



GWINNETT ANIMAL ADVOCACY ALLIANCE

**Jan 2025 Current Status
Vs.
2012 Animal Task Force
Recommendations**

INTRODUCTION

This document compiles observations and insights from individuals with **direct, inside knowledge** of Gwinnett County Animal Shelter operations. These perspectives come from those who have worked closely within the shelter environment, including staff, volunteers, and individuals familiar with its policies and procedures.

In addition to these firsthand accounts, this document references recommendations from the 2012 Animal Welfare Task Force Report and compares them to the **current state of operations** at the shelter. By juxtaposing the Task Force's vision with present practices, we aim to identify gaps, areas of improvement, and opportunities for implementing lasting change.

To provide clarity and structure, this document is organized into sections based on **key areas of concern**, including:

- **Euthanasia**
- **Animal Welfare**
- **Shelter Operations**
- **Rescue/Adoption**
- **Spay/Neuter**
- **Staffing**

The intent of this document is to provide an honest and constructive account of current practices, challenges, and successes. While these observations reflect the perspectives of those contributing, they highlight recurring themes and issues that warrant further investigation and action.

Our goal is to ensure transparency, accountability, and meaningful changes that prioritize the welfare of the animals, the effectiveness of shelter operations, and the trust of the community.

EUTHANASIA

Rescue Opportunities Before Euthanasia

Task Force Finding (2012):

It is the perception of this committee that some animals are euthanized when they could be offered to rescue groups. RECOMMENDATION: In order to help achieve our stated goal of reducing euthanasia, Sec. 10-36(a) should be amended to read: "... It shall be the duty of the animal control department to offer the animal to a recognized animal rescue group or groups before any steps to euthanize said animal are considered. Only after the initial hold period and after any interested rescue group is given three (3) days to retrieve said animal shall euthanasia be considered." (Page 27)

Current Observations:

- Some animals considered for euthanasia are offered to rescue groups, **but this is inconsistent**.
- Not all animals receive a "last plea," particularly those labeled as dangerous ("orange cards").
- Instances of **incorrect information** provided to rescues about specific animals, impacting their chances of rescue.

Proposed Solutions:

- Ensure all animals are given a last plea to rescues.
- Standardize accurate and timely communication between rescue coordinators and rescue groups.
- Fully implement the 3-day period before considering euthanasia to allow volunteers and rescues to network the dogs

Euthanasia Criteria

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

- Euthanasia should only occur for animals with behavior problems, not for space.
- Ending an animal's life should be a last resort, a decision never to be reached until all other possible outcomes have been exhausted.

Current Observations:

- **Euthanasia:**
 - Official policy **prohibits euthanasia for space**, but it occurs when the shelter is full.
 - Euthanasia is not treated as a last resort.
 - Many animals do not receive "last call" pleas to rescues or the public.
 - Dogs labeled with minor issues, like "barrier reactive," are often **misclassified** as "aggressive" **to justify euthanasia** for space (e.g., long-term dogs like Russ).
- **Behavior Assessments:**
 - The Welfare Panel decides which animals are euthanized but the majority of the panel members have not interacted with the animal.
 - Shelter management claims dangerous dogs should not get public pleas, yet **assessments are often made by untrained staff**.
 - There is no consistent use of videoed SAFER assessments to confirm dangerous behavior.
- **Medical Decisions:**
 - One vet is quick to euthanize, even during non-critical overcrowding or for treatable illnesses. Often euthanizes for length of stay or difficulty medicating.
 - Another vet is willing to treat, but not consistently.
- **Staff Behavior:**

- **Fear of simple behaviors** (e.g., barking, growling) leads to dogs being labeled as “awaiting behavior assessment,” which increases their risk of euthanasia.
- Intake Manager expressed frustration over public “Facebook notes” labeling dogs as friendly, contradicting welfare panel decisions. As a result, such **notes are no longer** included in Shelter Buddy records.

