interest Alliance, Pet Food Institute, SAWA, Oregon Humane Society (OHS) and a local animal rights agency, Watchdog. To review telephone operations, we collected standards from the Multi Messaging Educational Committee and Westbay Online Traffic Calculators.

Comparables were selected from the 2000 SAWA Resource Directory. The directory lists over 60 governmental, private, and non-profit animal care and control agencies. Comparables were selected based on similarities across multiple criteria such as square miles served, population served, number of full-time employees, budget, number of animals admitted, shelter age and square footage, and maximum animal capacity.

This audit was conducted according to generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results

MCAC mission and vision statements outline several basic objectives. The Division is dedicated to protecting people from animal harm, protecting animals from cruelty and neglect, providing adoptions for adoptable animals, and providing a safe and positive environment for animals in their care. We found that MCAC could better meet these objectives even within current funding levels. Specifically, MCAC can improve accessibility for citizens with different shelter hours, different use of parking space, web page improvements, and a more efficient telephone system. It could also improve shelter conditions by providing a clean and safe shelter.

Resources Could Be Used More Effectively and Efficiently

Multnomah County Animal Control Division (MCAC) management believes that the program is seriously under funded and that this impedes good service quality. However, our analysis of revenues for the past twenty years shows that when adjusted for inflation, the trend has been increasing slightly. The program has had down periods such as FY82 and FY93 but each time funds rebounded to higher levels. The largest expenditure was for personnel services, although this expenditure had decreased slightly. Since FY96 authorized positions have increased 8.6%.

When compared to four similar animal control agencies, MCAC was not noticeably lacking in resources except in the area of shelter size and age. The MCAC budget was the second highest, while the percent spent on payroll was slightly below average. MCAC had fewer adoption and kennel employees, more clerical and office employees, and a similar number of animal control officers. The square footage was the smallest of the agencies with below average dog capacity.

Our analysis of workload also suggested that shifting personnel schedules to match workload could be possible. The incoming animal workload dropped since FY87. However, MCAC significantly increased the adoption rate both in absolute numbers and relative to the number of adoptable animals available. We also believe there are efficiencies to be gained through better organization in other areas of the program.

This is not to suggest that MCAC could not increase its capacity or level of service with additional resources and perhaps better serve citizens. It is our conclusion, however, that MCAC could also more efficiently and effectively use current resources to improve service.

One of MCAC's primary purposes is to match adoptable pets with new and/or existing owners. Many citizens requested that shelter hours be more convenient for calling and visiting the shelter. In reviewing MCAC's data for visitors, telephone traffic, and dispatch calls, it appears that the shelter was not optimally scheduled.

The shelter was open to the public Tuesday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Realistically, citizens with day jobs could only visit the shelter during the four hours the shelter was open on Saturday. Additionally, there was a policy to not initiate the adoption process a half hour prior to closing. Again, assuming that many people who want to adopt or reclaim their pet are working, these hours were too narrow. The shelter could better serve people by opening later in the day and staying open later a minimum of one evening per week. We believe this could be accomplished with current staffing. MCAC also needs to consider being open all day on Sunday. In reviewing other public shelters in the 2000 SAWA Resource Directory, more than half of the shelters were open 7 days per week to the public. Only one other shelter was open only 5 days.

MCAC completed a study in 1997 on which the current shelter hours are based. In that study, MCAC tracked the number of vehicles and people visiting the shelter for two weeks. Management stated the study showed the busiest hours to be at noon with little traffic after 6:00 p.m. When factoring the hours open into the study results (7 hours each on weekdays and 4 hours on weekends), all days of the week were busy (Exhibit 5). We would suggest that MCAC make changes in hours as suggested above and complete a more reliable study such as over several months and once enough time has elapsed for citizens to learn of the new hours.

Exhibit 5

Recalculation of Visits to
Shelter Per Hour During
Two Weeks of MCAC Study
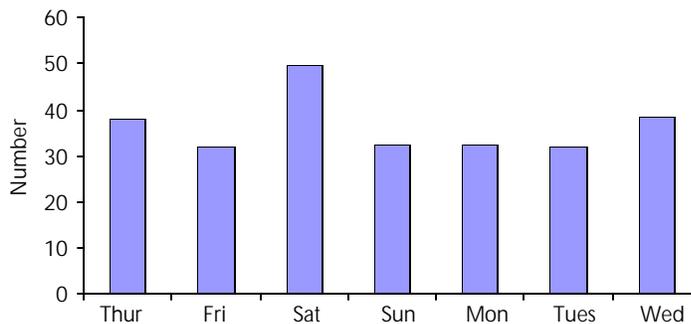
Furthermore, MCAC provided adoption outreach at Clackamas Town Center (CTC). There was not been a study done to determine the best hours to be at CTC to maximize public contact and increase adoptions. While MCAC was present at CTC on Sundays, they acknowledged this may be a good day to be open for business.

