

May 30, 2024, Rochester Animal Services Town Hall
Questions and Answers

Below are all questions received during the May 30, 2024, Rochester Animal Services Town Hall. The questions are grouped by topic and in no order. Please send any additional questions or concerns to Sarah Fletcher, Deputy Commissioner at Sarah.Fletcher@CityofRochester.Gov

Outreach:

1. Will the Outreach department be rebuilt after Amy transitions to her new role as Director of Animal Control?
 - a. **To be clear, Amy's proposed new title is Assistant Director for Animal Control. The functions of the outreach program, the biweekly free clinics pet food pantry, and free spay-neuter voucher program, should continue in the new organizational chart. Amy has the passion and experience to continue that work, which is why outreach programming will continue to fall under her in this new role.**

2. Why isn't your website updated to include new hours and your policy of adopting out unaltered animals?
 - a. **Please provide the location of where the hours are not updated as they should be consistent across the website. We are currently working on updating the entire City website, which will make the information regarding Animal Services easier to find. Also, we want to be cautious about publicizing this change in medical procedures to avoid attracting more people wanting to adopt animals for breeding. All adopters are told their new pet is not spayed or neutered before the adoption is finalized, with a plan for spay/neuter to occur in the future.**

3. What are the plans for community outreach/clinics?
 - a. **They will continue as planned. We are excited about potentially expanding the number of free rabies clinics next year through our new partnership with the Monroe County Department of Public Health.**

4. Can the PLF program be expanded to more than 1-2 cats per week per group?

- a. **Rochester Animal Services does not hold the Pets for Life grant. Therefore, we do not have control over how many more cats can get services through that grant. If we receive that grant again, we will make sure to include community cats in our planning of that grant.**

Operations:

5. Why are open hours 12-4? People interested in adopting may need to come in after work?
 - a. **We did not see many people coming to the shelter from 4pm-6pm when it was open in the evenings. We decided to instead have the shelter open 7 days/week. We will continue to explore evening hours as we become fully staffed.**
6. Who will be assigned to answer the phone? Currently cannot get a hold of anyone
 - a. **The Client Specialists answer the shelter's telephone. They experience a high call volume every day and do their best to answer the phone when they are not providing services to customers in the shelter. You can also try emailing us at AnimalServices@CityofRochester.Gov.**
7. When will we be getting peace officers like Lollypop?
 - a. **The Humane Officers that work for Lollypop Farms are considered Peace Officers. They oversee enforcing the laws around the humane treatment of animals. There are no plans for Rochester Animal Services to enter the humane law enforcement field as Lollypop currently has jurisdiction over the city of Rochester.**
8. One of the most controversial aspects of Chris Fitzgerald's tenure was his decision to follow the advice of a consultant (Dr. Sara Pizano) to implement the HASS model of sheltering. The results were problematic and led to protests. Are there plans to move away from the HASS model? Countless animals are struggling on the streets due to Chris's policies.
 - a. **It was determined several months ago to move away from the HASS model to focus more on the core functions of the shelter. While some of the policies that came from the HASS model, mostly about keeping animals out of the shelter to begin with, are good, the focus now needs to be on taking care of the animals who reside in the shelter.**

9. Can we get help for us from Lollypop?
 - a. **RAS has a strong partnership with Lollypop Farms RAS and Lollypop leadership are in constant communication, and Lollypop is assisting with some medical needs of animals in RAS's care. Lollypop's medical assistance has been and will continue to be crucial for the animals in the shelter.**

10. Improve/offer professional training
 - a. **As mentioned during the Town Hall, staff training became an important topic during the RAS listening sessions last summer. The shelter is closed the third Tuesday of every month for staff training. Outside of the all-staff professional development day, staff are provided with both in-person and virtual training opportunities.**

11. Why were the PARVO vaccine left in a defrosted freezer?
 - a. **As mentioned during the Town Hall, RAS leadership is looking at and updating all the standard operating procedures throughout the shelter, including checking the temperature on the refrigerators that hold the vaccines on a daily basis.**