Proposed Solutions:

- Ensure all animals receive a public plea, including those labeled as “behavior concerns.”
- Require videoed behavior assessments by qualified behaviorists to validate euthanasia decisions.
- Standardize medical treatment for treatable illnesses and discourage euthanasia for non-critical reasons like length of stay.
- Reinstate transparency by including “Facebook notes” in Shelter Buddy records.

Humane Euthanasia Practices

- **Task Force Recommendation (2012):**

- Euthanasia should be performed humanely, ensuring minimal stress for animals.
- Animals should not be able to see the bodies of other animals

- **Current Observations:**

- **Sedation Practices:**

- Sedation is always administered prior to euthanasia but often done using a squeeze gate, even when low-stress methods could be used. In the context of euthanasia, squeeze gates are **often criticized because they can increase the animal's anxiety, contradicting humane handling principles**. Alternative low-stress methods, such as syringe poles or sedation via less invasive techniques, are often preferred.
- Cats are rarely sedated using low-stress techniques, despite it being feasible.
- General cat handling practices are lacking; a **Fear-Free Shelter Certification** could help address this.

- **Tools and Methods:**

- **Catch Poles:** Not used for cats as a policy, and cat nabbers are standard.
- **Syringe Pole:** Available but rarely used for either dogs or cats, though it would minimize stress during sedation and euthanasia.

- **Environment:**

- On “busy” euthanasia days, animals may see the bodies of other animals being euthanized.
- Staff have reported being rushed to bring animals into the euthanasia room while death is being confirmed on a previous animal.

- **Proposed Solutions:**

- Train staff on **low-stress sedation techniques** for both dogs and cats.
- Implement consistent use of the **syringe pole** to reduce stress during sedation.
- Adopt **Fear-Free Shelter Certification** practices to improve overall handling and care.
- Ensure euthanasia protocols prioritize privacy and dignity by preventing animals from witnessing others being euthanized.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Temperament Testing

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

The Task Force would like to recommend that unless a dog has presented a very obvious case of human aggression (lunging, actually snapping at a person), it must be temperament tested before being labeled as aggressive. It is also recommended that at least two people be present for the temperament testing, both for safety reasons and validity of the test. (Pg 43)

Current Observations:

- Temperament testing evolved from informal notes to the SAFER assessment, a standardized but flawed method.
- **Key Issues:**
 - SAFER assessments are not videoed, despite recommendations.
 - The county cites privacy concerns, but properly conducted assessments would only show assessors and the animal.
 - Assessments are only performed on "orange card" (behavior concern) dogs due to staffing limitations.
 - Testing consistency varies, as kennel staff are **not well-trained** in conducting assessments.
- **Downgrade Issues:**
 - The staff member responsible for reassessments **has not consistently performed this role** and dogs labeled as "D" (Dangerous) are rarely downgraded to "C" (Caution), even if appropriate.
 - Dogs listed as "D" without bite history should be categorized as Awaiting Behavior Assessment/Retest to allow for proper evaluation.
- **Cats:**
 - No formal temperament testing is conducted, nor is it recommended.
 - Cats should be placed in decompression areas, such as the "scratch pad," to adjust.

Proposed Solutions:

- **Require video documentation** of all SAFER assessments to ensure proper execution and transparency.
- Expand staff training to improve consistency and allow testing for more dogs.
- Regularly reassess "D" dogs for possible downgrades, ensuring fair and accurate labeling.
- Continue prioritizing decompression spaces for cats over formal assessments.

Dog Walking and Behavioral Observations

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

Dogs who appear to be housebroken and are not relieving themselves in their pen are to be walked at least twice daily, as stated in 4-10 D of the S.O.P., observations made by kennel staff and volunteers during these walks should be added to all animals kennel cards to give potential adopters more insight to their behavior

Current Practices:

- **Lack of Walks:**
 - Dogs are typically removed from their pens and tied to a wall for cleaning, rather than being walked.
 - Walks are not required by management, and dogs often do not leave their pods unless handled by particularly compassionate officers or volunteers

Impact:

- Missed opportunities to observe and record behavioral insights that could assist potential adopters.
- Prolonged confinement negatively impacts dogs' mental and physical well-being.

