Frequently Asked Questions
Six City Contracts for Animal Services Terminate June 30, 2018
March 2018

San Diego County's Department of Animal Services has long provided animal services for six cities throughout the county, as well as the county's unincorporated areas. County officials have terminated their animal service contracts with these six cities: Carlsbad, Del Mar, Encinitas, San Diego, Santee and Solana Beach. The current contract terms will expire on June 30, 2018. It is possible that as of July 1, the 20,000 animals that the County's Department of Animal Services cares for in a given year could find themselves without a place to go. San Diego Humane Society is responding to a need to take care of these animals and is in negotiations to take over these city contracts, as well as possibly the unincorporated areas of the county. San Diego Humane Society is concerned about where these animals will go if a decision about the future of animal services is not reached soon.

More questions? Please send them to advocacy@sdhumane.org

Q: Why did San Diego Humane Society get involved in negotiating for animal service contracts?
A. When approached with the opportunity to take on animal service contracts, we were honored to be considered to take on this important work. We believe we are uniquely qualified to protect animals and serve as a safety net for pet families in San Diego County. Extending our work to take on these animal service contracts directly aligns with our mission. We can enhance services for our human and animal constituents throughout the region by transferring animals more easily, reducing confusion between agencies and expanding hours and coverage. As we continue negotiation, it is important to reflect on the responsibility our community has to care for the 45,000 homeless pets that enter shelters in San Diego annually.

Q. What is an animal service contract?
A. It is a contract between a municipality and an animal control agency charged with responding to requests for help with animals ranging from wild animals, dangerous animals or animals in distress. This work can include catching and caring for stray animals, reuniting them with their families, investigating complaints of potential neglect/abuse and finding homeless pets new homes.

Q: What are the benefits for the animals if SDHS takes on the animal service contracts for the six cities and potentially the county?
A: We believe the benefits would be:
- Elimination of confusion for pet owners looking for lost pets and seeking pet-related services;
- Efficiencies in how animals are prepared for a lifesaving course from point of admission, to medical processing, behavior evaluation through to adoption;
- Continual Humane Law Enforcement. Our officers are state-certified with full police powers to investigate all crimes relating to animals and are highly trained to perform technical rescues of animals in distress during major County emergencies;
- Strong volunteer engagement program for all shelters. There are more than 5,300 volunteers who collectively provided more than 452,632 hours of pro-bono work last year;
- And, greater public awareness of ways they can help reduce the number of animals who are admitted to a shelter, including:
  - Access to affordable community spay/neuter surgery services;
  - Our PAWS San Diego program that offers a safety net for the elderly, homebound, chronically ill, homeless and other groups at risk of giving up their pets due to economic restraints.

Q: Does SDHS expect to provide services more economically and efficiently than the cities?
A: Our mission as a nonprofit organization is to ensure that all healthy and treatable animals can go home whether they are rehabilitated and released into the wild or adopted into new homes. We are confident that if contracts go forward, services for the animals will be improved because a number of duplications will be eliminated, and other economies of scale will result in long-term cost savings and increased efficiency.

Q: Do San Diego Humane Society's facilities have the space to house an additional 20,000 animals/year?
A: We would anticipate using the City of San Diego's existing facilities: the building adjacent to us on the San Diego Campus. We also are working on leasing more space to accommodate the additional intake, care and adoption of animals.

Q. What is San Diego Humane Society's experience with animal service contracts?
A. San Diego Humane Society currently holds the contracts for six other cities throughout the county – Escondido, Imperial Beach, Oceanside, Poway, San Marcos and Vista, and five Indian reservations - Rincon, Pala, San Pasqual, Santa Ysabel and Mesa Grande. We have been servicing contracts effectively starting in 2010.

Rescue Groups

Q. How would the animal service contracts change the way SDHS works with animal rescue groups?
A. We would continue to work with the San Diego rescue community – our active partnership with the rescue community plays a vital role in keeping our region at zero euthanasia for healthy and treatable pets, increasing intake diversion efforts and providing education to lower the number of animals entering the sheltering system. We anticipate the increased volume of animals we would be responsible for leading to even more opportunities for working with the rescue community.

