

Austin Animal Center

Before Euthanasia Procedure for Dogs with Demonstrated Aggression (Draft procedure for pilot program)

Date: last modified 2/24/17

*****This is a draft document of a pilot procedure. We began piloting this procedure in September of 2015 and the pilot period will continue through at least the end of 2017. This document has undergone significant and multiple revisions and will likely undergo more changes prior to becoming a signed, formalized procedure of Austin Animal Center. Thus far, it has been instrumental in saving nearly a third of dogs that were at risk due to behavior or aggression issues in 2016.**

Policy: It is the policy of the Austin Animal Center to follow the guidelines set forth in the No Kill Implementation plan, including guidelines for “euthanasia.”ⁱ These include but are not limited to:

- A 24-hour Kill list hold 24 hours prior to the animals’ final day at the shelter and circulate the list to all placement partners and rescue groups with an at-least 24-hour opportunity to find a positive outcome for the animals with the end-time clearly defined.
- A Call Before Killing (CBK) policy

It is the pilot policy of the Austin Animal Center to only permit killing (other than medically suffering animals) is when s/he presents serious aggression issues or poses a health and safety risk and the prognosis for rehabilitation is poor to grave.

It is further the pilot policy of the Austin Animal Center that:

1. Actions taken will be attempted and documented on the form unless the dog’s prognosis is determined to be poor to grave.
2. Following the dog’s death, a signed euthanasia approval form will be kept on file on site at AAC.

Purpose: The purpose of this procedure is to outline the processes to be followed when an animal is at risk to be killed because s/he presents serious aggression issues or poses a health and safety risk. While dogs who pose a threat to public safety are not candidates for adoption, the Austin Animal Center also believes that the achievement of a No Kill community is consistent with public health and safety. As such, this document is intended to address some of the shortfalls or gaps in the No Kill Implementation Plan by laying out processes to ensure dogs being considered for killing because they are aggressive or pose a risk to public safety are guaranteed certain protections and that the decision to kill is not made by one person, but is rather a collaborative effort involving, at a minimum, four staff members to ensure that the decision is the right one.

Definitions:

Foster Placement (plea to volunteers and foster): Because aggressive behaviors are often directly a result of the stress and confinement of the shelter, where this is determined to be the operative issue, dog may be placed in trained foster homes as available to gain further assessment. The foster coordinator will provide appropriate training for these foster families and fosters will have all available information made available to them in writing and orally.

No Kill Implementation Plan: Officially adopted by the City of Austin in 2010, the No Kill Plan is a 34-point plan created by the animal services advisory commission and supported by community partners and volunteers.ⁱⁱ

Rehabilitative efforts: Efforts made by staff, volunteers and partner groups to improve the behavior of a dog with the goal of achieving a live outcome for that dog. May include behavioral modification by staff and volunteers, placement in a behavioral foster home, participation in play groups, or ongoing efforts by Austin Pets Alive!

Plea to Public: In cases where staff determines that while the animal cannot be safely housed in the shelter because of shelter-based behaviors, s/he can be adopted outside of the shelter.

Medical Evaluation: Any dog who exhibits behavior that puts him/her at risk of being killed shall have a medical evaluation conducted to rule out a medical origin for the behavior. For example, a stray dog who exhibits resource guarding of food will be evaluated to ensure s/he is not underweight and that the behavior is merely masking a historical lack of food. By way of other example, a dog who snaps when he is touched in specific areas will be evaluated to determine if s/he is in pain. Any underlying medical condition will be resolved and the dog reevaluated after a period of desensitization.

Behavioral Assessment: A standardized or modified standardized behavioral assessment may include the SAFER, Match-up II, or a behavioral assessment conducted by a professional dog trainer or behaviorist or the behavior team at Austin Pets Alive! with the understanding that the outcome is not a simple “pass/fail” but a source of information to be used within the overall process, which may include information in order to best place the dog or determine the dog’s prognosis for rehabilitation.

Review Team: A self-selected team made up of staff members who receive notification when a dog is going to be killed for behavioral reasons. They are given 24 hours or more to advocate for that animal and offer solutions other than killing.

Incident confirmation: The person preparing the form or a designated staff member will confirm that notes regarding incidents are accurate. This may include contacting dog’s owner, foster, bite victim, incident witness and/or law enforcement official who took report.

Procedures: These procedures will be followed for dogs who may be killed because of a reported history of aggressive behavior which may render the dog a risk to public safety or behavior or because of aggressive behavior in the shelter that may render the dog a risk to public safety.ⁱⁱⁱ

To initiate the process, a supervisor, manager or deputy chief will initiate a

“Austin Animal Center Placement Options Form for Dogs with Demonstrated Aggression” form.