Proposed Solutions:

- Enforce S.O.P. guidelines requiring twice-daily walks for housebroken or potentially housebroken dogs.
- Implement a system to document behavioral observations from walks on kennel cards to enhance adoption chances.
- Promote a shelter-wide commitment to regular exercise and enrichment for all dogs.

Enrichment and Comfort for Shelter Animals

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

Well-behaved, happy dogs and cats will market themselves. In order to do this, the animals need two essential things: stimuli to keep them busy and a blanket to help them feel warm and safe. Toys keep dogs from barking out of constant boredom and blankets can change the temperament of a cat or dog inside a shelter, making them more comfortable and therefore adoptable. (Pg 58)

Current Practices:

- **Blankets:**
 - Prohibited for most dogs unless they are old, sick, and have proven they won't chew them.
 - Most dogs lack proper bedding, including Kuranda beds.
 - Provided "beds" are hard, plastic, and too small for large breeds, leading to discomfort and physical issues such as pressure sores or foot injuries.
- **Toys and Enrichment:**
 - Dog toys are rarely given and almost never left in kennels for dogs to play with.
 - Enrichment is supposed to be provided daily but is inconsistently done.
 - The staff member who is in charge of enrichment has expressed he doesn't believe every dog needs it and must be ordered to provide it.
 - While the shelter director supports enrichment, enforcement is lacking.
- **Toys Availability:**
 - Toys are often left unused in bins but can be given away to adopters.

Impact:

- Lack of comfort and stimulation exacerbates stress, boredom, and poor behavior, making animals less adoptable.
- Physical discomfort and untreated boredom harm animals' well-being and reduce their chances of finding a home.

Proposed Solutions:

- Allow blankets for all dogs and provide appropriate bedding, especially for large breeds.
- Implement and enforce daily enrichment activities, ensuring every dog receives toys and stimulation.
- Promote a culture of care where enrichment and comfort are prioritized to improve animals' mental and physical well-being.

Exercise and Care

Task Force Finding (2012):

- In the seven hours our Task Force member spent at GCAWE on Monday 4/2/12, she did not witness even one dog being walked, nor were any staff members interacting with the animals. (Pg 68)
- Walks should be recorded on a kennel card kept on the dogs kennel to ensure dogs are getting enough exercise to make their stay more comfortable. (Pg 69)
- S.O.P. 4-10 D, clearly states that, "Attention will be made to those dogs that are not "relieving" themselves in their cages. Dogs that appear to be housebroken will be walked at least two times a day. If time permits, more walks will be provided." (Pg 69)
- Recommend change S.O.P. 4-10 D by The Animal Welfare Task Force: Attention will be made to those dogs not relieving themselves in their cages. Dogs that appear to be housebroken will be walked at least two times a day. If time permits, more walks will be provided. Additionally, all healthy dogs should receive adequate exercise daily; these dogs will be walked at least one time a day or permitted play time in an outside pen. If time permits, more walks will be provided. Every time a dog is walked or given playtime, it should be documented on the Kennel Card. Staff Supervisors are responsible for ensuring dogs are receiving adequate exercise daily." (Pg 69)

Current Observations:

- The recommended changes to S.O.P. 4-10 D were not implemented or enforced.
- **Exercise Practices:**
 - Dogs do not receive regular walks, exercise or enrichment. Dogs are tied to a wall while their kennels are cleaned and then returned.
 - Kennel cards do not document exercise or playtime, indicating lack of accountability.
 - Walking dogs is no longer a requirement under current leadership.
 - Bite and neglect dogs are never removed from their kennels, often for months or years, unless reclaimed or euthanized.
- **Animal Welfare Concerns:**
 - Under Vern's leadership, kennel officers were required to walk all dogs, but this policy has been discontinued.
- Staff were asked to fill out a "happiness survey"; feedback highlighted significant concerns about the lack of exercise and enrichment for animals, with reports noting that animals spend all day staring at walls or their neighbor, and they never get fresh air unless someone wants to see them or a volunteer takes pity on them. ***Despite these concerns, no changes have been implemented.***

Impact:

- Prolonged confinement without exercise or enrichment negatively affects animals' mental and physical health.
- Lack of fresh air and interaction reduces adoptability and quality of life.

