

# Matrix Update Report

Manatee County Animal Services

07/01/2015

## Matrix Section 7.1

**Recommendation:** MCAS should continue a strong feral cat trap and release program to reduce community populations of feral cats.

**Update:** TNR (trap/neuter/release) program has continued. In addition a new program to cover areas north of the river has been implemented with a new trapper and a new vet to do surgery. The expanded program will continue until the incremental funds authorized by BCC have been consumed. In the new fiscal year to come, the traditional funding of \$6000 will be combined with the \$20,000 the BCC approved and the combined fund of \$26,000 will be used to support a county-wide TNR program. Low cost spay/neuter procedures have been negotiated with the HS and with two area vets. The combined fund of \$26,000 will be administered on a first come-first-served basis to ALL TNR programs in the County, and when the funds are gone, the funds are gone. This program represents a significant uptick in the County's TNR efforts.

**Recommendation:** MCAS should publicize the purpose, goals and rationale of the trap and release program to educate the public about this program.

**Update:** A TNR expert from the rescue community has agreed to meet with individual residents or complainants within the County who voice concerns about the County's policies on TNR. I have used her in three separate incidents over the past six months. In each case her meetings with the complainants had successful outcomes. The TNR expert offers alternatives, additional resources, and most of all is human caring face from the County and the complainants respond well. When the County communicates its successes with the TNR program and its various partners it does so through PSAs, news articles, and in group rescue meetings with animal interests in the County. The negative, spirited complaints are few and we have an effective solution for dealing with them. We will continue to extol the virtues of TNR with our communications messages and through our County wide programs, publications, adoption events and PR programs.

## Matrix Section 7.2

**Recommendation:** MCAS should prominently publicize existing spay and neutering programs both on its website and through public education events.

**Update:** The publication of spay/neuter programs is prominent in everything we do. We have expanded and will continue to expand availability of low cost resources. The HSMC is about to open its new clinic. Animal Resource Coalition has announced a new mobility

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service and we and Animal Networks are working with the Director there to address rural areas in Manatee County to create drop-off points with ARC providing the transportation to and from to their clinic. I am also working with a new, local vet in the Parrish area who will be opening his clinic in a few weeks to offer additional low cost services.

## Matrix Section 7.3

**Recommendation:** MCAS must strengthen the working relationships with all rescue groups. A quarterly coordination meeting should be held between MCAS and representatives of each rescue group to develop strategies for working together, increase dialogue, and address issues that arise in a timely manner.

**Update:** New "Transfer Agreements" have been created and offered to all the rescue groups we work with, both within the County and outside it. The new agreement provides for inspections of rescue facilities on demand. If rescue refuses MCAS will cancel transfer agreement, but will still have to obtain warrant if access is denied by rescue. Most of the area rescues applaud the new agreement and have signed it, including many new rescues and out-of-county rescues. The new agreement has set a new tone for the relationship that is healthy. The quarterly meetings which have been orchestrated and presided over by Commissioner Whitmore have resumed and while I was out for the first one the reports were positive. These meetings are meant to be information exchanges/sharing and represent an opportunity for the staff to update the rescue community with respect to the progress, successes, and failures at MCAS.

**Recommendation:** MCAS should modify the agreement that it enters into with rescue groups who are being provided with animals from the shelter to ensure an appropriate standard of care is provided and that provides access by MCAS staff to facilities and information regarding the care, placement and location of animals placed with the rescue groups. one the reports were positive. These meetings are meant to be information exchanges/sharing and represent an opportunity for the staff to update the rescue community with respect to the progress, successes, and failures at MCAS.

**Update:** A new agreement was created and offered to Rescues which includes an agreement from them that AS may inspect facilities and animals at any time. Approximately 40 have signed including 3 Humane Societies and several SPCAs

**Recommendation:** MCAS staff should conduct pre-approval inspections prior to entering into agreements with rescue groups and at least annual inspections thereafter.

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**Update:** MCAS conducts pre-approval visits when it feels they are required. New candidates get visits. An additional ACO (Animal Control Officer) position was approved to facilitate inspections and to enforce existing licensing regulations in the hopes of generating additional revenue.

## Matrix Section 7.4

**Recommendation:** MCAS should work in collaboration with the rescue groups to develop a foster program to be administered by MCAS to provide an additional avenue for placement of animals, on a temporary basis, to provide relief for overcrowding at the shelter.