**Improve Shelter
and On-line Access**

Citizens also need adequate parking space to access the shelter. People unable to find a parking place may not choose to return to the shelter. MCAC is located in outer East County and is somewhat isolated. The only parking area available is the lot near the shelter.

The lack of parking space was noted previously in the NACA (National Animal Control Association) evaluation in 2000. During this audit, we monitored parking capacity at the shelter on several occasions. On one occasion we saw a car enter the parking lot and then leave after no spaces were available. We found that at least 8 parking spaces (36% of all spaces available) were being used by MCAC employees. There was parking available behind the shelter reserved for staff. We were told that employees were allowed to park in front of the shelter for safety precautions. We would encourage MCAC to free up those spaces for customers and provide other safety measures, such as a buddy system, for employees to park in back. MCAC management has also indicated to us they are in the process of having a fence erected between the shelter and railroad tracks that run behind the property to improve safety

Exhibit 6

**Under-utilized
Employee Parking Lot**

The Internet has increasingly become a way for people to access information and services. MCAC used an Internet web page to provide information on most of its operations. We acknowledge their efforts in this area. MCAC made the website more user-friendly, current, and functional and incorporated some new features, such as the pet license search. These steps could save MCAC staff time as more people use the web page.

To make this a more effective tool for MCAC, we suggest additional adjustments to the web page. MCAC had pictures of dogs and cats available for adoption. If MCAC wants to advertise dogs and cats over the Internet, those pictures need to be kept current. Further,

many of the pictures were blurry, did not show the animal's face, and were taken through kennel and cage bars. The pictures should be done in a way that invites adoption. MCAC stated that volunteers are used to take the photos. While we support MCAC's use of volunteers, we suggest they provide guidance to the volunteers or have staff take the pictures.

MCAC needs to continually seek input from citizens on their services. The primary source of citizen feedback was received from the web page. The web page survey should be more noticeable on the web site and MCAC should continually evaluate the results. All menus on the web page should be reviewed by management on a regular basis to verify information is current, accurate, and the web site is functional.

Telephone Responsiveness Could Be Improved

MCAC received complaints from the public regarding the telephone system. Complaints were related to long waits and an inability to reach someone to talk to. Critter Gitter, the night animal control contractor, received MCAC-related calls even during off-duty time because people wanted to reach a live person.

MCAC had 52 incoming lines, a guided menu, and 2 emergency lines. The call menu option for the emergency line is answered 24 hours a day. Non-emergency telephone hours were only four days a week— Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.—to allow for an employee lunch break. It is impossible to determine by the available telephone activity reports what time was the busiest time of day for telephone calls. Although MCAC may not have enough staff to increase non-emergency coverage, it would be improved by staggered lunch hours.

We reviewed telephone traffic reports and observed on several occasions the telephone/customer service center at MCAC. In addition, we listened to telephone calls through the supervisory line. We were told that Tuesday mornings were particularly busy because the non-emergency telephone lines are not operational after Friday at 6 p.m. We made several observations listening to calls on a Tuesday morning.

- Call takers were very friendly with the callers. While some of the callers were angry, off track, irritable, or disorganized, call takers were still very friendly in response.

- Call takers did not appear to respond to calls with a sense of urgency. Even very straightforward calls took 6-7 minutes to wrap up. The calls were consistently quite conversational and callers were not encouraged to complete the call quickly.

- Call takers did not appear to have current information on the status of the shelter, e.g., how full the shelter was.

- At one point in the morning, five minutes went by with no call takers logged in so they could take a call. During this time, the longest queue wait was 23 minutes.

- Even though four call takers were scheduled, with the exception of one 10-minute time frame, there were never more than 2 people taking calls on the non-emergency line. The longest hold time in the queue did not go below 15 minutes.

Further, several customer service staff indicated that the majority of the calls received are for lost and found pets. Of the total lost and found calls, some staff believed the majority of those calls were for lost cats. The customer service staff also stated that finding lost cats and matching them with cats in the shelter's database was very rare. The amount of time required for collecting information on these calls was quite extensive. Furthermore, many owners of lost pets called frequently to see if their pet has been found.

