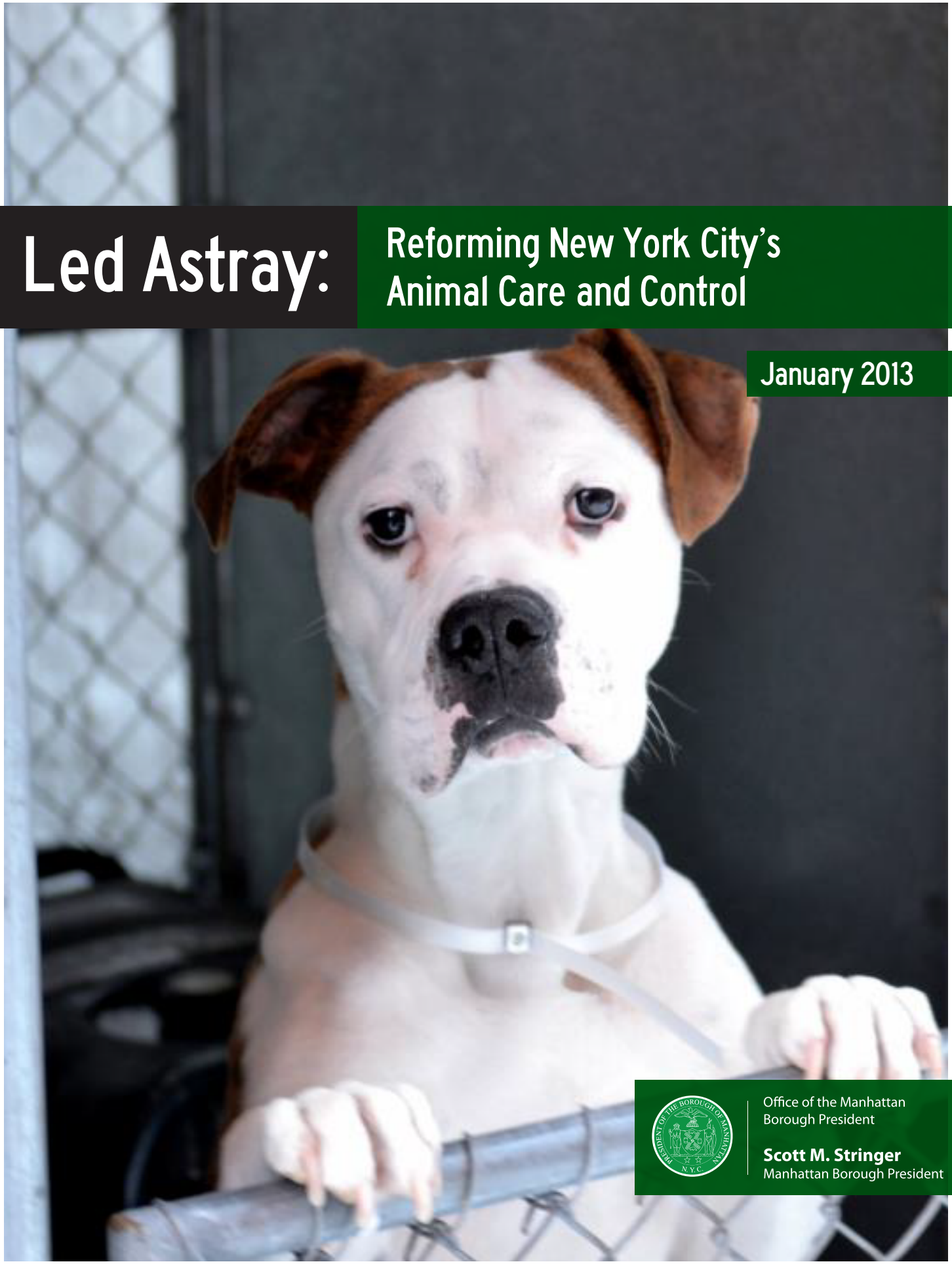
Led Astray: Reforming New York City's Animal Care and Control

January 2013



Office of the Manhattan Borough President

Scott M. Stringer
Manhattan Borough President

ABOUT MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT SCOTT M. STRINGER

During his nearly three decades of public service, Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer has achieved tangible results for New Yorkers by forging diverse coalitions and addressing the City's most enduring urban challenges. He has dedicated himself to making Manhattan more affordable and livable, tackling issues such as housing, school overcrowding, public safety, balanced development, sustainability, and equal opportunities for underserved communities.

Prior to being elected Borough President in 2006, Stringer, a native New Yorker, served for 13 years in the New York State Assembly. Representing Manhattan's Upper West Side, he led the successful fight to end "empty-seat voting" in the State Assembly, and voted against every attempt to weaken rent regulations. Stringer also emerged as a leader on animal care issues, particularly in the fight against Puppy Mills and Canned Shoots.

As Borough President, Scott Stringer has released over 45 reports, including most recently:

- Start-Up City: Growing the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem for All (December 2012)
- The Fiscal Cliff: How Looming Program Cuts and Tax Hikes Could Affect New York City Residents (November 2012)
- Economic Abuse: The Untold Cost of Domestic Violence (October 2012)
- Reforming NYCHA: Accountability for the nation's largest housing authority (August 2012)
- Time to Rebuild: A Blueprint for Reforming New York City's Department of Buildings (March 2012)
- Rooftop Revolution: How Solar Panels on Public School Rooftops Can Jumpstart the Local Green Collar Economy and Dramatically Expand Renewable Energy in New York City (January 2012).

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The report cover photo was taken at an AC&C shelter by Sabrina Paige.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City's Animal Care & Control ("AC&C") – the non-profit corporation that runs the largest animal shelter system in the Northeast – is in dire need of reform. Since 1995, AC&C has been under contract with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ("DOHMH") for rescuing, caring for and finding loving homes for the city's homeless and abandoned animals. However, AC&C's performance falls short of this mission.

Adoptions have dropped 37 percent in the past six years while placements, which enable AC&C to pass the responsibility of caring for an animal onto a rescue group, have increased by 70 percent. Dog licensing, a viable source for significant revenue, lingers at around 10 percent, and the number of new licenses issued has declined for three straight years. Furthermore, a high rate of illness at AC&C shelters exposes thousands of animals each year to potentially life-threatening conditions. AC&C's inability to generate outside revenue has made the non-profit overly-dependent on City funding, which historically has been inconsistent and inadequate.

The root of the problem is structural: AC&C is controlled by the DOHMH. The DOHMH both administers the City's contract with AC&C and oversees its board – leaving little room for AC&C to question DOHMH priorities and decisions. In short, AC&C's Executive Director and board members lack the independence, animal care expertise and fund-raising capabilities necessary to properly fulfill their mission. As a result, AC&C has experienced years of under-funding, mismanagement and service cuts – and the animals under its control have suffered severe neglect at shelters.

Nothing reflects the organizational dysfunction of Animal Care & Control more profoundly than its management history. Since 1995, the corporation has had eleven different Executive Directors, including eight in the last ten years. Additionally, AC&C has been without a full-time Medical Director on staff since February 2010, contributing to deplorable shelter conditions and a high rate of illness among dogs and cats.

On October 29, 2012, Superstorm Sandy hit New York City, causing catastrophic damage to numerous neighborhoods and displacing thousands of residents, businesses and animals. In the days following the storm, volunteers and rescuers reported that AC&C's doors were closed and field operations ceased – preventing individuals from dropping off found animals or adopting out existing ones. Veteran rescuers said the agency effectively stopped communicating – by phone, e-mail or web postings – making it impossible to know how its animals were faring or what the agency needed.

As AC&C struggled to respond, outside groups stepped in to fill the leadership void. Many smaller rescue groups took on the sometimes dangerous tasks of searching for lost animals, while others successfully set up a new network of foster families to take in strays – both responsibilities that should have reasonably fallen to AC&C. Ultimately, the ASPCA established an Emergency Boarding Facility, thanks to a $500,000 grant provided by television personality Rachel Ray, in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn to provide temporary sheltering for scores of animals displaced by the storm. The shelter did not open until November 17, more than two weeks after the storm hit.

In addition to a moral obligation, New York City has a legal requirement to care for its stray animal population. Various State and City laws outline requirements for the humane treatment of animals as well as mandate the City to operate shelters and necessary services. AC&C's record of underperformance stands in stark contrast to New York City's history as a national leader in animal care. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ("ASPCA"), the first animal welfare organization in the country, was founded in New York. Additionally, some of the nation's first and most important animal welfare laws were enacted in the city. It is time for New York to lead once again.

This report recommends a top-to-bottom restructuring of AC&C – one that reconstitutes the corporation as an independent, non-profit with a diverse board that can bring both new resources and new expertise to the City's animal welfare system. We examine the history and current performance of the corporation, as well as successful operations in other jurisdictions. Finally, we identify new revenue sources that could boost AC&C's annual funding by 133 percent.

Despite the passage of Local Law 59 in September 2011, which committed $10 million in additional funding to be appropriated by July 2014 and called on the DOHMH to increase licensing compliance, AC&C continues to fall short of fulfilling its mission. Although AC&C has made some progress in recent years – including a significant reduction in the euthanization rate over the past decade – its inability to build a comprehensive animal shelter system on par with other major cities can be seen on a number of fronts:

- **AC&C's performance continues to decline while it shifts the burden of responsibility onto rescue groups.** As shelter adoptions have decreased by 37 percent in the past six years, AC&C has shifted its focus to placements, which now account for 70 percent of all transfers. However, these placements enable AC&C to pass the responsibility for animal care onto rescue groups, leaving them to assume the burden of paying for boarding and associated medical costs while trying to find dogs and cats permanent homes.

- **Deplorable conditions at AC&C shelters.** According to the ASPCA's Director of Medicine at its Adoption Center, there is a nearly 100 percent rate of infection among the animals that they receive from AC&C facilities. Meanwhile, AC&C has been without a full-time Medical Director on staff since February 2010. This report details incidents of animal neglect at City shelters, ranging from dogs and cats being left to wallow in their own waste to animals being stacked in cages and left in hallways.