12. We need a full-time supervisor in the back with the animals
 - a. **We agree, which is why the proposed fiscal year 2024-2025 budget includes a full-time Animal Care Technician II. That person will be responsible for providing supervision, oversight, and quality control over the work of the Animal Care Technicians.**

13. Why are you continuing to allow cats to be dumped, aka "community cats" program. As of this moment, there are exactly 6 cats on RAS website and thousands on the street
 - a. **The cats on the RAS website are cats who have come to the shelter through either owner surrender or picked up as injured by an Animal Control Officer. Anyone is welcome to bring in an unwanted cat. However, the shelter only has so much space for cats and not all community cats will do well inside the shelter or adopted into a family.**

14. After Hours needs... ACO availability? Strays, strays with injuries

- a. **As explained during the Town Hall, once the Animal Control Officers are fully staffed, the ACOs will be staggering their shifts to provide additional, after-hours animal control services.**

15. Behaviorist

- a. **We agree that this is a need at RAS. We have some funds in the budget to have a behaviorist on contract. Once there is a new Director, that person will work through the City's request for proposals process to enter into a contract for a part-time behaviorist.**

16. What about the continuing overflow of dirty laundry in the hallways?

- a. **Dirty laundry has been an issue for some time. We recently bought large containers for the dirty laundry so that it can be kept in the non-public area of the shelter. Additionally, we will be installing a stacked washer and dryer so that more than one wash can occur at one time. We have also clarified in which situations animal laundry needs to be cleaned and provided dogs with new beds so that they don't need new bedding every day. Finally, RAS has an agreement with a commercial laundry service to be able to outsource laundry when the dirty laundry starts to pile up.**

Security:

17. What is the job description for the security guards?

- a. **The security guards are there to provide support to staff and volunteers when they are encountering a difficult customer or client, especially while dog walking. The guard's role is to reinforce the volunteer or staff member's rules and de-escalate if needed. The guard is available to assist during emergencies and ensure the safety of everyone in the building. Anyone with concerns about the security guards are encouraged to reach out to Jermayne Myers at Jermayne.Myers@CityofRochester.Gov**

18. Who trains them [the security guards] and what they are supposed to do?

- a. **Jermayne Myers, the Department of Recreation and Human Services' Emergency Response Coordinator, trains all new security guards**

assigned to Rochester Animal Services. He also coordinates with their direct supervisor on any/all updates to policies and procedures.

19. The “play yard” for dogs at Brown Square Park is heavily infested with poison Ivy. Angelica has reported this. When will the City remove or destroy this hazard to the walkers?

- a. The City’s parks operations unit has been notified. They said they will remove all poison ivy.**

Facility:

20. If you’re making changes to kennels to update, lobby, et. Is that to replace a new shelter rather than building or remodeling a new building that is more adequate to the needs of animals, people, and community?

- a. Addressing the lobby was mentioned as a priority in the Animal Arts RAS facility report. The kennels were added to the project because the shelter standards laws are changing in 2025. These two projects were then chosen to be included for funding in the City’s capital improvement budget. Even if there were enough funds for a new building right now, construction on the new building will still take a while. City leadership felt that now was a good time to start making facility improvements to help the animals and staff that are in the building every day.**

21. Why isn’t VSAS doing a capital fundraising campaign to build a new shelter?

- a. Rochester Animal Services is thankful for its partnership with the Verona Street Animal Society, as they assist the shelter in many ways. However, they are a separate organization with a separate leadership structure. It is the City’s understanding that VSAS leadership is looking for the direction in which the City will be going with the building, renovations on the current building, new building, renovations to an existing building, before beginning to discuss any fundraising campaign.**

22. Was there money allocated in the budget for a new/updated space?

- a. There is not currently any funding in the operation or capital improvement budget for a new or updated space. This is because the City is still determining the best route to go regarding the shelter, a new space, renovate the current space, or renovate an existing City-owned**

space. The Mayor has expressed that there is urgency on the part of City leadership to decide on the direction and move forward with finding appropriate funding.