Proposed Solutions:

- Reinstate mandatory daily walks for all dogs, including those under investigation, with progress tracked on kennel cards.
- Assign clear accountability to staff supervisors for ensuring compliance with exercise protocols.
- Create schedules and allocate resources to prioritize exercise and enrichment activities.
- Ensure bite and neglect cases receive regular exercise and interaction to improve welfare.
- Address staff feedback and prioritize animal well-being through actionable changes.

SHELTER OPERATIONS

Restrictive Shelter Hours and Accessibility

Task Force Recommendation (2012): The current hours are too restrictive to allow easy adoption for most families. (Page 25)

Current Observations:

- Hours are inaccessible for people with 9-5 jobs.
- First-come, first-serve policy excludes working individuals, as they must arrive by 11 AM to secure the pet of their choice.
- Gwinnett Shelter Adoption Hours (34 Hours) versus Fulton & Dekalb County Shelters (54 Hours)

Proposed Solutions:

- Pre-Adoption Policy: Allow potential adopters to pre-adopt animals before their official availability date.
- Extended Hours: Open later on weekdays and weekends to accommodate working families.
- Improved Communication: Advertise extended hours for increased community engagement.

Management and Leadership Challenges

Task Force Finding (2012):

The management team, directly led by a Police Department representative until very recently, has shown so little interest in shelter operations that standard operating procedures have been allowed to become woefully out of date.

Current Observations:

- **Community Services' Leadership:**
 - Recent leadership under Community Services has worsened transparency with the public.
 - Many shelter policies restricting communication are driven by Community Services rather than shelter management.
- **Misaligned Priorities:**
 - The shelter is being managed with the same approach as a park or other public facility, *ignoring its unique mission to save lives.*

Impact:

- Outdated S.O.P. hinders operational efficiency and alignment with best practices.
- Restrictive policies undermine public trust and prevent transparency about shelter operations.
- A lack of tailored management creates barriers to lifesaving efforts and community engagement.

Proposed Solutions:

- Update S.O.P. to reflect current needs and industry best practices.
- Redefine the shelter's leadership structure, prioritizing animal welfare expertise over general public facility management.
- Promote transparency with the public, emphasizing the shelter's unique mission and challenges.

Volunteers and Networking

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

Networking shelter animals on Facebook saves lives and doesn't cost a cent. (Pg 52)

Current Practices:

- **Networking Restrictions:**
 - Volunteers are prohibited from taking photos or videos of animals, despite the proven success of social media marketing in saving lives.
 - Signs in every pod explicitly state: "Do not take pictures of the animals."
- **Volunteer Relations:**
 - Staff perceive volunteers as "working against them" and actively look for ways to eliminate them from handling animals or being in the building at all
 - **Transparency Concerns:** The exclusion of volunteers has been a topic in multiple meetings with county leadership and appears rooted in an effort to hide practices and conditions staff do not want volunteers to see.
 - This restrictive approach discourages volunteer participation and creates a barrier to lifesaving efforts. Volunteers who live in Gwinnett are volunteering at other shelters because of this.
 - The attitude contrasts sharply with shelters like Fulton and DeKalb, where volunteers play a critical role in marketing animals and increasing adoptions.

Impact:

- Missed opportunities to promote animals for adoption via free and effective platforms like Facebook.
- Reduced community involvement and strained relationships between staff and volunteers.