- **AC&C lacks sustained funding and requires new revenue sources to implement essential services and effectively plan for long-term needs.** The DOHMH's failure to implement an effective dog-licensing program costs the City millions of dollars each year in potential revenue; monies which could be used to fund the AC&C. Currently, only 10 percent of New York City's one million dogs are licensed – well below the 90-plus percent rate achieved by cities such as Calgary, Alberta, Canada – and the number of dog licenses issued has declined in each of the last three fiscal years. Further, despite recent efforts to increase rates, New York City's licensing fees are among the lowest in the country.

  The problem, however, goes beyond a lack of municipal funding. According to AC&C's most recent reporting, it raised $56,276 in FY2010 – a paltry sum given the city's passionate philanthropic community. By comparison, Stray from the Heart, a group run by part-time volunteers, raised $156,780 in 2010 from private funds – nearly three times as much as AC&C in roughly the same time period. AC&C lacks the fundraising ability and focus to effectively solicit private donations that could supplement operations. Furthermore, many potential donors are disheartened by AC&C's sustained record of failure and choose to give to other groups instead.

On October 19, 2012, AC&C Executive Director Julie Bank stepped down after two and a half years – the eleventh change in leadership in AC&C's seventeen years of operation. This change presents AC&C with an opportunity to establish a new structure finally giving the non-profit the independence, expertise and revenue generating abilities it needs to fulfill its mission. This report recommends the following:

1. Restructure AC&C into an independent non-profit modeled after the Central Park Conservancy

AC&C needs a strong Executive Director with genuine authority over shelter operations, as well as an independent board with animal care and development expertise. To accomplish this, the DOHMH and other City officials should be relieved of their operational responsibilities and an expanded board should be established, comprised of expert stakeholders with broad knowledge of animal welfare issues and dedicated private citizens with a passion for supporting the City's animal shelter system.

The Central Park Conservancy offers a model that AC&C should adopt: although the Parks Department retains policy control over the park, 85 percent of Central Park's $45.8 million annual budget – approximately $38.9 million – is raised independently by the conservancy and its dedicated, 52-member board. If a reconstituted AC&C board raised just a quarter of what the conservancy does, that would provide over $9 million a year.

2. Substantially Increase Revenue by Aggressively Promoting Dog Licensing Compliance

The City should work with State Legislators to transfer licensing enforcement from the DOHMH to AC&C, so that the any revenue raised can go directly to funding shelter operations. Next, the new Executive Director and board should develop a multi-faceted approach to increase revenue from pet licensing. This effort should include: mandating dog licensing at all "points of transfer" (adoptions or sales) and authorizing external entities, such as pet stores, to sell dog licenses; launching a robust publicity campaign to advertise the animal welfare benefits of licensing pets; creating an incentive rewards program to encourage licensing; and increasing enforcement and penalties for owners of unlicensed animals.

Additionally, the AC&C should work closely with State Legislators to raise the City's licensing fees, which are among the lowest in the country. Increasing licensing compliance to 30 percent and raising fees to $20/$50 for altered/unaltered animals – about even with the fees charged by Los Angeles and San Francisco – could generate close to $20 million annually in revenue. In conjunction with a potential $9 million raised from private sources (discussed in the previous recommendation) AC&C could generate $28 million a year. That sum would increase per capita funding to $3.90, slightly above the minimum that the ASPCA estimated in 2007 is necessary to operate a comprehensive shelter system in New York City.

3. Commit to Building Full Service Shelters in the Bronx and Queens

The reconstituted AC&C should commit to building full service shelters in the Bronx and Queens. Despite legislative changes that have relieved the City of any legal obligation to build shelters in each borough, the need for them remains very real. The DOHMH estimates construction of these shelters would cost $25 million with an additional $10 million annually for operation costs. While this is a significant sum of money, it is also a necessary investment in the shelter system. Section III of this report outlines ways that AC&C can substantially increase its funds in order to pay for the costs of new shelters as well other necessary services.

By implementing these sensible reforms, AC&C can finally have the independence, expertise and revenue generating ability it needs to properly fulfill its mission. And in doing so, we can re-establish New York City as a national leader in animal care.

I. INTRODUCTION: A HISTORY OF ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL

New York City Animal Care, 1866-1995

Government-sponsored animal care in New York City dates back to 1866, when New York State authorized the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ("ASPCA") to enforce animal anti-cruelty laws. Founded earlier that year by Henry Bergh as the first animal welfare organization in the United States, the ASPCA's initial goals included educating the public on the proper treatment of animals and advocating against the inhumane treatment of horses, wild dogs and pigeons. Around 1870, the City asked the ASPCA to assume management of the municipal animal shelters, but Bergh declined because the City would not provide adequate financial and political support.[1]

In 1894, to address the growing stray dog and cat problem, the State granted the City authority to designate an operator of a municipal shelter system. For a second time, the City approached the ASPCA, now overseen by a board of directors subsequent to Bergh's death in 1888.[2] This time the ASPCA accepted, and for the next seven decades the organization used its private donations to provide animal care free of charge – a tremendous bargain for a city with a perpetually large stray animal population. However, as the ASPCA expanded into a national organization, its leadership questioned the wisdom of diverting funds to pay for what many viewed as a local government responsibility.

Subsequently, in 1977, the ASPCA entered into a formal contract with the Department of Health ("DOH") – later expanded into the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in 2002 – that compensated the organization $900,000 annually in exchange for operating New York's shelter system – a rate of nearly $0.13 per resident.[3] With the ASPCA's new reliance on municipal funds rather than private donations to run the shelters, the inadequacy of government funding became a constant source of contention.[4] Many perceived the lack of sustained and sufficient funding as a clear message that animal care remained a low priority for the City. In the mid-1980s the gap between costs and revenue for the ASPCA led to the closure of shelters in the Bronx, Queens and Staten Island and the establishment of receiving centers – which do not provide adoptive or medical services – in these boroughs.[5]

In 1985, the City refused to pay the ASPCA $250,000 in overdue payments, which prompted the organization to threaten to close its Brooklyn shelter and cut back on services.[6] Although service cuts were avoided, tensions continued to mount. In 1991, New York's worsening fiscal condition led the City to slash the ASPCA's contract by approximately 25 percent.[7]

By 1992, New York City was paying just $0.53 per capita on animal care, still one of the lowest rates in the country.[8] Advocates and volunteers became increasingly vocal about diminishing shelter conditions and high euthanasia rates.[9] In 1994, 75 percent of shelter animals in New York City were euthanized – well above the American Humane Society's estimate of a nation-wide average of 56 percent for dogs and 71 percent for cats between 1994 and 1997.[10] Meanwhile, the ASPCA estimated that by 1993 it was running the City's shelters at a loss of $2 million per year.[11] In light of these factors, the ASPCA terminated its contract with the City in 1993, effective January 1, 1995.

1 Testimony of Stephen L. Zawistowski on behalf of the ASPCA at the September 29, 2005 New York City Council Committee on Health Oversight hearing on Animal Care and Control.
2 Ibid.
3 Per capita funding is calculated by dividing the funding amount by the population level. In 1980 the population of New York City was 7,071,639 people, giving a per capita number of $0.127.
4 http://www.shelterreform.org/DyingForHomesPart2.html.
5 Testimony of Stephen L. Zawistowski on behalf of the ASPCA at the September 29, 2005 New York City Council Committee on Health Oversight hearing on Animal Care and Control.
6 http://www.shelterreform.org/DyingForHomesPart2.html.
7 Ibid.
8 Testimony of Stephen L. Zawistowski on behalf of the ASPCA at the September 29, 2005 New York City Council Committee on Health Oversight hearing on Animal Care and Control.
9 http://www.shelterreform.org/1993ASPCAMemo.html.
10 http://www.shelterreform.org/DyingForHomesPart2.html; http://www.americanhumane.org/animals/stop-animal-abuse/fact-sheets/animal-shelter-euthanasia.html.
11 http://www.shelterreform.org/DyingForHomesPart2.html.

The Center for Animal Care and Control (CAC&C)

For the first time in nearly a century, New York City needed a new operator for its vast shelter system. While the loss of an experienced and committed operator like the ASPCA posed difficulties for the City, it also presented an opportunity to enact a new vision for animal care. However, no genuine effort at reform was undertaken, and the factors that led to the ASPCA's departure were never fully addressed.

The DOH issued a request for proposals ("RFP") for the operation of municipal shelters, but a satisfactory applicant did not emerge. The situation grew so desperate that the agency approached the ASPCA employees' union, Local 355 of the Service Employees International Union (AFL-CIO), to see if existing shelter employees would be willing to stay on and run the shelters themselves.[12]

The Giuliani administration ultimately decided that the City should establish its own non-profit entity, the Center for Animal Care and Control ("CAC&C"), to take over the ASPCA's contract. Unlike the ASPCA, which was always an independent organization, the CAC&C was placed under the auspices of the DOH.

CAC&C began its operations in January 1995. Its initial by-laws provided for a seven-member board – three of the members were appointees from the Department of Sanitation, the Police Department and the Department of Health, while the four others were "independent" directors chosen by the Mayor. The Commissioner of the Department of Sanitation was installed as chair of the board, a decision that raised questions among many animal advocates about the City's regard for animal care. The Department of Health was given responsibility for overseeing CAC&C's day-to-day operations, including setting its budget, hiring executive staff and overseeing its board.[13]
Notably, the CAC&C's initial by-laws mandated that certain actions, such as appointing or removing officers and amending by-laws, required a unanimous vote of the three City Commissioners, even if a majority of the board had been reached.[14] To many, this established a clear message that the remaining four "independent" directors, who served voluntarily and at the pleasure of the Mayor, were effectively powerless. Eleven years later, following an unsuccessful lawsuit from the Shelter Reform Action Committee ("SRAC"), the by-laws were quietly amended and this provision was removed.