23. Renovations to the lobby – when are those scheduled/what if you move? Are there items in the updates that could be moved?

- a. Depending on the budget, the renovations to the lobby could start as early as the fall of 2024. Renovations to the lobby were a critical recommendation from the Animal Arts report about the Verona St Animal Shelter, which is why we are moving forward with that recommendation. We are still determining what the new lobby layout will look like and cannot say for certain if parts of the new lobby could be moved to a new space. City leadership felt it was important to make renovations to the kennels and lobby to not only be compliant with the new 2025 shelter standards, but also improve the space of the staff and animals who are in the shelter every day.**

24. Cameras throughout the facilities – all rooms

- a. There is a security assessment scheduled for the shelter in the coming weeks. During that time, it will be determined how many additional cameras are needed. Right now, the priority is to put new cameras in the clinic area.**

25. Will the planned renovations to the shelter ensure that it complies with the newly enacted A&M Article 26C which goes into effect 12/15/2025. These are budgeted for \$1.2million

- a. Yes, the planned renovations to the dog kennels will make the kennels compliant with the Ag and Market 26C law. We are working with Animal Arts and a local architecture firm to ensure that the kennels will be compliant with the law. Animal Arts are familiar with the new law.**

26. If we replace kennels now, are we serious about replacing the facility? It seems like City is delaying that event.

- a. The City is serious about looking into the best option for a new facility – doing renovations to the current facility, doing renovations to an existing City-owned building, or building a new building. Even if all the funds**

were secured for this effort today, there would be a delay until the project is completed. As such, we felt it was important to start making some serious improvements to the shelter now.

27. Couldn't a lot of money, effort, and time be saved if a decision was made about the facility? Or has the decision been made and that is why all the enhancements are being made?

a. As Mayor Evans has said publicly, there has not been a decision made in terms of the Verona St Animal Shelter. We felt it was important to make some improvements to the building now, for the sake of the animals, staff, and volunteers in the shelter on a daily basis.

28. Why do you wait so long to address the issues at the facility?

a. All staff have been trained in putting in building services requests, which is the City's way of addressing building concerns. As such, the number of building services requests has increased over the past several months.

29. How is NOT having a functioning fire alarm/sprinkler system NOT a violation?

a. The Rochester Fire Department inspected the facility at the end of May and determined there is a working fire alarm system. Also, the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets inspected the shelter building in November 2023 and did not find any issues with the fire alarm or sprinkler system. Finally, according to the City's Neighborhood and Business Development Department's Code Enforcement, a sprinkler system is not required in the current building. We will know if we need a working sprinkler system after the Consultant for the 2025 shelter law comes in July and makes that recommendation.

30. Build a new shelter. This one is too small

a. The City is currently assessing which option, renovating the current shelter, renovating another location, or building a new building would be best. The Mayor has stated that there is urgency to make this decision as we recognize the need for a new shelter.

31. They not given to build a new one?

a. As stated above, the City is determining the best course of action regarding the building to move forward. At that point, the City can

commit to some funds and potentially work with VSAS on a capital campaign to raise funds.

32. How many new kennels?

- a. Currently, there are 36 kennels. After the kennels project, there will be 27 new kennels. If both sides of the kennels are used, like they are frequently when we are overcrowded, we will be going from a capacity of 49 to 54 dogs.**

Medical Services:

33. Thank you for hosting this meeting! Once we get a new vet, how will we keep them?
Thank you.

- a. We will ensure that the new vet has all the support they need to be successful in their position. We are already working on updates to the clinic space, including new cabinets, new security cameras, new doors, new anesthesia machines, and tighter security measures for the clinic. Also, we are looking at the clinic's staffing to ensure it has all the staff needed to be successful. Finally, we will continue to listen to the needs of the vet and clinic team and respond accordingly.**