Q. How long has SDHS worked with rescue groups?
A. We have long worked with rescue groups, with our Escondido and Oceanside Campuses having the longest experience. When the San Diego Campus became an open-admissions shelter almost five years ago, we increased our outreach to the animal rescue community. Our entire mission is to save lives and we couldn't do this without the rescue groups who assist our animals daily. We are committed to lifesaving collaboration: Over the past five years, we have transferred 1,860 animals to rescue groups. Teamwork is essential in saving lives.

Q. How has SDHS's relationship with the rescue community changed in the last year?
A. Last May, San Diego Humane Society reached out to the animal rescue community during our exploration of expanding animal service contracts for the County of San Diego and the six cities served by the County. We conducted several forums and focus groups over the course of six months. The feedback for strengthening partnerships was tremendously helpful.

We began implementing productive changes brought forth by members of the rescue community, volunteers, staff and other partners. For example, a universal request by the rescue groups was for a single-point-of-contact, so we established a new position as Director of Rescue and Recovery. Our new director's experience includes a decade in rescue group relations and shelter operations, including foster care and animal transports. The goal of this position is to maintain regular two-way communication with the rescue community.

Our rescue director has reached out, and continues reaching out, to other animal welfare organizations locally, regionally and nationally to explore additional ways to collaborate successfully with rescue groups. Our entire mission is to save lives and we couldn't do this without the rescue groups who assist our animals daily.

Q. What are ways SDHS works with rescue groups?
A. We advise any rescue group expressing interest in taking animals out of our shelter and into their rescue to work directly with our alternative placement staff at each of our three campuses. These staff members are knowledgeable about our animals and can address questions regarding the animals' needs. We ask them to exit an animal from our shelter within a three-day commitment. If another group commits to helping that animal during that time, the animal is adopted, becomes available for adoption, or the animal's health declines, we update

rescue groups accordingly. We also work with rescue groups to schedule requested interactions with the sheltered animals within 48 hours. If we do not hear back from a rescue after our initial outreach, we assume the group is unable to assist us at that time.

Q. What sort of resources, if any, does SDHS provide rescue groups?
A. San Diego Humane Society currently provides partnering rescue groups fee-free transfers, and all necessary vaccinations, microchips and spay/neuter of most animals exiting our shelters (we do not microchip small pets and reptiles). Also, within San Diego Humane Society jurisdictions*, we do not require rescue groups to license dogs that they will be rehoming to new families.

We will perform medical and behavioral services for rescue animals as well as our own animals which have transferred to rescue. Some services differ based on veterinarian or behaviorist recommendations and the animal's best interests. All medical records are released to the rescue directly so they can provide them to their veterinarian of choice, which will help the rescue make a sound decision about exiting the animal from San Diego Humane Society. Our veterinarians are always willing to discuss cases with any rescue group's veterinarian regarding an animal they are interested in exiting.

Q. What is SDHS's protocol for reaching out to rescue groups for animals slated for euthanasia?
A. We reach out to rescue groups based on criteria they have provided. In some cases, if the animal is suffering or quality of life is very poor and/or declining rapidly, and we don't believe this condition can be repaired or cured, we may elect to perform humane euthanasia without reaching out to a rescue because we believe it to be in the best interest of the animal. Rescue groups are welcome to contact us about any of the pets available for adoption on our website, including the special needs pets who enter our care suffering from a chronic illness, challenging behavior or a terminal disease that deems them unhealthy. They are listed on the website as well. Through this special needs pets' program we were able to save 1,039 unhealthy/untreatable animals last year alone. That's over 1,000 animals in one year that would typically be euthanized in other shelters. Over the course of the past three years, we saved 2,724 unhealthy/untreatable animals by transferring them to rescue groups or adopting them to the public.