Report: "Dying for Homes"

From the beginning, the CAC&C faced daunting challenges to carrying out its mission. In addition to an unwieldy organizational structure, the CAC&C inherited aging facilities that were not adequate for providing proper animal care. In 1996, the City Council Committee on Contracts, under the leadership of Councilmember Kathryn Freed, requested a comprehensive performance review of the CAC&C, pursuant to its contract with the City. The subsequent June 1997 report entitled *"Dying for Homes: Animal Care and Control in New York City,"* described the CAC&C as "dead on arrival," given its severe funding and facilities challenges.[15]

Dying for Homes was especially critical of the structure of the CAC&C board, which it noted failed "to provide the appointed members with fixed terms and places them in a position of being dismissed at any moment," facts that, "may have a chilling effect on the exercise of independent judgment."[16] The report went on to identify several systemic problems with the CAC&C, including a lack of animal care expertise on its board, inadequate funding, insufficient and inaccessible facilities, poor public relations, shoddy volunteer management and an ineffective adoption program – all problems that persist today.[17]

At the June 1997 City Council hearings on the CAC&C's activities, board member Dr. Louise Murray testified about her "serious misgivings as to the

12 Ibid.
13 http://www.shelterreform.org/NYCShelterHistory.html#1992-1994.
14 http://www.shelterreform.org/TestimonyofMurray.html.
15 http://www.shelterreform.org/DyingForHomesPart1.html.
16 http://www.shelterreform.org/DyingForHomesPart3.html.
17 http://www.shelterreform.org/DyingForHomesPart1.html.

ability of [the] organization to succeed under current structural and political conditions."[18] As part of her remarks, Dr. Murray related the frustration several directors felt when the Search Committee for an Executive Director was "unable to function meaningfully due to obstructive tactics" from the Administration. Said Dr. Murray,

> [the] CAC&C is trapped in a cycle of failure which can only be broken if we are released from the stranglehold of City Hall. Without the right leaders, we cannot raise funds, improve our programs, or take the kind of care we would like to of the animals in our charge. Yet we are not free to use our judgment to select this leader.[19]

Within hours of their testimony, both Dr. Murray and Rosemary Joyce – another board member who raised concerns about the CAC&C's operations – were removed from their positions on the board by the Giuliani administration.[20] The termination of Dr. Murray and Ms. Joyce sent a clear message to directors that publicly challenging the policies of the DOH would not be tolerated.

Attempts to Fix the System and Service Cuts, 2000-Present

In the aftermath of the *Dying for Homes* report, the City Council sought to strengthen the CAC&C. In 2000, the Council passed the Animal Shelters and Sterilization Act (also known as the Shelter Act), which required the City establish full-time, full-service animal shelters in each of the five boroughs by 2002.[21] The legislative findings of the act described shelter overcrowding as a key contributor to abusive and negligent conditions in City shelters. The findings also estimated that "67,000 unwanted, stray or abandoned dogs and cats entered CAC&C facilities in 1998, with 70 percent of animals not spayed or neutered."[22] At the time, both Manhattan and Brooklyn operated full-service shelters, while Staten Island's shelter provided services for 12 hours a day. Queens and the Bronx – which accounted for roughly half of the City's population – had part-time receiving centers, where animals could only be dropped off and no other services were provided.

Citing financial difficulties following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Mayor's Office and the City Council extended the DOH's deadline to submit plans for the new shelters to 2006.[23] In September 2002, the City announced budget cuts that slashed shelter hours by 50 percent.[24] That same year the Center for Animal Care and Control was renamed Animal Care and Control ("AC&C"), with a re-christened board to be chaired by the Commissioner of the DOH, not the Department of Sanitation.[25] Additionally, on July 1, 2002 the City merged the Department of Health and the Department of Mental Hygiene, establishing the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ("DOHMH").

In 2007, the ASPCA launched a campaign to establish a comprehensive animal care and control program in New York City. The organization proposed a new Bureau of Animal Care and Control Services within the DOHMH that would replace AC&C. According to an ASPCA memorandum submitted to the Manhattan Borough Board on February 15, 2007, the organization estimated the City was spending as little as $0.93 per capita on animal care and control services. With AC&C failing to provide essential services, outside organizations such as the ASPCA were forced to pick up the slack. The ASPCA estimated that it spent over $30 million on animal care services between Fiscal Years 2004 and 2006 to provide supplemental services such as spay/neuter clinics and animal placement. The ASPCA's proposal cited a lack of compliance in dog licensing as a potential revenue stream that could generate as much as $11.5 million for the AC&C budget each year.

Severe cuts to the AC&C budget in 2009 resulted in a dramatic reduction of essential shelter services. Cuts included the firing of shelter dog-walking staff

18 http://www.shelterreform.org/TestimonyofMurray.html.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 http://www.shelterreform.org/2000AnimalBill.html.
22 http://www.shelterreform.org/files/SFTHLawsuitVerifiedComplaint.pdf, page 6.
23 http://www.shelterreform.org/NYCShelterHistory.html#2002.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.

(October 2009), a halving of admission hours at the Brooklyn shelter from 24 hours a day to 12 hours a day (February 2010), and a significant reduction/elimination of the Lost and Found, Field Services, and Telephone System programs (September 2010).[26]

The City's FY 2008 Executive Budget allocated $15.3 million in the DOHMH 2008-2017 capital plan for the construction of new shelters in the Bronx and Queens.[27] However, by 2009 the City had yet to comply with the Shelter Act.

In June 2009, Stray from the Heart ("SFTH"), a local not-for-profit dog rescue organization, sued the DOHMH for failing to provide the mandatory services established by the 2000 law. In 2010 the New York State Supreme Court ruled in favor of SFTH and ordered the DOHMH to submit a plan for the immediate implementation of their compliance with the Act. The City appealed this decision, and in Spring 2011 the First Department of the Appellate Division of New York State ruled that SFTH lacked legal standing to sue because the Act, as interpreted, was related solely to human public health issues and did not address animal welfare, thereby preventing organizations such as SFTH from enforcing the Shelter Law.

SFTH filed a motion with the New York Court of Appeals requesting the Court accept their appeal of the 2011 decision on the grounds that animal rescue groups have standing to sue the City to enforce laws that are fundamentally related to animal welfare, in addition to public health. With the support of Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, who filed an amicus brief in support of SFTH's suit, and pro bono representation by the law firm of Kaye Scholer, SFTH's motion was successful, and on September 13, 2011, the Court of Appeals decided in favor of hearing the appeal.
However, before the appeal could be fully heard, the City Council passed Local Law 59 in the fall of 2011. As part of an agreement to commit $10 million in additional funds by July 2014 and a commitment from the DOHMH to increase licensing compliance, Local Law 59 absolved the City of its responsibility to construct these shelters.[28] Instead, AC&C announced it would fund vans to pick-up animals in Queens and the Bronx and take them to the already crowded shelters in Brooklyn, Manhattan or Staten Island. Funds would also go to hiring nearly 100 new staff members, implementing trap-neuter-return (TNR) rules, and requiring owners to spay or neuter all owned, free-roaming outdoor cats. Additionally, as part of this agreement, the DOHMH agreed to appoint two new independent directors to the AC&C board, bringing the total board membership to nine.

On December 11, 2012, the Court of Appeals ultimately decided that since the City law had been changed to eliminate the key requirements for full-service, citywide shelters, Stray From the Heart could no longer sue to enforce those requirements and also could not sue for damages; hence the Court dismissed the case. However, the Court emphasized in its decision that it was clear that the original law was enacted for the "benefit of the general public in New York City and for the safety of unwanted dogs and cats." This suggests that if the law had not been substantially amended, it is possible that animal welfare organizations could have sued to enforce the law's requirements.

While Local Law 59 provided a welcome increase in funding, many advocates were disappointed that the City was relieved of its legal obligation to build shelters in the Bronx and Queens, a development that undermines the City's capacity to care for animals. To many in the animal care community, the New York City shelter system is no better than it was when the CAC&C/AC&C experiment began in 1995.

26 http://www.shelterreform.org/2010ServiceReductions.html; http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/aid-city-strays-dogs-budget-cuts-hurt-way-ward-pooches-cats-article-1.187032.
27 http://www.nyc.gov/html/omb/downloads/pdf/mm4_07.pdf, pages 156-157.

28 http://www.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/menuitem.c0935b9a57b-b4ef3daf2f1c701c789a0/index.jsp?pageID=mayor_press_release&catID=1194&doc_name=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nyc.gov%2Fhtml%2Fom%2Fhtml%2F2011b%2Fpr274-11.html&cc=unused1978&rc=1194&ndi=1.

II. TODAY: ONGOING PROBLEMS AT AC&C

Nothing reflects the organizational dysfunction of AC&C more profoundly than the agency's management history. Since 1995, the agency has had eleven different Executive Directors – including eight in the last ten years. Additionally, AC&C has been without a full-time Medical Director on staff since February 2010, contributing to deplorable shelter conditions and a high rate of illness among city dogs and cats.

The root of the problem is structural: AC&C is controlled by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ("DOHMH"), an agency whose mission and expertise has not sufficiently focused on animal welfare.[29] As a result, AC&C has experienced years of under-funding and service cuts, and the animals in its care have suffered from neglect at shelters. The DOHMH both administers the City's contract with AC&C and oversees the non-profit – leaving little room for independent leadership or innovation. Although AC&C has made some progress in recent years – including a significant reduction in the euthanization rate over the past decade – it continues to struggle to build a comprehensive animal shelter system on par with other major cities.

In order to succeed, AC&C needs a strong Executive Director who has genuine authority over day-to-day shelter operations, as well as an independent board with animal care and development expertise. Without that commitment to a more rational structure, the agency will never attract and retain top-level talent committed to running a world-class shelter operation.

The current board structure has limited expertise in animal care and fundraising, two areas that if buttressed could greatly enhance AC&C's ability to fulfill its mission and foster stronger links to the city's vibrant animal care community. Of the two additional independent directors added this year, only one has even tangential animal care expertise. Dissenting opinions on the Board are rare.

According to AC&C's website, the non-profit is under contract with the City "to rescue, care for and find loving homes for homeless and abandoned animals" in New York City. Central to this responsibility should be finding humane ways to decrease the stray animal population of our city. There is no better way of accomplishing this than through full-service animal shelters, which provide adoption programs, spay and neutering and lost-and found services. This three-pronged approach tackles both the root of the stray population and strives to put healthy animals in loving homes. Full-service shelters also provide a platform for rescue groups and volunteers to build up programs and develop strong, community-based networks dedicated to animal welfare.

DOHMH officials estimate building full-service shelters in the Bronx and Queens would cost the City more than $25 million for construction and another $10 million annually for operation. While this is a significant sum of money, it is also a necessary investment in the shelter system. Section III of this report outlines ways that AC&C can substantially increase its funds in order to pay for the costs of new shelters and other necessary services.