Proposed Solutions:

- Allow and Encourage Networking: Permit volunteers to take photos and videos for social media promotion.
- Foster Collaboration: Shift staff attitudes to view volunteers as allies, not adversaries, in the shared mission to save lives.
- Increase Transparency: Address volunteer restrictions to build trust and align with best practices from Fulton and DeKalb shelters, where volunteers are integral to marketing and adoption success.

Marketing and Social Media

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

Utilize Social Media: Social media is a very powerful tool in today's society. GCAWE must have either an official Facebook page or support one run by authorized volunteers. (Pg 56)

Current Practices:

- Social Media Restrictions:
 - The county **prohibits posts** about euthanasia, at-risk animals, or anything that may reflect negatively on the shelter.
 - Creative marketing strategies, such as videos with text, collages, or "cute" posts, commonly used by other shelters to drive engagement and adoptions, are not allowed.
 - The shelter is required to operate like other county departments, despite being unique in its lifesaving mission.
 - Example: While a video for the water department isn't necessary, engaging marketing content is critical to saving animals' lives.
- Lack of Personality Notes:

- Facebook notes that described animals' personalities during photoshoots are no longer entered into Shelter Buddy.
- This decision was made after a staff member complained about the time required to input notes and how the notes label dogs as friendly, contradicting welfare panel decisions, leading ***the shelter director to discontinue the practice entirely.***
- Without notes, the Facebook page administrator cannot effectively market animals or highlight their unique traits, reducing adoptability.

Impact:

- Reduced public engagement and adoption rates due to restrictive and uninspired marketing practices.
- Missed opportunities to showcase animals' personalities and connect them with potential adopters.

Proposed Solutions:

- Allow creative and engaging social media content, including posts about at-risk animals and their personalities.
- Reinstate personality notes during photoshoots to support effective marketing.
- Recognize the unique role of the shelter and empower it to operate differently from other county departments to save lives.

Rescue / Adoption

Rescue/Adoption Coordinator Responsibilities

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

Reach out to rescue organizations to notify them about animals at the shelter in a timely manner. Animal Rescues do not spend their time calling animal shelters looking for animals. The A/R Coordinator must be diligent in contacting rescues within 48 hours of an animal's arrival. This would include, calling breed specific rescues and sending out email blasts to approved rescues, and delegating these tasks to the volunteer Assistant Adoption/Rescue Coordinator. After speaking with local rescue groups in the surrounding areas, it has been established that rescues have a greater chance of finding placement for shelter animals when given at least a (3) day notification period.

Current Observations:

- Animals are only sent to rescues if they are deemed "at risk," limiting opportunities for desirable or purebred animals.
- Gwinnett's policy requires animals to be available to the public for 2 days before rescues can claim them (unless designated "rescue only").
- This policy discourages rescues from pulling from Gwinnett, as neighboring counties do not have this restriction.
- Rescues often need desirable animals (e.g., purebreds or smaller breeds) to incentivize taking on harder-to-place animals.

Impact:

- Reduced collaboration with rescues due to restrictive policies.
- Missed opportunities for rescues to take multiple animals, including those harder to adopt.
- Strained relationships with rescues, making it harder to request help in emergencies.

Proposed Solutions:

- Amend the 2-day public hold policy to allow rescues earlier access to animals.
- Build stronger relationships with rescues through proactive communication and collaboration.
- Adopt policies that align with neighboring counties to increase rescue partnerships and save more lives.

Adoption Applicant Screening

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

Ensure appropriate interviews and approval or declination of adoption applicants. There is currently no application/screening process in place for potential adopters. The Task Force strongly recommends the implementation of a basic application for potential adopters to fill out on-site, similar to that of Walton County Animal Control, for the Adoption/Rescue Coordinator to review. (pg 39)

Current Observations:

- Questionnaire: The Assistant Director introduced a questionnaire to address issues of adopters lying about having other pets, which often led to dogs being returned for compatibility issues.
- Limitations:
 - No formal screening process exists.
 - Adopters can decline meet-and-greets with their current pets.
 - Adopters are permitted to adopt animals for others, increasing the risk of unsuitable placements.