We reviewed the data available on the Lost and Found program. We found that MCAC had a very high stray reclaim rate compared to other shelters (27.5%). However, when we analyzed the data separately for dogs and cats, the dog stray reclaim rate was very high at 48% and the cat stray reclaim rate was very low at 3%. While the time spent helping owners find lost dogs was beneficial, it appears there wasn't the same result for matching owners with missing cats. By asking cat owners to visit the shelter, overall call response time could be shortened. While some citizens will be dissatisfied, the trade off is improved service to many others.

Telephone Call Menu Is Confusing

An automated call menu was the initial response to calls coming into the shelter. Because this system initiates telephone contact with the public, the menu should be clear and concise. The MCAC call menu organization was confusing. The menu options were not in numerical order, did not have an option to repeat the menu, and several of the different options ended up in the same place. To make the call menu more understandable, menu options should follow a numerical order (e.g., option 1, option 2, option 3, etc.). The call menu should also use common terminology. For example, the menu opening instructed callers to push 6 if there was an emergency involving a domestic animal. We would suggest something clearer such as, "If an aggressive dog is attacking you or someone else, please hang up and dial 911." Further, if the caller selected 6 for an emergency, the call menu sent the caller to another message regarding an emergency. This second message told the caller to push 1 if there wass an

emergency involving an attacking dog, injured or sick domestic animal, or loose livestock in the roadway. If the caller selected the emergency option again, they were placed on hold until the call could be answered.

The amount of time callers must spend navigating the call menu could be shortened by listing the most frequently requested menu items first. Based on telephone traffic reports we reviewed, the menu was not listed in that order. Client services received the most calls and was the fourth option listed. Telephone traffic reports can determine the optimal order of call menu options. Combining menu options into clear, succinct categories, as well as creating one menu choice for calls going to the same telephone line, would further simplify the call menu.

Shelter Appearance Could Discourage Adoptions

MCAC could improve shelter operations with some very simple actions. While MCAC staff showed a great deal of care and concern about the well being of animals, the impact shelter conditions have on visitor impressions seemed to be overlooked. We walked through all areas of the shelter on several occasions and observed shelter conditions. We also checked on kennels, storage, and space utilization.

In addition to touring MCAC, we also toured the new Oregon Humane Society (OHS) shelter and interviewed the Director and staff. MCAC cannot be expected to replicate the newer OHS shelter because of shelter age, staff size, and space restrictions. However, we identified some techniques for promoting the adoption of dogs and cats that would be useful for MCAC to consider. For example, MCAC could give dogs and cats names to personalize them and in return, visitors could refer to the animals by name and feel more of a connection with them. We would also encourage increasing personal touches to the kennels such as positive information about the animals, blankets, and grooming.

NACA recommended that MCAC keep dog kennels dry after cleaning. MCAC indicated to us that this was being done. However, on several occasions we observed wet dog kennels and on at least one occasion, soapsuds. Several of the small dogs were wet from walking through and sitting in water puddles.

For a variety of valid reasons, deceased animals (including those picked up on roadways) were cremated in the shelter's incinerator. We saw no evidence of animals being cremated arbitrarily. We also verified there is a process of supervision to prevent the wrong animal from being euthanized. As an additional supervisory checking point to verify that staff has followed procedure, we suggest that the reason

for euthanasia be hand documented in the euthanasia log. MCAC management stated that euthanization was very closely monitored but agreed an extra checking point would be beneficial. Management also indicated that shelter staff has the authority to re-evaluate a decision to euthanize an animal and discuss that decision with their supervisor.

Use of Space Could Be Improved

MCAC has an older shelter with limited space. However, available space could be used more effectively and create a safer environment.

MCAC is the only local shelter that takes stray dogs. After a 72 hour waiting period, stray dogs are made available for adoption. MCAC also has dogs that have been impounded. According to MCAC, stray and legally impounded dogs can have more behavioral and health problems. This can make them more difficult to place. As a result, MCAC is challenged with making sometimes less adoptable dogs more adoptable.

In addition to stray dogs, MCAC has owner-released dogs for adoption as does the Oregon Humane Society. OHS receives strays brought in by the public but then releases them to MCAC. We suggest that MCAC, in return, continue to send as many owner-released dogs to OHS as they will accept. This would free up shelter space and allow MCAC more time to work with the stray dogs.

The NACA report had several recommendations regarding shelter clutter and environmental safety that we support:

- Eliminate clutter inside and outside the facility

- Identify and remove all hazards to visitors and employees

- All equipment/supplies need to be stored properly, out of the reach and view of visitors

- Existing equipment should be inventoried and a determination made on its usefulness. Unneeded items should be disposed of properly

We observed several areas of the shelter that housed unused and obsolete materials and equipment. We were told some items are kept to be salvaged for parts later. We do not believe this is the best use of limited shelter space.