In the year following the passage of Local Law 59, AC&C continues to fall short of fulfilling its mission. Volunteers and advocates continue to regularly document cases of abuse and neglect in our City's shelters. Despite the hiring of 30 new staffers and projections for hiring an additional 63 by July 2013, essential services like cat rescue operations and establishing a sufficient number of dog walkers have yet to be restored. Additionally, the Bronx and Queens, with a combined population that would rank among the 20 largest cities in the country, still lack animal shelters.

Response to Superstorm Sandy

On October 29, 2012 Superstorm Sandy hit New York City, causing catastrophic damage to numerous neighborhoods and displacing thousands of residents,

29 As part of its mandate to protect public health, the DOHMH has had tremendous success in reducing animal illnesses that pose a threat to people, such as rabies. According to a February 13, 2012 DOHMH advisory on rabies (http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cd/2012/12md02.pdf), the last known case of a dog infected with rabies in New York City was in 1954. Additionally, the disease has also become rare in cats, with only one feline testing positive for rabies in 2011.

businesses and animals. In the days following the storm, volunteers and rescuers reported that AC&C's doors were closed and field operations ceased – preventing individuals from dropping off found animals. Furthermore, AC&C's computers were down for 11 days, during which time the nightly "kill list" (of animals at risk for euthanasia) stopped going out to rescue groups, leaving many volunteers and rescuers to question what happened to these animals.

Individuals who visited AC&C shelters during these days describe it as being unusually quiet and empty. Rob Maher, who helps to run an AC&C-certified rescue group called Dog Habitat Rescue and routinely pulls animals from City shelters, said he visited the Brooklyn AC&C shelter on Saturday, November 3, and the Manhattan shelter on Sunday, November 4 – some five days after the storm hit – and said he saw more than a dozen empty cages in both locations. "Everybody there was shocked at how quiet it was," Maher reported. "There were so many empty cages." He was told by AC&C staff that animals had been adopted out in the previous few days, even though the agency's computers were down and other would-be rescuers had reported being turned away at the door in the immediate aftermath of the storm.

As AC&C struggled to respond, the ASPCA and outside groups stepped in to fill the leadership void. The ASPCA established an Emergency Boarding Facility, thanks to a $500,000 grant provided by television personality Rachel Ray, in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn providing temporary sheltering for hundreds of animals displaced by the storm. Meanwhile, Maher and other rescuers put out a call for foster families and to date have placed more than 80 cats and dogs in new homes – all without any leadership from AC&C.[30]

Shelter Tales: AC&C and Hurricane Sandy

Like a lot of veteran animal rescuers, Rob Maher knew Hurricane Sandy would force scores of terrified New York City pets out in the cold. What he and other experienced rescuers did not fully expect was the total failure of Animal Care & Control to help deal with the devastation.

The agency all but retreated into a bunker in the days just before, during and after Hurricane Sandy, say rescuers and volunteers who were inside AC&C shelters as the superstorm swept across the city.

"No one could get in touch with AC&C - there was no phone communication, no internet communication, no website communication - no one could figure out what they were doing," said Maher.

Maher's concern only deepened when he went to visit AC&C shelters in Brooklyn and Manhattan the weekend after the storm and saw over a dozen empty cages in each location. "This was four or five days after the storm, they hadn't been talking to anyone, and they said, 'Oh, we had lots of adoptions in the last two to three days, in the middle of a hurricane,'" recalled Maher. "We were like, 'OK, that's kind of crazy.'"

In fact, say volunteers at city shelters during the storm, there were two causes to the sudden decline in population: a limited number of private rescue groups were working overtime to pull animals from city shelters, and – much more unusual - AC&C all but locked its doors to new intakes from the public.

"There were animals there but they were locking the front doors, so people could not get in," said Jeff Latzer of Adopt NY, an umbrella group representing some 45 rescue groups. "That, combined with AC&C field operations doing nothing, meant that the normal shelter population was just decimated."

Added one experienced volunteer who worked at the Manhattan shelter every day in the week after Sandy hit: "They basically just shut down. That was their answer to the crisis – to not be open. There were no real intakes except from police."

To try and fill the leadership vacuum and help the scores of cats and dogs made homeless by the storm, Maher's group sent out an urgent plea for new foster families, a request that usually nets about a dozen willing families. This time, more than 850 families volunteered, an overwhelming response.

Maher utilized Adopt NY's network to help get the word out about the new foster families – a basic task of most municipal shelter systems – and so far more than 80 placements have been made.

"AC&C just really wasn't doing anything," Maher concluded. "They are supposed to be there to help animals, but if they are not doing that, then I don't know what the point is."

30 http://aspca.org/pressroom/press-releases/120512-1

The following is an examination of the major ongoing problems in AC&C shelters.

A. Unacceptable Conditions in City Shelters: "A nearly 100% outbreak rate of infection"

Of the three existing shelters, only the East Harlem facility in Manhattan currently accepts stay animals 24 hours a day, as the Shelter Law had mandated. The Brooklyn and Staten Island centers provide full services only between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. As a result, if a stray animal is picked up by a good Samaritan or police between 8 p.m and 8 a.m., the only AC&C shelter they could take the animal to is in East Harlem.

As part of the Fall 2011 City Council agreement to relieve the City of its obligations under the Shelter Act, AC&C has until 2014 to expand hours of operations for receiving centers in the Bronx and Queens to twelve hours a day, seven days a week. Currently, there are plans to relocate the Queens facility, but it will remain a receiving center. Overall, these improvements still fall short of providing residents of the Bronx and Queens with adequate animal care services.

Receiving centers allow for the drop-off of animals but do not have medical staff of provide other services – a serious shortfall when wounded or sick animals are brought to a center or if a neighborhood resident is looking for a lost animal. When animals arrive they are placed in temporary cages and stacked one atop the other until they can be picked up by vans. Vans then take the caged animals to already over-crowded Manhattan and Brooklyn facilities.

Overcrowded shelters create conditions that foster animal neglect and illness. In January 2012, a volunteer at the Manhattan shelter posted a grim description of conditions in the temporary cages on the Shelter Reform Action Committee ("SRAC") website. "These temporary cages are always filthy – covered with feces and no food or water. I know that some dogs or cats can be messy, but I'm usually at the shelter for several hours straight, and I check on these cages when I come arrive [sic] and when I leave, and they stay the same: filthy with vomit, diarrhea, dirty or no water." [31]

Photo posted on Shelter Reform Action Committee website on January 2, 2012 [32]

Photo posted on the Shelter Reform Action Committee website, taken in June 2011. [33]

Volunteers and anonymous employees have offered numerous eyewitness accounts of horrific conditions in the Brooklyn and Manhattan shelters: hallways lined with cages, stacked two or three high, with animals crying loudly. The smell has been described as a nauseating mixture of animal excrement and vomit.[34] Many cats are put into tomahawk cages, which are intended as carrying vessels but end up as permanent homes.

31 http://shelterreform.org/blog1/2012/01/02/notes-from-the-underground-volume-6/.
32 http://shelterreform.org/blog1/2012/01/02/notes-from-the-underground-volume-6/.
33 http://www.shelterreform.org/2011AuditAnalysis2.html.
34 http://shelterreform.org/blog1/2012/01/13/notes-from-the-underground-volume-8/.

Photo posted by an anonymous volunteer on the Shelter Reform Action Committee on July 25, 2012. [35]

Photo posted by an anonymous volunteer on the Shelter Reform Action Committee website on July 25, 2012. [36]

In November 2010, WABC Eyewitness News reporter Sarah Wallace did a three-part exposé on the terrible conditions facing shelter animals: animals in cages with soaked and soiled sheets, cages smeared with feces, cat food mixed with kitty litter, and other examples of animal neglect.[37]

In spite of these conditions, AC&C has operated without a full-time Medical Director on staff since 2010. As one might imagine, shelter animals are exposed to a uniquely high risk of illness. The most frequent affliction is an upper respiratory infection (URI), commonly referred to as "kennel cough," but which affects dogs and cats alike. URI is a fast-moving airborne illness that presents an immediate hazard for animals entering the contaminated shelter system. Other potentially fatal illnesses that afflict shelter animals include Canine Influenza, a highly-contagious disease which can lead to pneumonia, and Feline Leukemia Virus, which is easily transmitted through saliva or close contact.

35 http://www.shelterreform.org/2011AuditAnalysis2.html.
36 Ibid.
37 http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/video?id=7806880.

Shelter Tales: Cocoa

Cocoa was a healthy female dog when she was dropped off at AC&C to be spayed on the morning of June 20, 2012. It turned out to be her last day: Cocoa died on the operating table at AC&C, which has been without a full-time medical director on staff since February 2010.

It would take some time for the rescue group Project Pet to find out how a seemingly simple procedure like spaying could prove to be fatal to Cocoa. But an independent necropsy performed on the dog, as well as medical records filled out by AC&C, eventually uncovered the cause: Cocoa died because the surgical team failed to provide her with oxygen during the operation, because of an improperly monitored valve.

"In simplest terms, the AC&C suffocated Cocoa to death, cutting off oxygen to her while she was being operated upon," Project Pet wrote in a follow-up letter to AC&C. "So there is no misunderstanding here, this is not simply our conclusion, but that of a number of veterinarians."

In a June 20, 2012, letter informing Project Pet of Cocoa's demise, AC&C Director of Operations Doug Boles apologized for the lapse and said the agency was "working to ensure that such risk is minimized as much as possible" for other animals in the future.

More than six months later, AC&C is still without a full-time Medical Director on staff.