- Staff have the authority to deny adoptions, with the shelter director supporting their decisions when necessary.
- **Impact:**
 - Inadequate screening can result in mismatched placements and higher return rates.
 - Lack of structured protocols increases the risk of animals being adopted into unsuitable homes.
- **Proposed Solutions:**
 - Introduce a comprehensive adoption application and review process.
 - Require mandatory meet-and-greets with existing pets for compatibility assessments.
 - Prohibit third-party adoptions to ensure accountability and suitability.

Adoption Holds and Waitlists

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

While current policy does not allow more than one “hold” to be placed on an animal at a time, the Task Force strongly recommends there be a list devised for potential adopters.” (Pg 71)

Current Practices:

- The shelter operates on a first-come, first-serve basis with no holds or waitlist system in place.
- Occasionally, a kind kennel officer may add a name and number to a pop-up note for follow-up if an animal becomes available, but adopters are rarely, if ever, contacted.
- The lack of a system has led to:
 - People camping out overnight to secure an animal.
 - Fights between individuals over who arrived first, sometimes requiring police intervention.

Impact:

- Creates unnecessary tension and inequity in the adoption process.
- Discourages potential adopters who are unable to compete with the first-come, first-serve policy.

Proposed Solutions:

- Establish a formal waitlist system to manage adoption interest fairly and reduce conflicts.
- Train staff to ensure consistent follow-up with potential adopters on the waitlist.
- Communicate clearly with the public about the process to create transparency and build trust.

Dog Descriptions for Adoption Promotion

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

Create written descriptions of the dogs to promote them for adoption on websites and cage cards, if volunteers have not already done so

Current Observations:

- No written bios are provided for dogs or cats.
- Volunteer-created bios or notes placed on kennels are often removed.
- Example: A bio created for a dog named Pluto was removed, and the ***effort was met with hostility from shelter management.***

Impact:

- Lack of descriptive information makes it harder to promote animals for adoption.
- Potential adopters are less likely to connect with animals without personal or behavioral insights.

Proposed Solutions:

- Implement a system for volunteers or staff to write and display bios on kennel cards and online platforms.
- Foster a supportive culture where volunteers' contributions to animal promotion are valued.
- Utilize bios to highlight unique traits, behavior, and potential matches to increase adoption success.

Post-Adoption Support**Task Force Recommendation (2012):**

Provide follow up assistance to adopters to resolve problems to help lower return rates.

Current Observations:

- The shelter does not provide follow-up support for adopters.
- County policy prohibits taking back dogs unless it involves a legal issue (e.g., bite quarantine leading to euthanasia).
- Limited efforts by volunteers have helped a small number of adopters, but no formal program exists.

Impact:

- Lack of support increases the likelihood of returns or abandonment if adopters face challenges.
- Missed opportunities to provide guidance that could lead to successful placements.

Proposed Solutions:

- Implement a follow-up support program to assist adopters with behavioral or adjustment challenges.
- Offer educational resources, such as tips for training and integration with existing pets.
- Create a return policy that encourages responsible rehoming while prioritizing animal welfare.

SPAY/NEUTER

Spay/Neuter Requirements for Reclaimed Animals

Task Force Finding (2012): “It is generally accepted that one goal of the Animal Welfare/ Enforcement Dept. is to provide for the welfare of all animals in the community. It is also generally accepted that, except in certain circumstances, it is in the best interest of domestic animals to be spayed or neutered. Many stray animals arrive at the shelter intact. Owners are currently allowed to re-claim their animals without having to alter them, thus endangering the welfare of other animals if that re-claimed animal again becomes loose. RECOMMENDATION: Sec. 10-29 should have a new subsection with the following penalties added: “For any dog or cat impounded and found to be intact, FIRST OFFENSE: the owner shall be assessed a fine of up to \$1000 or offered a low cost option to spay or neuter the animal. The fine will be waived if the owner opts to have the animal altered. SECOND OFFENSE: mandatory spay or neuter and up to \$1000 fine. The fine for the second offense will be assessed whether the owner re-claims the animal or not. “ This will encourage the owner to provide the many health and behavioral benefits of spay/neuter to their pets.” (Pg 29)