Zero Euthanasia

Q. What are standard criteria for identifying healthy and treatable animals?
A. The standards set for treating healthy and treatable animals are called the Asilomar Accords. The accords were established for the purpose of building bridges across varying philosophies, developing relationships, agreeing on common definitions and gathering statistics in a standardized format. **More information here >>** Asilomar Accords .

Q. Who is responsible for the Asilomar Accords?
A. San Diego Animal Welfare Coalition is responsible for creating and agreeing to a set of criteria that go above and beyond the Asilomar Accords to define unhealthy/untreatable for San Diego County as a part of Getting to Zero. The members of the SDAWC use the guidelines for making decisions on how to care for healthy and treatable animals in their shelter and rescue populations. The criteria also serve as an important tool for consistently tracking the progress of eliminating the euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals. The Accords were updated to include wildlife in 2015. **More information here >>** Getting to Zero

Q. What is San Diego Humane Society's initiative to reach zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals in San Diego?
A. San Diego Humane Society has achieved a 94 percent live release rate for the past four years and has not euthanized a healthy or treatable animal since 2001. We continue to pledge that no healthy or treatable animal entering a San Diego Animal Welfare Coalition shelter is in danger of euthanasia thanks to the collaboration with local shelters and rescue groups.

The initiative to reach zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals throughout San Diego County resulted in a landmark accomplishment in July of 2015; an achievement made possible through a partnership with the San Diego Animal Welfare Coalition that has been working together since 2005. The eight local animal shelters committed to maintaining this lifesaving goal include Friends of Cats, Inc., City of Coronado, County of San Diego Department of Animal Services, City of Chula Vista, Rancho Coastal Humane Society, City of El Cajon Animal Shelter, and most recently House Rabbit Society. All members of the SDAWC have agreed to standard criteria for identifying treatable and healthy animals in their shelter populations. Our teamwork over the past 13 years has enabled San Diego to stand alone among the country's 10 largest cities for attaining zero euthanasia. The SDAWC achieved this goal while reaching a coalition live release rate of nearly 90 percent.

The rescue community was vital to this success of attaining zero euthanasia for healthy and treatable animals due to their commitment to working with local shelters. Staying at zero will require all animal welfare advocates working together, shelters and rescues alike.

Q. What constitutes an animal being treatable?
A. The word treatable describes any medical or behavioral issues that can be corrected with the appropriate treatment. For example, an animal with a broken leg is considered medically treatable since this injury can be remedied with veterinary care. An example of a behaviorally treatable condition would be an animal that comes in displaying shy/fearful behaviors which prevent normal interaction with humans. This behavioral condition may be treatable through work with specialized trainers so that animals can learn to become comfortable and thrive with people or things that previously scared them.

Q. What constitutes an animal being unhealthy and untreatable?
A. The term "unhealthy and untreatable" means and includes all dogs and cats who, at or subsequent to the time they are taken into a shelter or rescue:

- have a behavioral or temperamental characteristic that poses a health or safety risk or otherwise makes the animal unsuitable for placement as a pet, and are not likely to become healthy or treatable even if provided the care typically provided to pets by reasonable and caring pet owners/guardians in the community; or
- are suffering from a disease, injury, or congenital or hereditary condition that adversely affects the animal's health or is likely to adversely affect the animal's health in the future, and are not likely to become healthy or treatable even if provided the care typically provided to pets by reasonable and caring pet owners/guardians in the community; or
- are under the age of eight weeks and are not likely to become healthy or treatable, even if provided the care typically provided to pets by reasonable and caring pet owners/guardians in the community.

Q. Are all unhealthy/untreatable pets euthanized?
A. Not at all. Last year, SDHS placed more than 1,000 pets that would typically be euthanized in other shelters. Over the course of the past three years, we saved 2,724 unhealthy/untreatable animals by transferring them to rescue groups or adopting them to the public. Many of these animals came to us suffering from chronic illness, challenging behavior or a terminal disease that deems them unhealthy. Despite their prognosis as unhealthy/untreatable, if we believe that it is in the best interest of the animal, we will continue to work to find a loving home for them.