34. Tell us the TRUTH about the PARVO outbreak and how it resulted in 11 dogs being put down

- a. The truth is that the shelter facility is not equipped with the spaces and rooms needed to properly separate animals to prevent a widespread outbreak. This means that unfortunately, more dogs were exposed to the disease than should have been if the shelter had enough rooms to contain an outbreak. Additionally, after the parvo outbreak in December, the RAS staff has been trained on proper disinfecting and vaccine management techniques to hopefully prevent another outbreak.**

35. Why is there no spay and neutering? When will be begin again?

- a. Unfortunately, the shelter is adopting animals who are not spayed or neutered. This is because there is no full-time vet on staff who can spay and neuter all the animals. We are informing adopters of this when at the point of the adoption and offering a \$35, which is the fee for the spay/neuter surgery if we had done it, if they come back and provide**

proof that the animal was spayed/neutered. We are also keeping track of all the animals and their adopters to contact them to offer a gift certificate to get their animal spay/neutered at a local clinic. We are also working with Lollypop to fit in animals in foster care for spay/neuter surgeries at their clinic a few times per week. We will be able to begin spaying and neutering the animals before adoption once we have a full-time vet on board.

36. Why no spay or neuter?

- a. **There is no spay or neuter surgeries occurring at RAS while we are without a full-time veterinarian. We need a full-time vet on staff to ensure that all the animals who leave the shelter are spayed and neutered.**

37. Will there be vet care for Rochester community cats in addition to spay/neuter?

- a. **Once we have a full-time veterinarian on board, we will be able to start planning how to better assist the spay and neuter surgeries of Rochester's community cats.**

38. Can vets be hired on weekends to do surgeries as they did in the past?

- a. **We continue to investigate continuing the weekend surgeries for the community cats as we did in the past, once we get a full-time vet on board. After we have a full-time vet, we will still have contract vets who might be able to assist with some weekend surgeries. This will all be discussed with both the new director and vet.**

39. Have "whiskers to tails" mobile van come every week or every other week to spay/neuter?

- a. **We will be following up with Whiskers to Tails to see how they can assist with spay/neuter surgeries. Thank you for this suggestion and resource.**

40. Can we hold animals until they are altered?

- a. **Unfortunately, we cannot. Animal Control Officers are bringing in stray animals every day, so we need to move animals out of the shelter as fast as we can to make room for the new animals entering the shelter.**

41. Why release animals without spay or neuter when there is \$600K+ in VSAS bank account?

- a. **We partner with VSAS, but do not manage their finances. We also do not make decisions on how they choose to spend their funds as they have a separate leadership structure.**
42. How does not spaying or neutering animals for adoption (cats and dogs) make sense in light of the huge homeless population?? CRAZY!
- a. **We are in a tough spot without a vet and understand how this decision affects the homeless animal problem. However, we do not have another choice while we are without a full-time vet. We will follow up with every family who adopted during this time to ensure they can get their animal altered, at no charge to them.**
43. How can you legally adopt out non-altered animals?? You realize you are contributing to more unwanted / dumped animals?
- a. **We know that this is an unfortunate circumstance, but we have no other choice but to adopt out unaltered animals, which is not illegal. We get new animals entering the shelter every day and must move animals from the shelter to make room for the new ones. This is not the best option, but must make do while we are without a full-time veterinarian.**
44. Spay and neuter
- a. **Yes, we are currently adopting out animals that are not spayed or neutered from the shelter. This is only until we hire and onboard a new full-time vet.**
45. Dogs being adopted unaltered
- a. **This is the current practice. However, we have to adopt out animals from the shelter due to the fact that new animals enter the shelter every day.**
46. How can you reconcile not providing low-cost neuter/spay while the City requires dogs to be neutered and spayed (see City ordinance)
- a. **There is no longer a City ordinance that requires that people have their animals spayed or neutered. That ordinance was changed some time ago. We understand and appreciate that this is an unfortunate decision, but there is no other option while we are without a full-time veterinarian on staff.**