We also observed other areas of the shelter that are used to store unused donated items. While we encourage the use of donations, MCAC needs to identify which items are needed and that there is room to store them. We would recommend assigning one person at the shelter to coordinate identifying the need, acquiring the donations, and finding storage for them. If there is no space or need for a certain

donation, MCAC should not accept it. This would reduce some of the clutter inside and outside the shelter.

Exhibit 7

Cluttered Space
Behind Shelter

Entryway Is
Safety Risk

A mission of MCAC is to provide safety for people from animals. However, the entry to MCAC was a safety risk to staff, visitors, and animals. MCAC had one entrance for visitors and animals being brought into the shelter. The exception was for those animals being brought in by Animal Control Officers. Customer Service Representatives or other administrative personnel conducted the initial intake process such as scanning the animal for microchip identification. If the animal appeared to be aggressive, an Animal Tech was called to retrieve the animal and to do the intake process. However, the animal's temperament cannot always be determined when it comes into the shelter. For example, during the course of our audit, an employee was injured so badly from a cat bite received during intake that the employee missed several weeks of work.

The entryway of the shelter was a narrow hallway and customers were often standing in line. Bringing animals through the front entrance puts visitors and animals at risk. Visitors and animals can be exposed to a variety of animals that could have aggressive temperaments. Several times we observed multiple people with animals waiting in line for intake at the same time as other customers. We encourage MCAC to consider creating a separate intake area and have it operated by trained Animal Techs to increase safety to visitors and administrative staff. In reviewing shelter maps and walking through the shelter, we identified areas we believe could be converted into a safer animal intake area.

Program
Expenditures
Lack Planning

MCAC needs to develop a clear, unified vision of the agency's future mission. In addition, to achieve their vision, the support of department and County leadership is needed. Historically, MCAC has been moved between different departments, including the Sheriff's Office. MCAC provides a service that is unique to their current department—the Department of Sustainable Community Development (DSCD). Because their service is unique, it makes shared planning and goal setting difficult. DSCD's mission does not easily align with MCAC. If MCAC were moved to a department that shared a similar mission, such as public health or public safety, increased support and direction might result

MCAC has limited resources and therefore, services need to be carefully planned and distributed. Many of the services appeared to be based on perceived immediate need, in response to activists' demands, or are politically driven. MCAC provides a very high profile County service, and as a result, the public scrutinizes them very closely. Some members of the community keep a very close watch on shelter operations and expend a great deal of energy in providing MCAC with suggestions for improvement. While MCAC should continue to be open to suggestions from people in the community that also care about animal welfare, these services need to be well planned. By responding immediately to outside demands without examining them in the context of overall shelter needs and goals, limited resources can be scattered in multiple directions and reduce accomplishments.

Service and program decisions did not always appear to be made in consideration of current space and financial capacity. Implementing new programs and services can require additional shelter space and staff time, and they need funding to be maintained. While MCAC may find the resources to initiate and/or implement a new service or program, it does not appear that the long-term resource impact is considered. As a result, a cohesive plan for the future of the shelter is difficult to develop and follow.

For example, MCAC expressed a desire to be a "one-stop" shelter for people adopting animals. This includes selling animal care products and renting crates, as well as providing humane education, adoption outreach, and a variety of other services. However, MCAC has not done the cost/benefit analyses to determine if the capacity existed to offer all of these services. As a result, some services were not receiving the resources necessary to be fully effective. Creating space for donated crates and providing clerical staff time to support renting the crates to citizens can cut into needed resources for other shelter operations, such as answering telephones and assisting shelter visitors.

Staff Not Optimally Scheduled

MCAC has not had significant staffing level changes for the last 8 years (Exhibit 8). During that time services were expanded, improved adoption and reclaim rates occurred, and a more humane approach to animal control functions was developed. All of these factors contributed to increased demands on staff time. We also found that service demands had decreased in other areas.
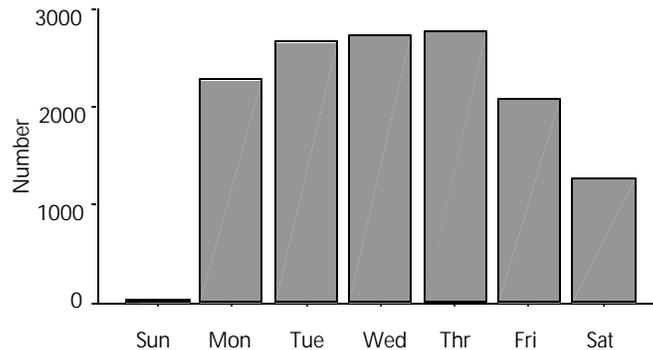
Exhibit 8