Current Observations:

- Animals must be altered after a third offense at the owner's expense.
- Many owners do not reclaim their pets when faced with the cost, leaving these animals at risk of euthanasia.

Practices from LifeLine Animal Project:

- Fulton and DeKalb offer a reclaim option:
 - Unaltered pets: Full cost to reclaim.
 - Neutered pets: Reduced cost—owners pay only \$10 for a license fee.
- This encourages spaying/neutering and reduces financial barriers for owners.

Proposed Solution:

- Reintroduce a low-cost spay/neuter reclaim program to reduce euthanasia risks and address roaming, breeding, and unwanted litters.
- Promote community education and accessibility to spay/neuter resources to ensure compliance and improve animal welfare.

Spay/Neuter and Microchip Reclaim Option

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

Not everyone who reclaims a dog is offered the option to spay/neuter and microchip for \$60 (or \$30 for senior or Gwinnett County employee) instead of paying the impound/boarding fees. This should be offered every time, as altering and microchipping can prevent future problems for the shelter.” (Pg 70)

Current Observations:

- This program does not appear to still be implemented
- Many pet owners, unable to afford impound and boarding fees, are forced to leave their pets behind, often in tears.
- No follow-up information is taken or recorded in the animal's file, and these pets frequently face euthanasia over a few hundred dollars.
 - Example: Blue, a well-known case, was euthanized due to this issue.

Impact:

- Financial barriers prevent owners from reclaiming their pets, leading to unnecessary euthanasia.
- Missed opportunity to address overpopulation and improve public trust through proactive solutions.

Proposed Solutions:

- Reinststate the spay/neuter and microchip reclaim program to reduce financial burdens for pet owners.
- Ensure the option is consistently offered to all reclaiming owners and clearly communicated.
- Collect and document owner information to support follow-up and transparency.

Spay/Neuter Education and Accessibility

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

The Task Force feels that Gwinnett County must invest in educating its citizens on the importance of spay/neuter and do more to offer those who are willing to spay and neuter, but are of limited means, the help to do so. Spaying and neutering can greatly reduce the animal overpopulation problem." (Pg 41)

Current Practices:

- No public spay/neuter programs or vouchers are offered through the county.
- Reclaimed animals are only required to be spayed/neutered after being reclaimed three times.
- The shelter does not offer spay/neuter services to the public for reclaimed animals.

Impact:

- Missed opportunity to address overpopulation and reduce intake numbers.
- Limited accessibility for low-income pet owners contributes to continued breeding and overpopulation.

Proposed Solutions:

- Establish a low-cost spay/neuter program or offer vouchers for external clinics.
- Require spay/neuter for all reclaimed animals, regardless of the number of offenses.
- Launch a community education campaign on the benefits of spay/neuter to reduce animal overpopulation.

STAFFING

Lack of Training in Animal Behavior for Officers

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

All officers should receive training in basic animal behavior. With this training, officers would have tools to make difficult decisions with confidence and accuracy, reducing unnecessary euthanasia of scared animals and adoption of vicious or feral animals. (Page 26)

Current Observations:

- New Animal Control Officers (ACOs) do not receive formal training in animal behavior.
- Behavior training is only covered during occasional in-service sessions, if at all.
- Only management and the enrichment coordinator are allowed to "downgrade" animals labeled dangerous ("orange cards").
- The enrichment coordinator ***lacks formal training in animal behavior and often makes incorrect assessments.***

Impact:

- Increased risk of unnecessary euthanasia of frightened animals.
- Higher likelihood of adopting out dangerous or feral animals.