**Update:** Foster programs have proven to be difficult for MCAS to administer. A subset of traditional foster programs has been developed (bottle-babies, kittens, puppies) and certain special needs animals are currently in Foster. Traditional foster programs are better managed by our transfer and rescue partners. Recently an experienced ex-volunteer has rejoined the team and is assisting in "pet retention" and fostering programs to assist the Volunteer Coordinator in what is a huge task. A "Foster Coordinator" position is present in many organizations of the size of MCAS and is something that Management should lobby for in the future -- Foster management is a full time job if it is to be effective. At present MCAS has approximately 75 animals in its own foster and the rescue groups with their own foster programs far exceed that. Medical foster is a new concept initiated by staff several months ago and has resulted in saving of a dozen or so animals that would have been PTS (put to sleep) in the past. This is an expensive program and relies on donors and pro bono medical treatment to be successful.

**Recommendation:** MCAS should, as part of its volunteer program, seek to determine if individuals who have already expressed interest in volunteering for the shelter have an interest and capabilities to participate in the foster program.

**Update:** See above.

## Matrix Section 7.5

**Recommendation:** MCAS should continue its strong focus on adoption programs including maintaining a satellite adoption center.

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**Update:** Downtown Meowtown (DTMT) was re-opened in January and as of first week in July has adopted approximately 100 animals. This is a 100% volunteer effort (Animal Networks). The value of a store front with easy access in populated areas, and the value of a free-roaming environment for prospective adopters to evaluate the cats is the key to success of this initiative. Kitten season has resulted in swelling kitten populations and as these small animals are old enough to be spay/neutered and enter the adoption program the adoption rate will accelerate. Presently both MCAS and Animal Networks are actively engaged with caring for "bottle babies" and "feed and grows" who have been weaned but still too small for S/N (spay/neuter). This program has been so successful that at times there has been a shortage of mature, adoptable cats in the DTMT shelter. This program MUST be continued and expanded.

**Recommendation:** MCAS should employ various adoption incentive events throughout the year.

**Update:** Adoption events at the shelter have been held approximately every six weeks with varying degrees of success. The same may be said for off-site adoption events MCAS staff have attended -- pretty close to every weekend. The rescue community is tired and saturated -- the staff must find ways to reach out to the public. The Volunteer Coordinator position has morphed into a Marketing Communications position by necessity to fill a void. Marketing Communications is augmented by volunteers but it is clear that a full time marketing communications effort is required to provide an effective outreach programs. In early August MCAS and its volunteers is hosting a two day event to be held in the Convention Center. It has been broadcast through all media types, local newspapers and television channels are supporting, etc. All MCAS rescue partners have been invited; the event will include seminars on health and nutrition, training, medical treatments, demonstrations, agility contests for animals, static displays by Feld, much more. It will be the result of a collaborative two month planning effort by MCAS and its volunteers. The goal is to reduce animal population in the shelter by 50 animals. A retired Handivan was obtained from fleet -- it will accommodate up to 20 animals for transport to off-site adoption events. It has a great "wrap job" and is a rolling advertisement for "Adoption" programs.

**Recommendation:** MCAS should implement evening hours for adoptions at least one night per week at the shelter and/or satellite adoption center.

**Update:** Hours have been extended/modified, but staffing without significant overtime expenses precludes evening hours, at least for now. Shelter staff has had turnover and upheaval; when the staff is fully on board and the routines have been established perhaps this issue can be revisited with a combination of staff and volunteers. Saturday hours have been extended to encourage families.

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## Matrix Section 7.6

**Recommendation:** MCAS should develop a resource handbook that outlines community resources available to individuals who may need temporary assistance to support their ability to maintain their pet rather than choosing relinquishment.

**Update:** A nice booklet size handout has been developed and deployed and is in use by ACOs and kennel staff. The booklet is in Spanish and in English and discusses pet retention, assistance options, and emphasizes low cost spay/neuter options. This booklet was deployed within the past 90 days but the Spanish version was just recently deployed.

## Matrix Section 7.7

**Recommendation:** All animals should be timely assessed for behavioral and medical condition upon intake.

**Update:** Both Shelter Manager and Vet Tech collaborate on behavioral and medical issues. Outside animal behaviorists have been brought in from time to time to evaluate "aggressiveness" which is a very difficult and subjective area. All animals are evaluated at intake and notes are made in Chameleon database at that time. Volunteers/dog walkers have additional note pages to record their assessments and observations. All these are taken into account when evaluating animals. Emphasis has been placed on behavioral analysis skills in most recent senior positions filled, i.e. new Shelter Manager and new Vet Tech.

**Recommendation:** Staffing adjustments need to be made at MCAS to provide the appropriate level of resources to provide medical care in a timely, effective, and cost appropriate manner. A staff veterinarian should be added to the MCAS staffing allocation.