MCAC Staffing
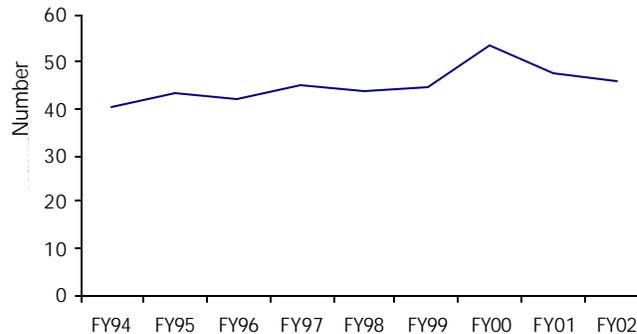
MCAC has limited resources to carry out their operations and need to utilize staff as effectively and efficiently as possible. By reviewing the workload data that were available, we determined that shelter and field personnel are not optimally scheduled. Field personnel were scheduled to work 4 days a week for 10 hour shifts. If an employee worked this schedule, the County was required to give that employee 3 days off in a row. Field services operated 6 days a week (Monday through Saturday) which created an overlap in the scheduling to accommodate the 3-day break. Twice as many field officers were scheduled on Wednesday and Thursday.

While Wednesday and Thursday were busy days for requests for service being initiated, Tuesdays were also busy (Exhibit 9). We found Mondays to be the fourth busiest day of the week despite not having customer service representatives available to answer telephones. Changing the work week to 5 days and 8 hour shifts instead of the current scheduling pattern could improve coverage. Or, MCAC should review how they can provide better coverage with 10 hour work days. MCAC management expressed a willingness to start adjusting Field Officer schedules based on the newest union contract.