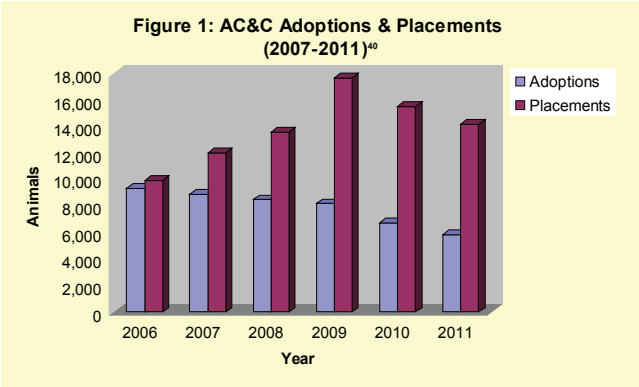
When healthy animals get sick in shelters, it can lead to dramatically higher medical costs for adopters or, worse, euthanizations that could have been avoided. Evidence submitted by animal professionals and shelter insiders suggests that illness has become rampant in City shelters. In testimony submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Health as part of the hearings on Local Law 59 in September 2011, Jennifer Lander, the ASPCA's Director of Medicine at its Adoption Center, stated, **"When animals from AC&C arrive at our facility we see a nearly 100 percent outbreak rate of infection, typically upper respiratory inflections, including influenza. These conditions can become very serious, to the point of being life-threatening, but are entirely preventable."**[38]

38 http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=1553562&GUID=833625D7-7F15-4B9C-985C-

DOHMH officials have contested this number. At an October 9, 2009 AC&C board meeting, then Medical Director Dr. Stephanie Janesczko reportedly stated that 40 percent of shelter dogs exhibited signs of URI within 5 to 7 days of arrival. However, many animals stay in shelters for more than 5 to 7 days. As an animal's length of stay in the shelter increases, so does its risk of developing an illness. Shelter illness can lead to the animal being deemed unadoptable and therefore euthanized or being placed with a rescue group, who must assume the financial burden of nursing the animal back to health.

B. Declining Performance and Results

Over the past six years AC&C shelter adoptions have decreased by 37 percent from 9,313 in 2006 to 5,843 in 2011. AC&C has instead shifted its focus to placements, which now account for 70 percent of all shelter transfers, up from 9,937 in 2006 to 14,167 in 2012.[39]



In an adoption the AC&C animals go directly from the shelter into a permanent home, whereas in a placement, AC&C transfers animals into the possession of a rescue group. When an adoption takes place and a dog or cat enters what is hoped to be a loving home, the journey is complete. However, when an animal leaves the shelter for placement with a rescue group, its journey is just beginning. The rescue group becomes responsible not just for finding the dog or cat a permanent home, but also for the costs of interim housing and medical expenses for that animal. There is no guarantee that a placement leads dogs and cats to permanent homes.

AC&C's reporting of these numbers has created confusion as to the status of animals that leave their shelters. In some statistical reports, AC&C has provided a cumulative total of adoptions and placements while failing to make clear that it has included placements – which do not necessarily lead animals to permanent homes – in that total.[41] Additionally, on the AC&C's website, under statistical reports, there is a link to see the number of "Placements," however, the hyperlink for the document refers to it as a chart for adoptions. This confusion gives the mistaken impression that AC&C is finding homes for more stray animals than is actually the case.[42] While increasing its reliance on placements over adoptions, AC&C is effectively out-sourcing the responsibility to keep animals healthy and find them permanent, loving homes.

In 2011, 14,000 animals – over a third of those animals taken into AC&C shelters – were diverted to rescue groups through the New Hope partnership program.[43] Toni Bodon of Stray from the Heart says that her organization will care for a dog taken out of AC&C until a permanent, suitable home is found, while incurring boarding and medical expenses to treat serious upper respiratory conditions contracted at AC&C operated shelters. While the collaboration between rescue groups and AC&C is completely voluntary, these figures indicate how profoundly AC&C has come to rely on their partners to carry out its mission.

25FD5A0C1609, page 20.
39 http://www.animalalliancenyc.org/about/annual2010.htm; http://www.nycacc.org/pdfs/boardmeetings/2012Q2_PublicPresentation.pdf.
40 http://www.animalalliancenyc.org/about/annual2010.htm.; ://www.nycacc.org/pdfs/boardmeetings/2012Q2_PublicPresentation.pdf.

41 In ACC's Second Quarter 2011-12 Review document (http://www.nycacc.org/pdfs/boardmeetings/2012Q2_PublicPresentation.pdf), page 6 includes a chart with the number of adoptions. However, the figures provided also include placements.
42 http://www.nycacc.org/Statistics.htm.
43 http://www.nycacc.org/pdfs/boardmeetings/2012Q2_PublicPresentation.pdf.

Shelter Tales: Lacey

In August 2012, the rescue group Stray from the Heart pulled a pit bull named Lacey from an Animal Care & Control shelter through the New Hope partnership, which coordinates with rescue groups to "pull" certain at-risk animals from City shelters.

At first it appeared that Lacey suffered from kennel cough, an airborne illness rampant in city shelters, according to the ASPCA. But like so many animals that spend time inside a New York City shelter, Lacey's condition turned out to be much worse.

It was soon discovered that she had pneumonia and required $5,000 worth of veterinary care, costs that fell entirely on Stray from the Heart. This is a familiar story that once again underscores the degree to which AC&C is outsourcing its responsibility to keep animals healthy and find them permanent, loving homes.

As of September, Lacey has made an almost complete recovery and SFTH is now trying to find her a permanent home – an often lengthy process. Toni Bodon of SFTH says the group is committed to finding good homes for every adoptable dog that comes into their care no matter how long it takes– even though they once had to hold onto a pit bull terrier for 2 years before finding it a family.

C. Shifting the Burden of Responsibility to Outside Groups

New York City is home to a uniquely passionate, committed and organized animal care community. Every day, countless New Yorkers work to improve the quality of life for the city's stray animal population – whether by volunteering at a shelter, working with a rescue group, adopting a cat or dog or just by keeping watch on their block. As AC&C has continually failed to provide adequate animal care, rescue groups and volunteers have stepped up to supplement AC&C's activities.

In 2002, the Mayor's Alliance for Animals, a coalition of non-profit shelters and rescue groups, was founded to end the killing of healthy and treatable cats and dogs at our City's shelters. In 2005, the Mayor's Alliance received an initial $15 million grant from Maddie's Fund, a national organization committed to making "no-kill" the standard for all municipal shelters in the country. The purpose of the grant was for the Mayor's Alliance to work with AC&C to establish a "no-kill" shelter system for the City by 2008, though that target was later revised to 2015.

As part of its activities, the Mayor's Alliance established AC&C's New Hope department, which coordinates with rescue groups to "pull" (a term for removing cats and dogs from shelters by means other than adoption) certain animals from City shelters. When a rescue group pulls an animal, it automatically assumes the financial responsibility for all required medical or behavior services, kenneling or foster fees and efforts to find the animal a permanent home. Mayor's Alliance members receive a small subsidy for each animal for whom they find a permanent home.

The majority of animals eligible for placement are deemed "unadoptable" by the AC&C – either because they have fallen ill, failed the shelter's "temperament" testing, or suffered from conditions that the shelter does not treat, such as broken or fractured bones. As mentioned earlier, since 2006, New Hope placements have consistently outpaced AC&C adoptions.[44] In 2011, New Hope placements accounted for more than 70 percent, or 14,162 out of 20,008 AC&C shelter transfers. While the New Hope program achieves the laudable goal of relocating stray animals from City shelters – thereby reducing the shelter population, eliminating potential euthanization and also inflating adoption numbers – the reality is most of the time, the AC&C is simply shifting the burden of animal care onto rescue groups.

Jeff Latzer, co-founder of Adopt NY, which provides resources for rescue groups, recently described the working relationship between those groups and AC&C as follows: "Rescue groups are faced with mounting vet bills stemming from widespread and well-documented AC&C medical neglect, no re-

44 http://www.animalalliancenyc.org/about/annual2010.htm.

liable behavior assessments of the animals they're pressured to pull, and a race against the clock to find quality fosters and adopters through very limited means of exposure."[45]

Because of the high rate of illness in City shelters, almost all shelter animals require veterinary care ranging from antibiotics to surgery – sometimes at a cost of hundreds or even thousands of dollars per animal. The fact that so many dogs and cats receive this care is a testament to the commitment of animal rescuers, but also underscores AC&C's limited ability to care for the City's stray population.

Toni Bodon, co-founder of SFTH, says the City should be working with rescue groups to spur adoptions instead of having them pick up the bill for nursing animals back to health. Between August 2009 and September 2010, SFTH spent two-thirds of its $156,780 operating budget on care for AC&C shelter dogs – with nearly a third of the budget going just to veterinary care alone. SFTH, like many other rescue groups, is run by part-time volunteers and raises its operating costs through private fundraising. Because SFTH spent so much on caring for AC&C animals, the organization was able to rescue fewer dogs.

Further complicating this dilemma for rescue groups are the pleas coming directly from AC&C itself. The daily e-mails that AC&C shelter staff send out to New Hope partners often include subject lines such as "HERE ARE OUR 10 SMALL DOGS AT BROOKLYN ACC WHO NEED YOU, WE ARE OVERLOADED, PLEASE HELP!", "PLEASE HELP THEM, NO ONE RESPONDING" and "ADORABLE SWEET THROWAWAY MOMMA WHO LOVES BELLY RUBS!" [sic][46] These e-mails, which can number about six on a given day, include an assessment of the animal's behavior, health and condition, all of which offer insight into the kinds of struggles that healthy animals entering AC&C shelters confront.

45 http://shelterreform.org/blog1/2012/06/25/notes-from-the-underground-volume-15-life-after-volunteer-death/.
46 7/1/12 AC&C e-mail to New Hope partners; 7/3/12 AC&C e-mail to New Hope partners; 8/12/12 AC&C e-mail to New Hope partners.

Shelter Tales: OptimusPrime

For rescue groups, the financial burden of taking on sick animals is often weighed against the risk of leaving them in the care of AC&C, an organization that is not above prodding rescuers with heart-wrenching e-mails about an animal's deteriorating condition.

For example, a July 26, 2012 e-mail sent out by AC&C advertised a dog named OptimusPrime. The e-mail noted that "OptimusPrime is an EXCELLENT dog!" but then added ominously that a routine exam showed that he "looks like he may be getting sick and is in [a] cage next to a dog with KC [kennel cough]."

"Please pull this vital, charming doggy; he deserves a family as awesome as he is," the e-mail beseeched.

Rescuers interviewed for this report said situations like these are common and often force them to make a tough decision – either rescue these animals and incur whatever costs are needed to nurse them back to health, or delay and risk the possibility that they will succumb to shelter illnesses resulting in an almost certain death, either by disease or euthanasia.

While the commitment of the Mayor's Alliance, rescue groups and other outside organizations is laudable, their ability to continue filling these gaps is contingent upon the availability of grants and the generosity of donors. Sustaining this burden over the long-term is exceedingly difficult. With the increased prevalence of serious shelter-borne diseases, rescue groups face escalating expenses. Many have argued that adoptions are a core function of any shelter and should be funded with public, rather than private dollars to assure continuity of services.

