

## **1. Why have so many animals been put down?**

Since February, the shelter has been operating differently under city management. Although it was always taxpayer-funded, the City had to take over operations to ensure it remained open to the public. Previously, euthanasia was easier to control because the shelter could close its doors and maintain a 3-5 month waiting list for owner surrenders. The prior organization also stopped accepting animals from animal control, which forced the city to rely on neighboring shelters for animals picked up by animal control.

Now, the shelter takes in not only highly adoptable pets but also animals that are severely injured, neglected, involved in accidents, sick, aggressive, or bite cases. Every animal is thoroughly evaluated by a licensed veterinarian with decades of experience, who assesses their health and behavior. Euthanasia is only considered when an animal's condition or behavior poses a significant risk or prevents them from having a good quality of life.

In January 2024, after announcing the City would take over shelter operations, we were contacted by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), the largest animal rights organization in the world. PETA is known for advocating on behalf of animals and promoting ethical treatment across a variety of industries. They commended our efforts to keep the shelter open to the public and recognized the issues that arise when organizations close intake to the community. In August, they sent a follow-up letter, continuing their support of our work. The letters from PETA are attached to this email for your reference.

## **2. Why is it that less than half of the animals taken into the shelter survived?**

Several factors influence survival rates, including the condition of animals upon arrival. Many animals come in with severe injuries, illnesses, or behavioral issues that make it difficult for them to thrive. Our veterinarian carefully evaluates each animal to determine the best course of action based on their health, potential for recovery, and adoptability. Unfortunately, some arrive in such poor condition that their chances of survival are limited.

## **3. What is the city doing to try and improve this number?**

The City of Harlingen has been actively spaying and neutering shelter pets and will be expanding these efforts. We are also promoting adoption events, partnering with rescue organizations, and educating the public about responsible pet ownership. To better manage intake, we plan to close the shelter one or two days a week for deep cleaning, allowing partner rescues to pull animals, while volunteer groups spend time with the animals while staff deep cleans.

**4. For euthanasia, many reasons are listed like failure to thrive. What does this mean?**

"Failure to thrive" refers to animals unable to recover from serious medical conditions or injuries that severely diminish their quality of life. For example, this could include animals suffering from severe malnutrition, chronic untreated infections, or life-threatening injuries. In these cases, despite best efforts, their chances of recovery are slim, and euthanasia may be the most compassionate option to relieve their suffering.

**5. For euthanasia, many reasons are listed like aggression to humans and animals. What factors go into deeming an animal aggressive?**

Aggression is assessed based on a thorough evaluation by our veterinarian and shelter staff. This includes the animal's history, behavior during their time at the shelter, and the severity of any aggressive incidents. We carefully consider whether the aggression is a one-time occurrence, manageable through training, or poses an ongoing risk to humans and other animals.

**6. For euthanasia, many reasons are listed like behavioral issues. What factors go into deeming an animal with a behavior issue?**

Behavioral issues are evaluated based on their severity, the animal's history provided by previous owners, and their impact on the animal's ability to thrive in a home environment. Some behaviors, such as excessive fear or aggression, may make an animal difficult to adopt or dangerous in certain situations. Our veterinarian, along with shelter staff, assesses whether the behavior can be modified or poses a long-term challenge.

**7. What is the message to animal advocates and the public who are concerned with these numbers?**

The Harlingen Animal Shelter is dedicated to the humane treatment of all animals in our care, but our resources and space are limited. We are constantly working to adopt out as many animals as possible through collaboration with rescue groups, foster programs, and public adoption events. All animals in the shelter are evaluated by a licensed veterinarian with extensive experience, and every effort is made to rehabilitate and rehome them.

While euthanasia is sometimes necessary due to medical or behavioral issues, the shelter operates with the policy of "No Termination Date." This means we commit to housing and caring for animals for as long as humanely possible, ensuring they receive the best care, even if they cannot be adopted.

We invite the community, rescue groups, and volunteers to join us in our mission to save as many animals as possible. Every adoption, foster placement, and act of support helps. Together, we can make a meaningful impact on the lives of these animals and ensure those that cannot be saved receive the compassionate care they deserve.

**8. Is the City Shelter going to look to partner with other organizations to house animals to help combat the number of animals currently being put down?**

Yes, the City Shelter already partners with several reputable rescue organizations. Since these rescues are not taxpayer-funded shelters, they are able to manage their own capacity and pull pets from us, ensuring those animals are not euthanized. We will continue to collaborate with these rescues and are open to expanding our network. However, any organization we partner with must have the proper paperwork in order to be vetted, ensuring they meet the necessary standards for care and capacity management.