Exhibit 9

Requests for
Service by Day

Requests for Service by Day

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Number
3000 ┤                    ┌──┐┌──┐
     │              ┌──┐  │  ││  │
     │              │  ││ │  ││  │┌──┐
2000 ┤        ┌──┐  │  ││ │  ││  ││  │
     │        │  │  │  ││ │  ││  ││  │┌──┐
     │        │  │  │  ││ │  ││  ││  ││  │
1000 ┤        │  │  │  ││ │  ││  ││  ││  │
     │        │  │  │  ││ │  ││  ││  ││  │
   0 ┤ ──     │  │  │  ││ │  ││  ││  ││  │
       Sun   Mon  Tue  Wed  Thr  Fri  Sat
```

We also reviewed the schedules of Customer Service Representatives. We found that most requests for service came in from 12:30 to 1:30, the front office lunch hour time. During this hour non-emergency telephone calls were not answered. MCAC should consider modifying the lunch schedule to better accommodate citizens calling the shelter during the afternoon.

The Use of Data Could
Improve Operations

Data are an important management tool. While MCAC had a variety of data available, they were not systematically collected, analyzed, or acted upon. Valuable staff time was used to collect these data and it should be put to use. Key organizational decisions were not based on the critical data analyses that could be available. Better data collection and analysis would also lend itself to better expenditure planning. MCAC had some performance goals—such as field officer response time—but there were no procedures for linking data to performance.

Data collection and analysis could also be used for overall management decision-making. By tracking service calls, telephone traffic, shelter visitors, adoptions, and any other service or program provided, MCAC management would have information for making key service decisions. This information could be used to hire and schedule employees to meet highest demand times. Programs could be prioritized or discontinued based on performance and/or the cost/ benefit. Furthermore, the future directions of MCAC could be forecast and planned.

To meet resource planning needs, MCAC needs to give data collecting systems priority. MCAC uses a software package called PetWhere that holds and organizes a great deal of data. They have worked through software "bugs" and are up-to-date with software upgrades. They should continue to improve the software's usefulness. In

reviewing the PetWhere data, we found inconsistencies in data entry in addition to multiple fields being entered as NA or unspecified. MCAC should create data entry standards and review data entry to confirm accuracy and consistency. This will make the data available more reliable.

Data for Resource Management

Tracking workload trends would provide MCAC with a tool to anticipate future resource demands. For example, the number of dogs and cats coming into the shelter decreased over the last 6 years. The largest decrease was in stray dogs. Data could be used to determine if a current program is working well and should be continued. Or, management may want to shift some resources to other areas of the shelter in response to this trend. MCAC collected data on animals for more than 15 years. Some definitions and data categories changed which makes some comparisons difficult. However, continuing to follow these trends can assist the shelter in planning the future demand and need for different services.

Incoming Dogs and Cats

Exhibit 10
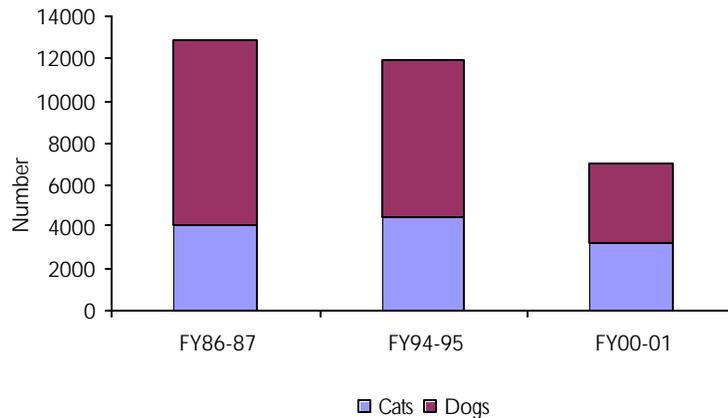
In addition to deploying and monitoring field operations the Dispatch Unit was key to data collection. The staff were in constant contact with field officers and document most of the activity occurring in the field. Trending these data would help management allocate resources throughout the County based on need. For example, we found that East County received many more service calls than any other district. On the other hand, service district 2B in NE Portland received at least 5 times as many calls for stray holdings. These data could be used in scheduling field officers more efficiently. Although MCAC management divided the County into service districts, the workload did not seem to always support district boundaries.

Calls for service information were entered into the PetWhere database by Dispatch and could be analyzed by query. Dispatch staff log data; however, these data were primarily entered into hand written Radio Logs that were never fully analyzed. The radio log data collected includes date, dispatcher, field officer responding, call priority, nature of call (e.g., aggressive dog, neglect, etc.), the address responding to, time call was dispatched, and time field officer arrived on scene. The Radio Logs were archived and not analyzed regularly. We analyzed a sample of the data to determine what kind of management information was available.

We found that:

- Each month had 243 dispatched calls

- Of the dispatched calls we were able to review, more than 50% were for aggressive animals or animals in distress

- About 1/3 (four of the eleven) of the field officers responded to about 1/2 of the dispatched calls and the high priority calls

- Non-priority dispatched calls were responded to almost as quickly as priority calls

- By matching data sets we found that approximately 18% of all calls for service were dispatched with about 9% of all calls for service dispatched as high priority

This type of analysis could be valuable in making staffing decisions. Refining what data needed to be collected could provide information for key decisions such as scheduling field officers and dispatch staff.

MCAC had standards and procedures for log entry. A supervisor needs to verify that the entry is done correctly and consistently. MCAC also needs to continue searching for an automated dispatch system. If dispatchers entered dispatch information directly into a computer tracking system, management could use the analysis to monitor the performance of field officers, needs of citizens related to animal control, and plan organizational capacity and response.

Telephone System Data

Tracking telephone data would allow MCAC to determine the effectiveness of system improvements or identify problematic areas that need addressed. The telephone system used by MCAC is a proprietary system, meaning only the original designers of the system can make changes to the system. This system was initially selected because it appeared to better meet their needs compared to other systems available. However, MCAC management indicated that the system is very difficult to manipulate for retrieving telephone data. The system has also crashed, losing data with it. Since the telephone

is a major source of consternation for the public, it is an area MCAC management needs to give priority to and measure performance. When telephone handling procedures or system changes are implemented, management needs to be able to determine the impact on telephone efficiency and effectiveness. We would recommend that MCAC use a system that better allows them to track telephone performance.