D. Feral Cats

It is estimated that tens of thousands of feral cats roam New York City's alleyways, backyards and other outdoor spaces.[47] Cats must be socialized at a young age to appreciate human companionship. As such, most feral cats are rarely suitable for adoption. As a result, many animal care advocates agree that the most humane solution to controlling

47 http://www.nycferalcat.org/.

this population is a practice known as Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). TNR involves humanely trapping feral cats, sterilizing them, clipping their left ear tip for identification, and then returning the animal to its familiar habitat. Friendly cats and kittens young enough to be socialized are put up for adoption.[48]

Surprisingly, AC&C does not perform TNR or any other practice to reduce the city's feral cat population. Instead, AC&C relies on rescue groups to do the work through the New York City Feral Cat Initiative, run by the Mayor's Alliance.

As part of AC&C's agreement with the Mayor's Alliance and Maddie's Fund, "no-kill" protections only extend to animals that are potentially adoptable. Because feral animals are not socialized, they often fail to meet AC&C's standard for being kept alive – whereas, had the animal gone to a rescue group instead, it would have received TNR and likely survived.

As passed, Local Law 59 required that the DOHMH issue regulations for animal groups to perform TNR, a curious decision given AC&C's hands-off attitude toward the practice. However, in August 2012, the City Council amended the law to remove this requirement.

E. Lack of Transparency

Tracking AC&C's costs and expenditures with any precision is difficult at best today, despite the fact that it relies on tax dollars and is overseen by a City agency. As a contractor of the City of New York, AC&C is not subject to the same disclosure requirements as a City agency. Whereas the public can easily learn about the DOHMH's fiscal activities through public budget documents, there is no line in the City budget for AC&C spending – only what the DOHMH reports as part of its overall agency spending.

Instead, as a non-profit corporation, AC&C is required to submit a Form 990 to the State Attorney General's office. While this document gives a rough breakdown of AC&C's total revenue and expenditures on salary and infrastructure expenses, it does not require AC&C to disclose details on spending for specific services, such as adoptions, where there has been a 37 percent decline over the past six years.

48 Ibid.

III. SECURING THE FINANCIAL FUTURE

As part of the negotiations concerning Local Law 59, the City committed to a one-time infusion of $10 million dollars into AC&C's budget. The first $1 million was given at the time of the agreement and $3.8 million was added into the FY 2013 budget. The remaining $5.2 million is scheduled to be distributed over the next two years and will bring AC&C's budget for FY 2014 to $12 million.[49] This will increase per capita spending on animal care to $1.46 for every New Yorker – well below the $3.75 minimum that the ASPCA estimated in 2007 is necessary in order to run a comprehensive shelter system in New York City.[50] By comparison, Los Angeles spends $5.30 per capita and Miami spends $4.36 per capita.[51]

Outside groups have dedicated their money and resources in an attempt to close this gap. In 2010 the ASPCA spent around $20 million on direct animal care programs in the city and Mayor's Alliance contributed an additional $6 million to supplement efforts.[52] Additionally, hundreds of smaller rescue groups across the city spend thousands of dollars each year on similar efforts. However, throwing money at a problem is not always the solution – rather, better

49 http://www.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/menuitem.c0935b9a57b-b4ef3daf2f1c701c789a0/index.jsp?pageID=mayor_press_release&catID=1194&doc_name=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nyc.gov%2Fhtml%2Fom%2Fhtml%2F2011b%2Fpr274-11.html&cc=unused1978&rc=1194&ndi=1; http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/public/testi/testi20110909.pdf.

50 September 14, 2006 memo from ASCPA Senior Vice president for Government Affairs and Public Policy, Lisa Weisberg. . DOHMH argues that a more accurate measure of spending is to consider per animal rather than per capita. The agency cites varying pet ownership rates across different cities, with New York City being lower than most. However, per capita spending is the metric used by the ASPCA,US Humane Society and other leading animal care advocacy organizations as well as most municipalities.

51 http://las.depaul.edu/chaddick/docs/Docs/Companion_Animal_Final_Report_030310.pdf.

52 Testimony of Ed Sayres President of the ASPCA, before the New York City Council Committee on Health, 12/17/2010; http://www.animalalliancenyc.org/about/annual2010.htm.

management structures and improved strategies are necessary.

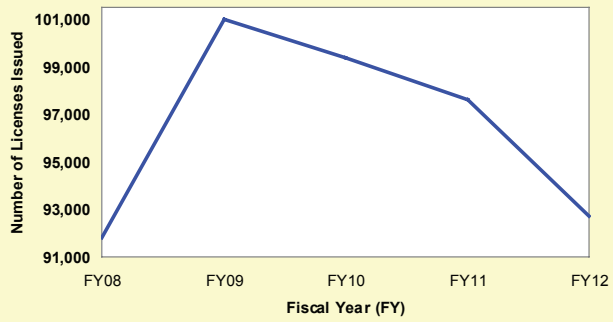
A. Dog Licensing

Revenue from dog licensing presents an important opportunity to supplement city spending on animal care. Cities like Seattle and Calgary, Alberta, Canada rely on these revenues to fund their animal operations. In fact, the City of Calgary Animal and Bylaw Services does not use any taxpayer funding to cover its $5.9 million budget.

In New York City, the DOHMH is responsible for implementing dog licensing, with the majority of revenue going to the City's general fund and – thanks to state legislation passed in 2012 sponsored by State Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal and State Senator Tom Duane – a small portion of collected fees is now directed to the Animal Population Control Fund to provide spay and neutering services for low-income individuals.[53] However, the AC&C only provided about a tenth of the over 67,000 spay/neutering surgeries reported in 2011 – with the ASPCA and Maddie's Spay/Neuter project responsible for the vast majority of procedures.[54] If this revenue were fully redirected to the AC&C, then the non-profit would have the flexibility to spend the money on operational costs, as necessary.

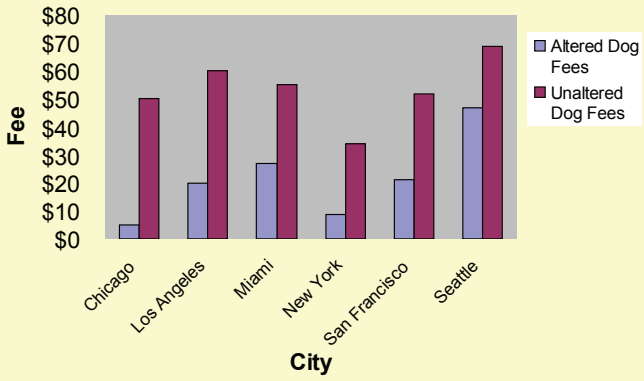
To date, New York's City's dog licensing program has been poorly implemented, costing AC&C millions of dollars a year in uncollected potential revenue. Currently, only 10 percent of New York City's estimated one million dogs are licensed (the DOHMH estimates the number at closer to 500,000 dogs; however the ASPCA pegs the number at over a million).[55] This pales in comparison to cities like Calgary which has a 90 percent compliance rate. Furthermore, the situation appears to be getting worse. According to the September 2012 Mayor's Management Report, the number of dog licenses issued has declined in each of the last three fiscal years, including a 5 percent decline between Fiscal Years 2011 and 2012.

Figure 2: DOHMH Dog Licenses Issued (FY08 - FY12)[56]



In addition to a declining rate of licensing compliance, New York City's licensing fees are among the lowest in the country: $8.50 for altered dogs and $34 for unaltered (altered animals have been spayed/neutered). If increased to levels commensurate with other major cities, these fees, which are set by the State government, would provide New York City's animal care system with millions of dollars in added revenue. Additionally, New York City does not license cats – doing so would create another potential source of revenue. Any increase in dog licensing fees or redirection of the subsequent revenue would require legislation with State approval. DOHMH has been supportive of increasing licensing fees and should continue its work with the animal care advocacy community and elected officials towards this goal.

Figure 3: Major US Cities with Higher Dog Licensing Fees Than New York[57]



53 http://www.nycbar.org/pdf/report/Control_Animal_Report061109.pdf.
54 http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/vet/2012-annual-statistical-report.pdf; http://www.animalalliancenyc.org/about/progress2011.htm
55 September 14, 2006 memo from ASCPA Senior Vice president for Government Affairs and Public Policy, Lisa Weisberg; Testimony of Ed Sayres President of the ASPCA, before the New York City Council Committee on Health, 12/17/2010.

56 http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/mmr0912/0912_mmr.pdf.
57 http://chicityclerk.com/dog-registration/prices.html; http://animalcare.lacounty.gov/cms1_153864.pdf.; http://www.miamidade.gov/animals/dog-license.asp; http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/vet/vet-doglicense.shtml; http://www.sfgov2.org/index.aspx?page=2856; http://www.seattle.gov/animalshelter/licensing-fees.htm.

By focusing on increasing compliance and working with the State Legislature to increase fees the City can charge for licensing, AC&C could create a new revenue model to ensure it has the necessary funds to fulfill its mission. A September 14, 2006 memo from ASCPA Senior Vice President for Government Affairs and Public Policy, Lisa Weisberg, outlines the ways that AC&C could drastically increase revenue by improving dog license compliance.

The ASPCA memo estimates there are one million dogs in New York City and roughly one third of those dogs are altered (spay/neutered). Based on those figures, the ASPCA estimates AC&C could generate a minimum of $8.5 million per year by increasing compliance to 100 percent. Furthermore, increasing the licensing fee to a minimum of $10 could render some $11.5 million.

While a 100 percent – or even 90 percent – rate of compliance may be an unreasonable goal for New York to achieve given its sizable population, a boost from 10 to 30 percent is attainable. Assuming the current pricing scheme and a 30 percent rate of compliance, the AC&C could generate $7.65 million in new revenue. Adding this sum to the Fiscal Year 2014 baseline budget of $12 million would give AC&C $19.65 million in funds – a 64 percent increase.

Taking these calculations a step further, if licensing fees increase to $20/$50 for altered/unaltered animals, comparable to the current fees of Los Angeles and San Francisco, then a 30 percent compliance rate could net the AC&C an additional $12 million for a total of $24 million in funds – an impressive 100 percent increase. In short, the City could double AC&C's current budget simply by aligning its licensing fees with other major cities and undertaking a pro-active campaign to license more animals.