Budget:

47. Why isn't money allotted to buy the shelter ice cream cones for enrichment or peanut butter or distilled water – why don't the animals in the shelter benefit from the funds?

a. **VSAS provides the funds for these types of purchases.**

48. The posted salary for the shelter vet is well below state and national average salaries. Can the salary be increased, given how difficult it is to recruit a vet for a facility substandard as the Verona St building?

a. **Right now, we will review candidates that applied to the position with the current salary. We will consider negotiating the salary of the veterinarian.**

49. Why didn't City Council apply for NYS grant program from Governor Hochul?

a. **As discussed during the Town Hall, we did apply for the funding to help improve the shelter and were not awarded funding. We met with New York State to get feedback as to why we were not funded. We understand there will be another round of funding and will apply for that additional round. If needed, we will engage with the New York Animal Protection Federation for a low-cost grant writer to assist with the new application. City Council would not apply for this type of funding; this is something for which RAS would be responsible for applying.**

50. Who is applying for grants and funding? Why doesn't the City allocate funds to improve the facility?

a. **RAS and the Department of Recreation and Human Services are responsible for applying for any/all grant funding. Additionally, RAS assists VSAS with information related to grant applications as needed. We are working diligently to apply for grants. There are funds available to improve the facility in the capital improvements budget. Specifically, there are funds for the facility's general upkeep, small equipment, and the new kennels and lobby project.**

Leadership:

51. Will the new director have the "freedom" to implement new progressive care programs or will this continue to be managed above this level?

- a. **The new Director will continue to report to Commissioner Green. However, the Director will have the freedom to implement new progressive care programs as it makes sense for RAS to do so.**

52. Was there an exit interview with the vet who left?

- a. **The Department of Recreation and Human Services has an anonymous survey process for all employees who are leaving our department. The employee gets a survey emailed to them and the responses go to the Director of Administration and Marketing, who compiles the responses with the names removed. Additionally, after she submitted her resignation, Dr. Braitkrus stated numerous times that she did not have time to meet with department leadership before she left as she was focused on conducting as many spay/neuter surgeries as she could. The only meeting with her that occurred before she left was about her transition plan. However, Deputy Commissioner Fletcher was able to meet with Dr. Braitkrus after she left and did get a full understanding about why she resigned. Some of the reasons why she left were structural issues with the shelter, in terms of it sitting within City government, that cannot be changed.**

53. Tell us the TRUTH about why the vet, Dr. B resigned

- a. **Dr. Braitkrus left for her own reasons. She may have spoken to others about why she left, but those reasons were not shared with City leadership before she left. We provided as much support as we could and offered her the interim Director of RAS and the permanent Director of RAS roles, but she declined as she wanted to focus on being a veterinarian. She could have helped make RAS an all-around better shelter but declined to do so.**

54. How often do you Shirley visit the shelter? Do you go weekly? Do you go monthly? Do you meet with staff and volunteers?

- a. **As Commissioner Green mentioned during the Town Hall, she goes to the shelter 3-4 times per month. Commissioner Green is the Commissioner of the entire Department of Recreation and Human Services, which includes the Public Market, 10 R Centers, Rochester Community Sports Complex, among many other programs. She does not go to each R Center daily or weekly. Deputy Commissioner Fletcher has taken over the leadership and monitors the work/duties of RAS. As such, she is in**

daily contact with staff and has biweekly meetings with David, Angelica, Amy, the Licensed Vet Techs, and VSAS (Maggie and Mary). Deputy Commissioner Fletcher goes to the shelter or meets with the RAS leadership team almost weekly.

55. Why did the qualified vet, Dr. Chritine “B”, leave in such a hurry? Staff loved her, why would she leave after a few months?

- a. Dr. Braitkrus had her own reasons for leaving. She had a very positive effect on the staff and animals, and we are grateful for the time that she spent at RAS.**