Collections Data

One way MCAC can potentially increase revenues is to improve their collections procedure. MCAC recently contracted with a collections company, Outsourcing Solutions Inc. Strategic Receivables Management (OSI), to assist them in collecting money from deferred billings, non-sufficient fund return checks, fines, fees, and judgments. This was a positive move for MCAC in collecting unpaid debts.

However, the contract with OSI was very confusing and we found that MCAC staff did not fully understand contract requirements. OSI interacted with three different people at MCAC. No one staff person knew in total how much OSI collected and were only aware of the one area they oversaw. This is due, in part, to the newness of the contract.

The OSI contract had a maximum expenditure of $75,000 and, while it is unlikely MCAC will meet that limit, there was no mechanism in place to determine if the cap is reached. Because MCAC did not systemically determine how much was due versus collected under the previous system, there is no way to compare the success of OSI. Further, since implementation management has not tracked that information. It could be that at some time it will be more efficient to move the collection function in-house. Management should continually review the cost/benefit of OSI to determine when or if a change should be made. MCAC also needs to understand the contract and make sure they monitor the results.

Recommendations

To better maximize the use of current resources, MCAC should:

1. Schedule shelter hours to increase public accessibility

   a. Stay open later at a minimum of at least one day per week

   b. Open later in morning to enable later evening hours

   c. Offer more weekend hours

2. Schedule telephone coverage to better meet demand

   a. Stagger customer representative lunches to have telephone coverage during the lunch hour

   b. Re-schedule current telephone coverage to provide some telephone coverage on weekends and Mondays

3. Improve telephone efficiency

   a. Set performance goals to turn around calls faster, reduce queue time, and reduce number of drop-outs

   b. Consider discontinuing cat lost and found calls

   c. Consider identifying one operator as back-up for longer, more complicated calls

   d. Do an efficiency study of paperwork/telephone operation

   e. Re-organize call menu

4. Prioritize program objectives and plan to meet those objectives

   a. Do cost/benefit analyses of services and programs

   b. Prioritize programs and services to determine capacity to continue providing them

   c. Develop a space utilization plan—consider an alternative animal intake space, space availability for donations, and clearing out obsolete materials

5. Develop and enforce a data collection plan

   a. Determine which data is needed

   b. Develop a plan to collect it

   c. Use data to monitor MCAC operations

6. Designate an employee(s) to oversee data collection, analysis, and reporting

7. Consider moving MCAC to a County department that better aligns with their mission
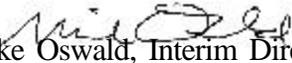
Responses to the Audit

Department of Sustainable Community

MULTNOMAH COUNTY OREGON

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Memorandum

To: Suzanne Flynn, County Auditor

From: Mike Oswald, Interim Director DSCD (prior to January 1, 2002)
            Gary Hendel, Animal Control Director

Date: January 2, 2002

Subject: Management Response to Animal Control Audit

Thank you for the opportunity to review your Animal Control Audit. We appreciate the efforts that the Auditor's Office has put into this report and have found that many of the issues raised are opportunities that can be used to improve the Animal Control program. This memorandum will provide additional information and background on the major issues identified in the report and describes our planned actions.

First, we think your report has done a excellent job in describing the difficult mission the county has in providing animal control services in a large metropolitan county: the program often deals with conflicting needs; citizens can become very emotional; the program is under close scrutiny by the public and animal interest groups; and at times animal control is "literally in a 'no win' situation."

This is the third independent evaluation of the program in the past two years. First was the National Animal Control Association evaluation in May 2000, and the second was the Multnomah County Animal Control Task Force Report and Recommendations in June 2000. We appreciate that your audit found that the division made progress on most of those recommendations. The Auditor acknowledged that we responded to those recommendations we had funds for, began work on more financially demanding recommendations and have yet to take action on lower priority recommendations.

Major Issues and Planned Actions

1. Shelter hours could be increased

The first recommendation made in the audit is to schedule shelter hours to increase public accessibility. Our hours of operation need to better reflect the schedules of people who work. We agree that increased shelter hours will have a positive impact. Three years ago we were open from noon to 7 p.m., but a traffic study showed an average of (62) visitors at the shelter between 11 a.m. and noon and only an average of (2) visitors from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. It made sense at that time to shift our schedule to 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. to service a greater number of citizens.

We agree that the limited hours open to the public can impact adoptions. Higher adoptions and higher number of animals returned to their owners are key measurements of the animal control program's performance. These factors are what citizens, animal interest groups and elected officials look at to determine how well we are doing. We are pleased with the division's adoption statistics. As the report pointed out, our adoption rate is three-times higher than the other comparable agencies surveyed. The percentage of animals reunited with their owners also is higher than the agencies surveyed.

> Planned Action
> a. We will make changes in shelter hours to better meet the needs of working families.
> b. Effective February 1, 2002, we will shift the Clackamas Town Center Adoption Outreach Center schedule to allow both a Saturday and Sunday shift.

2. Telephone responsiveness could be improved