B. Strategies to Increase Licensing Compliance

As part of Local Law 59, the DOHMH launched the "Is Your Dog a Real New Yorker" campaign to encourage greater dog licensing. The campaign consisted of ads placed throughout the city, but ran for only about 90 days between October 2011 and January 2012.[58] It is unclear what, if any, additional strategies accompanied the ad campaign. Despite the campaign, the number of dog licenses issued declined 5 percent between July 2011 and June 2012. Furthermore, the 92,700 licenses issued during that time frame were well short of the DOHMH's stated target of 105,000.[59]

While this program was a step in the right direction, clearly more needs to be done. In 2006, the ASPCA recommended several strategies that the DOHMH and AC&C could implement for increasing compliance, including mandating licensing at "points of transfer" (adoptions or sales), and authorizing external entities to sell dog licenses, such as veterinarians, humane societies, shelters, pet shops, boarding, grooming and training facilities. Unfortunately, none of these recommendations have been implemented.

Bill Bruce, who ran the highly successful City of Calgary Animal and Bylaw Services for 12 years (see Section IV), believes the secret to significantly boosting licensing compliance is a value-based approach. Simply put, pet owners are more likely to license their animal if they can see the tangible benefits of what they are paying for. Licensing should not be viewed as a burden, but rather as a value added for a pet owner. One easy-to-replicate idea is Calgary's "I Heart My Pet Rewards" program, which gives discounts on restaurant meals, hotels, car services and clothing at over 60 participating businesses. Bruce estimates most pet owners recoup their licensing fee after one or two purchases.

Moreover, because Calgary's $5.9 million animal operation budget is funded completely with revenue collected from licensing and other fees, the agency has a strong incentive to focus on generating this revenue.

58 http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/pr2011/pr025-11.shtml.
59 http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/mmr0912/0912_mmr.pdf.

In addition to increasing awareness and enforcement, an effective licensing campaign must also eliminate barriers to licensing compliance. As such, Calgary has made licensing as convenient as possible, including automatically sending out renewal notices, establishing a 24-hour hotline to license pets, creating an online form and allowing owners to license animals at the bank or even directly through an officer.[60]

Recently, Chicago has shown how a comprehensive campaign can boost dog-licensing compliance in a short period of time. Chicago is home to roughly 560,000 dogs and has historically struggled to get dog owners to license their pets, with an estimated compliance rate of 5 percent as of 2011.[61] In fall 2011, Chicago City Clerk Susana Mendoza announced the City would begin a significant crackdown on pet owners who did not license their dogs following a 90-day education and public awareness campaign and a "Dog of Distinction" contest.

The results have so far been impressive: through the first quarter of 2012, 9,100 Chicagoans have registered their dogs – more than double the number of dogs registered during the first quarter of 2011.[62] Additionally, dog-licensing revenue is up 118 percent over that same time period. While Chicago still has a long way to go, this initiative gives New York a tangible example of how a comprehensive awareness campaign can yield immediate results.

C. Fundraising and a Revenue Generation Model

A June 5, 2011 *New York Times* article estimates the United States Pet Industry generates over $55 billion in annual revenues.[63] In 2007, the ASPCA estimated the industry is responsible for over $100 million in tax revenues for New York City alone.[64] AC&C should be working with the pet services industry to boost private fundraising and form public-private partnerships to promote its operations, such as dog-licensing compliance or adoptions.

In FY 2011, AC&C reported it had raised a paltry $56,276 from private sources – equivalent to less than half a penny per New Yorker. In contrast, Stray from the Heart, a group run by part-time volunteers, raised $156,780 in 2010 from private funds – nearly three times as much as AC&C in roughly the same time period.

By comparison, the Central Park Conservancy raised $38.9 million through fundraising and invested revenue. By restructuring the AC&C board to include the city's passionate and generous philanthropic community as well as individuals with marketing expertise, the City could significantly increase private fundraising revenue.

When combined with an increase in dog-licensing compliance and a steady commitment in funding from the City, the results could be transformative for AC&C. For example, if:

- The City were to establish a baseline funding of $10 million a year for AC&C ($2 million less than FY 14 projections);
- Dog licensing fees were restructured to generate $12 million a year through an increase to $20/$50 for altered/unaltered animals and a 30 percent compliance rate; and
- A new AC&C board raised about a quarter of the Central Park Conservancy's annual fundraising haul – approximately $9 million

Then the AC&C would have a robust $32 million a year in funding to carry out its mission. That is the equivalent of $3.90 per capita, slightly above the ASPCA's estimate of minimum required spending in order to provide comprehensive animal care services for New York City.

60 http://network.bestfriends.org/groups/conferences/news/archive/2008/10/31/municipal-animal-programs-that-work.aspx.
61 http://www.suntimes.com/news/cityhall/8412365-418/no-dog-license-you-could-finally-face-a-ticket-in-chicago.html.
62 Ibid.
63 http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/business/05pets.html?pagewanted=all&_moc.semityn.www.
64 Source: Documents submitted to the Manhattan Borough Board on 2/15/07.

IV. BEST PRACTICES: JURISDICTIONS WITH SUCCESSFUL ANIMAL CARE SYSTEMS

As part of this report, information was gathered on animal welfare systems in other cities that are independent, staffed by trained animal care experts in leadership positions and have robust fundraising operations that leverage the goodwill of their communities. All are recognized as models in the field of municipal animal shelter operation.

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Calgary, home to 1.1 million residents, has the most impressive municipal shelter system in North America. The City of Calgary Animal and Bylaw Services, run from 2000 to 2012 by Bill Bruce, funds its entire $5.9 million annual budget at no cost to taxpayers.[65] Instead, it relies entirely on its own revenues – a mixture of licensing, adoption, fines, and other sources. The licensing compliance rate for dogs is 91 percent and the euthanasia rate is a mere 6 percent; for cats it is 50 percent and 18 percent respectively.[66] Despite having a population one-eighth the size of New York City, Calgary boasts roughly 11,000 more licensed dogs than the five boroughs (using the ASPCA's estimate of 100,000 dogs).[67]

This success starts at the top. Bruce was granted the freedom and independence to make key changes to the Calgary shelter system. His unique approach started with the belief that the emphasis in animal care should be placed on humans, rather than their pets. "Any animal that ends up in a shelter is there because the human end of the relationship failed," he says.[68] From there, Bruce implemented a three-pronged approach to responsible pet ownership: licensing, public education and enforcement.

As discussed in Section III of this report, Bruce's approach focused on creating a value for licenses. Pet owners are more likely to license their animal if they can see the tangible benefits of what they're paying for – as seen in the successful "I Heart My Pet Rewards" program. Another clear benefit is the City's return-to-owner policy, which provides drop-off service at home for any licensed animal found alone on the street.

Calgary puts its licensing revenues to work. For instance, in 2011 the system processed 731 animals through a No Cost Spay/Neuter Program funded entirely from cat-licensing fees.[69] Revenue from the dog-licensing program goes directly to covering the cost of operations. The benefits of licensing are touted in the agency's 2011 annual report: "Licensing allows pets to be returned to their owners faster and reduces euthanization rates. Calgary has one of the highest return-to-owner and lowest euthanization rates in North America."[70]

One important distinction between the approaches taken by Calgary and New York City is the cost of licensing an animal. The DOHMH charges $8.50 for neutered dog and $34 for non- neutered, whereas Calgary charges $31 for a neutered dog and $53 for non-neutered. Additionally, Calgary charges for cat licensing – $15 for altered and $30 for unaltered. This is a significant boost that undoubtedly helps with generating needed revenue. At the same time, the "I Heart My Pet Rewards" program allows owners to quickly recoup licensing fees through discounts.[71] It is a win-win for animal owners and the shelter system.

San Diego, California

Mike Arms, Director of the Helen Woodward Animal Center (HWAC) in San Diego, believes a shelter system should be run like any successful multi-million dollar business – "Marketing, fundraising and promotion… that's the first thing you have to do." Since Arms took over in 1999, the Center's endowment has increased from virtually nothing to $10 million. The Center is also launching a $50 million expansion project.

65 http://www.thestar.com/news/article/1053251--what-cowtown-s-pound-can-teach-hogtown.
66 http://saveourdogs.net/2009/08/09/the-calgary-model-for-success/.
67 http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/ABS/Documents/ABS-2011-Annual-Report.pdf.
68 http://saveourdogs.net/2009/08/09/the-calgary-model-for-success/.
69 http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/ABS/Documents/ABS-2011-Annual-Report.pdf.
70 http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/ABS/Documents/ABS-2011-Annual-Report.pdf.
71 http://www.thestar.com/news/article/1053251--what-cowtown-s-pound-can-teach-hogtown.

HWAC has the highest adoption fees in all of San Diego County, yet is one of the most popular private animal shelters in the country. Arms' approach is simple: a warm and inviting shelter and an aggressive media strategy will drive foot traffic. In 1999, HWAC launched the "Home 4 the Holidays" pet adoption campaign, which strives to reduce euthanasia by encouraging families to adopt a pet rather than purchase from a puppy mill or backyard breeder. The campaign has quickly grown from fourteen shelters in San Diego County to a national campaign that has resulted in the adoption of over seven million animals in the past twelve years.

Additionally, HWAC uses the momentum of current events as a tool to drive potential adopters to visit their facilities. During the Occupy Wall Street movement in fall 2011, HWAC staged an "#Occupyhearts protest" to raise awareness for adoptions. Animals were accompanied by signs that said "too cute to fail" and "I am the K-99%." Arms says a successful shelter should find ways to engage the media: "You have to market your product and increase footsteps by playing up the beautiful pets that you have."

Photo of puppy at Helen Woodward Animal Shelter's Occupy Hearts adoption drive on October 20, 2011.[72]

72 http://helenwoodwardanimalcenter.wordpress.com/2011/10/20/occupy-protests-gone-to-the-dogs/.

Photo of puppy at Helen Woodward Animal Shelter's Occupy Hearts adoption drive on October 20, 2011.