Q. What is San Diego Humane Society's policy about euthanizing an animal?
A. The decision to euthanize a pet is never one that is easily made. When an owner relinquishes an animal to San Diego Humane Society we evaluate the pet both behaviorally and medically to determine if they are suitable for adoption. Pets that are healthy, treatable or manageable are provided with the necessary care to prepare them for new homes. A pet is deemed unhealthy and not suitable for adoption only when severe medical issues adversely affect the pet or when behavioral conditions make it a danger to humans, other animals or themselves.

Through the generosity of donors and dedicated staff, San Diego Humane Society has resources for managing pets who present behavioral or medical conditions and can be rehabilitated for adoption. Most importantly, the decision to euthanize a pet is not made by one single staff member. There is a rigorous process to make sure euthanasia is the absolute last resort. A minimum of two senior-level animal welfare experts need to agree this is the best option for the animal before euthanasia is performed.

Q. What does SDHS do if a pet owner requests a healthy pet be euthanized?
A. We will not euthanize healthy pets. We will offer the owner a variety of resources including rehoming the pet, surrendering the pet to us for adoption and referring to other rescue organizations. When pet owners surrender a pet, they are giving up all legal ownership rights to the animal. Legal ownership and responsibility are transferred to San Diego Humane Society. If our staff do not agree with the owner's assessment that humane euthanasia is the right decision for the animal, we have a team of compassionate and dedicated animal care

professionals who are committed to giving every animal an opportunity to thrive, even if their prior owner felt they should be euthanized. **More information here >>** [Relinquish or Rehome a Pet](#)

Q. Where can someone access information about San Diego Humane Society's annual live release rates, and euthanasia rates, including all medical and behavioral reasons?
A. San Diego Humane Society publishes all annual impact reports on [sdhumane.org](#). The reports include our data on all animals entering and exiting our organization, including euthanasia of animals for behavioral and/or medical reasons, and animals that die of natural causes while in our care. **More information here >>** [Annual Reports](#)

Q. What is San Diego Humane Society doing to reduce systemic reasons for animal homelessness?
A. The vital services of San Diego Humane Society stretch beyond the traditional care of many shelters. San Diego Humane Society has evolved into a national leader in animal welfare thanks to the development of innovative programs like our Kitten Nursery, Behavior Center and our PAWS San Diego. By supporting pet-owning citizens with resources essential to keeping their pets, fewer animals end up in shelters, lessening the burden on taxpayers.

Our three campuses offer impactful programs, such as: lost and found pet assistance; adoption services; pet licensing; pet relinquishment; pet training and behavior assistance; pet-assisted therapy; vaccination/microchip clinics; foster care programs for sick, injured, behaviorally-challenged and under-aged animals; low-cost community spay/neuter surgeries; sheltering services to include farm animals; rescue group partnerships; resources for finding pet-friendly housing; pet-loss support and owner-requested euthanasia services; as well as safety net programming for low-income seniors, chronically-ill and homebound individuals. Our community engagement programs for youth and adults serve nearly 100,000 people annually with camps and animal-focused events, inspiring compassion and promoting responsible pet-ownership.

- San Diego Humane Society's 24-Hour Kitten Nursery is the first of its kind in the nation. More than 10,000 newborn, under-aged, orphaned or injured kittens in the County of San Diego have been saved in the nursery from 2009 to present.
- SDHS operates one of only three Behavior Centers in the United States designed to save lives of animals with behavior barriers to adoption.
- For 76 years, San Diego Humane Society Humane Law Enforcement Officers have been empowered by the state to investigate crimes involving the abuse and neglect of animals.

*A jurisdiction generally describes any authority over a certain area. In the case of animal control, each city has legal authority over protecting their community, strays and pets within their jurisdiction. A list of jurisdictions is available on SDHS website sdhumane.org https://sdhumane.org/jurisdiction-chart/. There are approximately 122 jurisdictions in San Diego County.

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