We agree that the phone system we use to handle the high volume of calls from the public could be improved. An automated telephone system channels incoming calls over (52) incoming lines and two emergency lines to four staff scheduled on the phones during business hours. Callers can be on-hold for extended periods of time and our phone sequencing message can be confusing. We would prefer to have staff available to provide phone assistance rather than an automated call machine. We have reviewed and edited our phone sequencing message with the help of telecommunication experts to find the right balance of information and time a caller is on a line. We have also worked on developing the optimal call menu. We appreciate the auditor's independent assessment of how well the menu works for citizens. The auditor also acknowledged that we "may not have enough staff to increase non-emergency coverage." We appreciate the auditor's recognition that the division's customer service staff are courteous "despite callers who are many times angry and impatient."

The audit recommends that we consider discontinuing the lost and found calls to improve phone efficiency. One of the benefits of cat licensing is to provide cat owners with the same level of service for their license fee as with dog owners. Not providing assistance to pet owners looking for their lost cat is not consistent with our mission of the division. As stated in the audit, eliminating lost and found services for cat owners may have the result where "some citizens will be dissatisfied." This is a good example of the difficulty the program faces in meeting the often competing expectations and demands of citizens.

<u>Planned Action</u>
    a. We will bring in a consultant to make specific recommendations for improvements so that citizens can get faster, more efficient phone service.
    b. The audit suggested the phone menu be better organized. We have already rearranged the phone "tree" message in response to the audit to allow for a more consistent numerical order. We have also clarified some of the recordings to make them more efficient. We expect more improvement with input from the consultant.
    c. We will explore alternative schedules and staggered lunch breaks to improve staffing levels on the phones.

3.   Improve Shelter and On-line access

The internet is an important new tool for increasing public accessibility to animal control services. We agree that improvements can be made. The MCAC website was recognized with a National Association of Counties Achievement award. New features, like a scrolling slide show of adoptable animals, a featured pets section, a home disaster plan that can be down-loaded, and a new search tool to find lost pet information are just a few of the recent upgrades. Maintaining the site with current information has been a challenge and an area where we can make improvements.

The audit identified using shelter space better by eliminating clutter. We agree that a better effort must be made to reduce the amount of material and supplies that accumulates. The shelter is old and we are continually challenged by not having sufficient space. We are currently using our hallways to store adoption paperwork and handouts, and we use our lunchroom to store our adoption outreach supplies. More storage space is critically needed. We also agree with the audit recommendation to address the need for adequate parking and to improve the appearance of the shelter.

    <u>Planned Action</u>
    a. We will work with the County's Facilities and Property Management Division to develop an improved space utilization plan for the shelter to specifically address alternatives for animal intake, and clearing out obsolete materials.
    b. Lack of parking – safety of employees is a high priority. We will explore increased security measures to move all employee parking to the back lot.
    c. We are developing a system to take a picture of every animal upon intake and to have that picture available on the website with daily updates. This new program will be in place in January and will be one of the first of its kind in the United States.

4.   Data Resource Management

The audit indicates that we can improve our use of data analysis in decision-making, and we concur. We historically have tried to use public surveys, traffic patterns, and national standards when making decisions. Unfortunately, in last year's budget cuts, we lost two managerial positions, both of which provided data analysis roles in addition to supervising personnel. We transferred the supervisory roles to the shelter manager and to the Director, which improved efficiency but compromised our data analysis capability. We will improve in this area. The report's recommendation about data collection, analysis and planning will be helpful in management decision making.

<u>Planned Action</u>
a. We will develop a data collection plan and incorporate it into the routine business of the division.
b. The audit suggests that one person be designated to oversee data collection, analysis and reporting and we agree. We will explore a way to restructure our Program Supervisor position to create the responsibility to oversee and monitor data collection, conduct analysis, and provide regular reports to the Director.

5. Program expenditures lack planning

We agree that careful planning is critical, especially when resources are limited. We have been challenged during the last three years where our primary planning efforts have been around service reductions and service elimination necessary to address potential County budget reductions. These efforts will continue to be a challenge in the upcoming FY03 budget development process as the County faces additional General Fund revenue constraints.

6. Consider moving animal control to a different department

One recommendation made in the audit is to consider moving MCAC to a county department that better aligns with their mission. Moving the program to another department with a more similar mission is an interesting observation. There certainly are elements of public safety, law enforcement and public health associated with animal control. However, the emphasis of the program over the years has been on the principles of responsible pet ownership. The rationale for including animal control in the Department of Sustainable Community Development was based on our thinking that animal ownership issues are best aligned with community/ neighborhood livability. The organizational home for the animal control program ultimately rests with the County Chair.

Animal Control Director Gary Hendel will develop an action plan to address each of the specific recommendations made in the audit. We will report quarterly on our progress during the first year.

We want to thank County Auditor Suzanne Flynn for the opportunity to provide our comments. The work done by the Auditor will be very helpful in guiding the work of the division as we continue to make improvements to the animal control program.

Cc; John Ball, Chief Operating Officer, Chair Linn's Office