Arms also believes shelter system success begins at the top with the Executive Director and that independence is necessary for effective leadership. "I can't work if my hands are tied and I can't get things done," he says. When asked how New York could adopt an incentive-based approach to encourage animal licensing compliance, Arms offered a truly outside-the-box idea: raise the base dog licensing fee from $8.50 to $9. Then set aside revenue generated by that extra fifty-cent increase and create a lotto where each year one owner of a licensed animal is selected and given a cash prize. Arms' point is whether you are trying to get people to comply with laws or adopt animals, it all starts with generating attention and getting people excited to be part of your solution.

Washoe County, Nevada

Public-private partnerships can provide a strong foundation for a municipal shelter system, provided there is strong leadership at the top.

One of the more unique public-private partnerships is in Washoe County, Nevada – home to Reno and approximately 430,000 residents. Since 2006, Washoe County Animal Services (WCAS) and the Nevada Humane Society have operated out of the same building and developed a joint strategy for pro-

viding animal care. In the first year, adoption rates increased by 53 percent for dogs and 84 percent for cats while the "save rate" for dogs increased countywide by 50 percent.[73] Today, Washoe County boasts a 9 percent euthanasia rate – among the lowest in the nation.[74] The collaboration behind this remarkable turnaround is documented in a report by WCAS Manager Mitch Schneider entitled *"Creating a Win-Win: Reducing Costs While Improving Customer Service and Public Support."*[75]

V. A LOCAL GOVERNANCE MODEL: THE CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY

In addition to employing best practices from other animal welfare agencies, the City should redesign AC&C's governance structure along the model of the Central Park Conservancy.

In the late 1970s, Central Park was in a state of disrepair and neglect. In response, the Central Park Conservancy was founded in 1980 by merging the Central Park Task Force and the Central Park Community Fund into one group. These individual groups had formed in response to concerns that Central Park was being abandoned because of its astoundingly high crime rate. Many philanthropists and community members were concerned over the fate of the park.

Today Central Park is one of the nation's greatest public spaces, thanks largely to over $470 million in funds raised privately by the Conservancy since its founding. Although the Parks Department retains policy control over the park, 85 percent of its $45.8 million annual budget – approximately $38.9 million – is raised independently each year by the Conservancy and its dedicated board.[76]

The Conservancy is run by a board of trustees that has 52 members. The Mayor appoints five, and there are four ex-officio members, including the Manhattan Borough President, the Commissioner of the Department of Parks and Recreation, the President of the Women's Committee for the Central Park Conservancy, and the President and CEO of the board. The other members, who have to run for re-election every two years, are meant to support the city's businesses and philanthropic goals and are expected to donate to help fund the restoration, maintenance, and projects of the park. The Board of Trustees elects its President and CEO, a Board Chair, Vice-Chairs, a Secretary and a Treasurer every year. There are no term limits for any elected members of the board.

The AC&C should adopt a similar model as the Central Park Conservancy. A larger board would add diversity and independence to the AC&C's structure and improve it ability to raise private sector dollars, while also adding a level of animal welfare expertise that simply does not exist today.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. RESTRUCTURE AC&C INTO AN INDEPENDENT NON-PROFIT MODELED AFTER THE CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY

Under its current model, AC&C lacks the independence and funding to fulfill its mission. The best chance at reversing this trajectory and providing New Yorkers with the animal care system they deserve is by restructuring the AC&C.

As with any successful agency, non-profit or private sector company, leadership starts at the top. An Executive Director must have authority over day-to-day operations and a level of financial support that allows for the creation of a clean, safe, forward-thinking animal welfare system. The best way to accomplish this is through an expanded board comprised of expert stakeholders with broad knowledge of animal welfare issues, as well as dedicated private citizens with a passion for supporting the City's shelter system. Such a framework would vastly expand AC&C's ability to raise funds, while also providing a level of expert oversight that does not exist today.

AC&C currently has a nine-member board of directors, all of whom serve at the pleasure of the Mayor, and the Commissioner of the Health Department

73 http://www.cvent.com/events/2012-no-more-homeless-pets-national-conference/custom-17-7c5bde28fbe9439ca5c058e2f7300b65.aspx.
74 http://www.toledoblade.com/local/2011/08/06/Collaboration-results-in-reduced-dog-euthanasia-rates-officials-say-2.html.
75 cma.org/Documents/Document/Document/303807.
76 http://www.centralparknyc.org/about/.

chairs the board. As outlined in Section V, the Central Park Conservancy has a 52-member Board of Trustees – with only five appointed by the Mayor and the rest selected by fellow board members. The composition of the board includes a robust mixture of individuals with knowledge. Although the Parks Department retains policy control over the park, 85 percent of its $37.4 million annual budget is raised independently by the Conservancy and its dedicated board.

Implementation
Changes to the AC&C's structure can be made by the corporation's Board of Directors. Additionally, the City Council could push for changes as part of contract negotiations when the current AC&C agreement with the City expires in 2015.

From there, the City should seed the new AC&C board with an initial group of roughly ten individuals who can help the new board establish new by-laws and a system for selecting new members. Initial representation on the AC&C board should include outside experts in animal care who can counsel AC&C management, such as the ASPCA, Mayor's Alliance and other organizations that have significantly invested in improving New York's homeless animal population. As with the conservancy, the board members should decide on their own system for governance, independent of municipal control. With this solid foundation in place, the reconstituted AC&C should bring on a strong Executive Director to oversee day-to-day operations.

In order to significantly boost collaboration, promotional efforts and private sector fundraising, individuals with development and marketing expertise and members of the pet services industry should be represented on the board. The DOHMH should serve as an ex-officio member and its relationship with AC&C should be similar to that of the Parks Department and the Central Park Conservancy. However, it is crucial the new board be granted the freedom to run the day-to-day operations of the City's shelters.

By bringing together these diverse stakeholders, AC&C would be able to take on a stronger leadership role in the city's animal care community and work with outside groups on a coordinated approach to fundraising and spending. This would help ensure that spending on animal care happens in the most strategic and efficient manner.

Support
Proposals to reform AC&C's Board of Directors and re-model it based on a structure similar to that of the Central Park Conservancy have already attracted tremendous support in the animal care community. In Fall 2011, Manhattan Borough President Stringer launched the Protecting Animal Welfare and Safety (PAWS) campaign to encourage New Yorkers to support such a reform proposal. To date, the petition has received over 8,800 signatures, nearly 5,000 likes on Facebook and over 200 tweets.[77]

2. SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASE REVENUE THROUGH AGGRESSIVE PRIVATE FUNDRAISING AND PROMOTING PET LICENSING COMPLIANCE

In order to attain necessary operational funds, establish appropriate shelter conditions and pay for necessary capital expenditures, the new board should develop a business plan with an emphasis on proactively identifying new opportunities to increase licensing compliance and adoptive services. One way to do this is to partner with corporations, cultural institutions and the pet service industry to raise awareness about AC&C activities. The goal should be to generate excitement and media attention around AC&C and its services.

Additionally, the AC&C board should focus fundraising efforts on necessary capital expenditures – such as new shelter facilities. People are more likely to give money if they can see the tangible benefits of their donations. Additionally, calling attention to necessary capital projects would generate interest in shelter activities. If a reconstituted AC&C board raised a quarter of what the Conservancy does, that would be over $9 million a year – enough to double the AC&C's budget.

Currently, the responsibility for enforcing pet license compliance rests with the DOHMH, with the majority of revenue going straight to the agency and a

77 http://www.mbpo.org/paws/.

small portion directed to spay/neutering services. The City and AC&C should work with state legislators to transfer this responsibility to the reconstituted AC&C. The new Executive Director and dynamic new board should then be charged with developing a multi-faceted approach to increasing revenue from pet licensing that includes:

- Mandating the issuance of dog and cat licensing at all "points of transfer" (adoptions or sales) and authorizing external entities to sell dog licenses, such as veterinarians, humane societies, shelters, pet shops, boarding, grooming and training facilities;

- Undertaking a robust publicity campaign to advertise the animal welfare benefits of licensing dogs and cats, especially now that licenses can be obtained easily and quickly online. The City should involve all relevant stakeholders – rescue groups, pet store owners, dog-run operators, city schools – to raise awareness and engage the general public. This should be a comprehensive effort that utilizes digital tools and harnesses the energy of the City's active animal care community. The NYPD and Parks Police should be encouraged to issue warnings, and then summonses, to increase compliance; and

- Creating an incentive rewards program to encourage dog and cat licensing, modeled after Calgary's "I Heart My Pet Rewards." Such a program would not just incentivize compliance but also provide pet owners with an opportunity to save money on needed pet products and services.

In addition, the reconstituted AC&C should work with the State Legislature to increase the licensing fee, which at $8.50 for spayed/neutered animals is one of the lowest fees in the country.

AC&C has the potential to more than triple its annual funds by aggressively targeting private fundraising and boosting pet compliance. As with the Central Park Conservancy model, public funding should continue to pay for a portion of animal care services, but the reconstituted AC&C should move aggressively to create its own revenue stream that would give it the needed independence and flexibility to effectively revamp its operations.

3. COMMIT TO BUILDING FULL-SERVICE ANIMAL SHELTERS IN THE BRONX AND QUEENS

According to AC&C's website, the non-profit is under contract with the City "to rescue, care for and find loving homes for homeless and abandoned animals" in New York City. Central to this responsibility should be finding humane ways to decrease the stray animal population of our City. There is no better way of accomplishing this than through full-service animal shelters, which provide adoption programs, spay and neutering and lost-and-found services. This three-pronged approach tackles both the root of the stray population and strives to put healthy animals in loving homes. Full-service shelters also provide a nexus for rescue groups and volunteers to create strong, community-based programs dedicated to animal welfare.

The DOHMH estimates these shelters would cost $25 million for construction and $10 million annually for operation. While this is a significant sum of money, it is also a necessary investment in the shelter system. Construction of the Bronx and Queens shelters would also give the reconstituted AC&C a worthy and tangible project to fundraise around – one that could potentially generate positive press attention for the shelter system.

These facilities would not just give residents access to services such as adoptions, spay and neutering and lost and found – which will help control the stray animal population in these boroughs – but would also help reduce overcrowding at the Manhattan and Brooklyn shelters. Further investment should also be made to the antiquated facilities in Manhattan and Brooklyn, which are in serious need of an upgrade.

By implementing these sensible reforms, AC&C can finally have the independence, expertise and revenue generating ability it needs to properly fulfill its mission. And in doing so, we can re-establish New York City as a national leader in animal care.

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