Proposed Solution:

- Implement mandatory, comprehensive animal behavior training for all ACOs to ensure accurate assessments and better outcomes for animals.

Public Interaction and Staff Conduct

Task Force Finding (2012):

Staff do not smile and often appear to have a rude or condescending attitude, as if it is an inconvenience to be asked questions or to help people. (Pg 57)

Current Observations:

- **Staff Behavior:**
 - Kennel staff are often seen on their phones or chatting instead of assisting customers, cleaning, or walking dogs.
 - Despite management threatening write-ups, these behaviors persist.
- **Customer Experience:**
 - Lack of engagement and perceived rudeness create a negative impression for potential adopters or visitors.
 - Missed opportunities to provide excellent service that could result in more adoptions and community support.

Impact:

- Undermines the shelter's mission to connect animals with adopters.
- Discourages community engagement and trust in the shelter.

Proposed Solutions:

- Implement regular customer service training to improve public interactions.
- Enforce accountability for unprofessional behavior with consistent follow-through on disciplinary actions.
- Develop a culture of proactive engagement, where staff prioritize helping customers and promoting adoptions.

Staffing and Field Operations

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

GCAWE should have 4-5 officers on the road at all times to properly respond to critical calls and have more time to ascertain animals in the field; animals which may be returned to their owners and may never have to come to GCAWE in the first place (pg 71)

Current Observations:

- **Staffing Levels:**
 - Day shifts usually have 3-4 officers, and night shifts have 1-2 officers, which is insufficient for covering the county.
 - Management is aware of the staffing shortage but has not addressed it.
- **Consequences of Understaffing:**
 - Untrained Officers in the Field:
 - Leads to mistakes that harm both animals and officers.
 - Examples:
 - An ACO officer improperly used a catch pole on a cat, causing injuries that required costly overnight care at Blue Pearl.
 - An ACO officer was severely injured by a dog due to lack of behavior training.
- **Missed Opportunities to Prevent Intake:**
 - Officers often take animals to the shelter instead of spending time to locate owners or call microchip companies.
 - When microchips reach a dead end, officers do not contact implant facilities or utilize free microchip hunter assistance, which has been **declined by the shelter on multiple occasions**.

Impact:

- Increased shelter intake due to avoidable actions in the field.
- Risk of harm to officers and animals, leading to financial and reputational costs.
- Wasted taxpayer resources on preventable incidents.

Proposed Solutions:

- Increase staffing to ensure 4-5 officers are on duty during all shifts.
- Implement comprehensive field training on animal behavior, microchip scanning, and owner reunification protocols.
- Establish clear procedures to utilize external resources, such as microchip hunter assistance, to improve outcomes in the field.

Use of Inmate Manpower in Kennels

Task Force Recommendation (2012):

To offset the loss of man power in the kennel, Sheriff Butch Conway has offered inmate manpower to work at GCAWE in the kennels and to handle the same duties that the current inmates from the Department of Corrections handle.” (Pg 71)

Current Observations:

- Inmates were scheduled to return to the kennel in September 2024 but were only available once in November 2024.
- It is unclear if inmates have returned since, leading to speculation that the promise was a re-election tactic by the current sheriff.

Impact:

- Without inmate assistance, kennel staff remain overburdened with cleaning and basic care tasks.

- Lack of manpower prevents staff from performing critical enrichment activities or ensuring every dog is walked daily.

Proposed Solutions:

- Ensure the consistent and reliable use of inmate manpower in the kennel to offset staffing shortages.
- Free up kennel staff to focus on enrichment, exercise, and higher-quality care for all animals.
- Establish accountability and transparency regarding inmate program commitments to avoid political misuse.
- Supervision Requirement:
 - Inmates must be supervised at all times to ensure safety, compliance with shelter policies, and proper handling of animals.