1. The dog will receive a medical evaluation by a veterinarian to rule out any underlying medical cause for behavior. Notes from the veterinarian will be entered into the shelter software system and will be attached to the approval form.
2. The staff review team will be notified via e-mail.
3. If this has not already been done prior to the form being initiated, AAC will plea the dog to relevant rescue groups and provide a minimum of 24 hours for those groups to respond.
4. If there is a previous owner, the owner will be contacted via telephone or e-mail and given 24 hours to respond (Y-call).
5. In some cases, the preparer will plea to volunteers or fosters, offering the dog for foster or adoption following special adoption procedures.^{iv}
6. Volunteers and fosters will be notified via e-mail. If volunteers have questions or would like to advocate for dogs set to be killed, they should reach out to the engagement manager as well as a behavior staff team member.^v
7. The preparer or a designated staff member will confirm the notes about the incident(s) related to the decision and enter notes into the shelter software system.
8. In some cases, the preparer will create a public plea and share it on the shelter Facebook page, ‘Austin Animal Center Urgent Foster and Rescue Pleas.’^{vi}
9. If not already done prior to form being initiated, and if the dog is able to be safely handled, the dog will receive a behavioral assessment by a shelter staff member or Austin Pets Alive! partner and this assessment will be attached to the forms.

Part two: Completing documentation

All documentation will be reviewed by an administrative staff member (customer service, animal care or volunteer/foster team), a manager (lead, supervisor or administrative manager) and the animal services chief or deputy chief who will sign they have approved all notes and are confident that all viable options have been explored.^{vii}

Part three: Proceeding to euthanize the Dog^{viii}

1. Once the completed forms are signed and a final determination to proceed with killing the dog has been made, the chief or deputy chief will communicate, via e-mail or verbally, with the medical team that it is 'Okay to process' the dog.
2. The medical team will respond that they have received the communication and will proceed.

ⁱ See No Kill Implementation Plan.

http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Animal_Services/aac_no_kill_implementation_plan.pdf

ⁱⁱ No Kill Plan and related documents are all housed online for public review at

<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/no-kill-plan>

ⁱⁱⁱ This procedure does not apply to a dog that has been determined by a court to be dangerous or vicious pursuant to state law.

http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Animal_Services/Animal_Protection/Dangerous_Dog_Info.pdf

^{iv} The dog may be offered to volunteers and fosters for adoption or foster following the procedures outlined in the Center for Shelter Dogs Special Adoption protocol.

<http://www.centerforshelterdogs.org/Home/DogBehavior/SpecialAdoptions.aspx>

^v Volunteers may not be notified prior to killing if animal was brought in, either by animal protection or surrendered, because of an aggressive incident and taken straight to the quarantine area, never being brought in a public area. Additionally, volunteers may not be notified in advance if there is a safety or humane reason to euthanize the animal immediately, rather than waiting a 24 hour notification period.

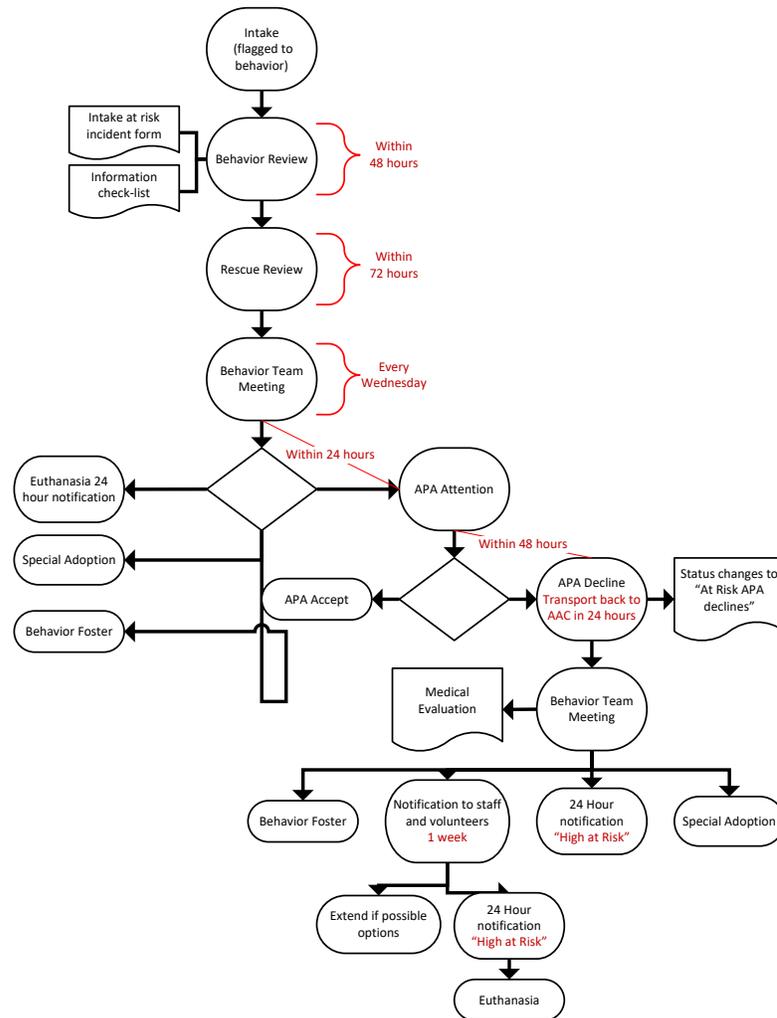
^{vi} The various possible avenues for placement will depend on the particular dog and the level of aggression and the ability of staff and rescue partners to safely handle the dog.

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^{viii} In some cases, if dog can safely interact with humans, staff and/or volunteers will be given the opportunity to spend time with the dog, monitored by a staff member, prior to the dog being killed.



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* Only at risk dogs go on "attention" and all paperwork MUST be complete.

* Before Euthanasia, the before Euthanasia checklist will be complete with signatures.

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