**Update:** MCAS is still not at appropriate levels but quantum progress has been made. An additional ACO has been hired to help with community outreach and license tag regulation enforcement. An additional Vet Tech has been hired to assist in medical evaluations and care procedures. A Veterinarian has been approved for hire and will be hired as we are able to make the space here at MCAS (late August). What is still needed (note these have not yet been formally requested) is an additional kennel staff person to man the front desk and assist in meet/greet with public, and a marketing communications person to manage outreach and public awareness of availability of animals and services.

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**Recommendation:** MCAS should develop and implement a comprehensive shelter behavior assessment program (based upon the criteria outlined by Maddie's Fund or a similar program).

**Update:** Many shelters have full time behavioral assessment individuals who specialize; assessment in MCAS is handled by the Shelter Manager, the Vet Tech staff, and by experienced volunteers. Notations on behavior are made in Chameleon and on logs used by volunteers to record observations. The efforts of local behavioral experts and trainers has also been helpful, but the remedies they recommend have not been. This is a shelter: it is not a boarding school, a training facility per se, a half-way house, nor a convalescent home. We have neither staff nor resources nor general training to address remedial behavior. The best we can hope for is to identify it and document it. Animals with behavioral issues that could prove harmful to the public are NOT entered into the adoption program, and are offered on a limited and controlled basis to certain rescues able to provide that remedial training. Maddie's Fund assumes large shelters with deep pockets that do not exist in this facility.

## Matrix Section 7.8

**Recommendation:** A strategic communications plan should be developed for MCAS that outlines approaches to be utilized to increase transparency, enhance public awareness, and promote available animals for adoption. This should include development of periodic newsletters, community meetings and a redesign of the website.

**Update:** This agency has little communications expertise beyond whatever skills the volunteers bring. The first order of business for me was transparency, and we achieved that by opening up Chameleon datasets to any who wanted it (all animal population information is sent electronically daily). Open communications with all rescues and interested parties have been offered and many accepted. Press and other media are welcomed and encouraged. Public Records Requests are addressed promptly. Calls are accepted and messages responded to. Regular meetings with rescues and partners occur daily. The Volunteer Coordinator publishes a regular newsletter aimed at her volunteers, but we do not and do not have anyone to address a community newsletter to citizens -- hence the recognized need to have a communications person on board. Volunteers have done a great job but it is inconsistent. Jim Hansen Manatee County IT Department has been working on a website redesign and will soon publish pages for review.

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## Matrix Section 7.9

**Recommendation:** An annual work program should be developed for the Volunteer Coordinator to ensure a coordinated effort is in place to improve the recruitment, training and utilization of volunteers within MCAS.

**Update:** The Volunteer Coordinator is completely saturated with managing the County's volunteers, writing policy/procedures and then launching the Foster program, coordinating the weekly/monthly adoption events, and assisting in the shelter each day with adoptions. The position needs a re-definition with more emphasis on outreach. This is not a priority at this moment.

## Matrix Section 7.10

**Recommendation:** A proactive field canvassing program should be instituted for Animal Control Officers and volunteers to identify unlicensed pets.

**Update:** An additional ACO Field Officer was requested and approved, and hired. This individual will be focused on outreach programs including license and registrations. With the PetData relationship now beginning to produce renewal license notifications, this individual will also focus on those residents who fail to renew. Site visits will be made to those who are unresponsive to telephone requests for update information.

## Matrix Section 7.11

**Recommendation:** At the time the County fills the MCAS Director position, it should conduct a national search and seek an individual with an understanding, commitment, and prior experience with the No Kill philosophy.

**Update:** The HR Department in concert with the County Administrator's Office has re-written the job description and employment requirements for this position. An internal/external search will commence shortly with an emphasis on management and leadership qualities emphasized over strict experiential qualities, although experience will be required and preferred all things equal otherwise. It is anticipated that the position shall be filled in the fourth calendar quarter of the current year.

**Recommendation:** The County should undertake an RFP (request for proposal) process to determine feasibility of outsourcing the animal sheltering function of MCAS through a public-private partnership.

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**Update:** The County Administrators office and the staff of MCAS are currently researching successful PPPs (public/private partnerships). A field trip is planned to at least two facilities over the next 45 days by the Director in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of what worked and what did not, and to plagiarize existing contracts, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), architectural concepts, and common sense advice from these Shelter Directors. A "Request for Proposal" is under construction at this time. Staff has identified at least two local groups that will have an interest in providing a response to an RFP and the hope is there will be one or two additional.

**Recommendation:** If the County enters into a public private partnership for delivery of Animal Services shelter and adoption operations, the County should reevaluate the need for a continued Animal Services Advisory Board and/or modify the role of the board.

**Update:** Noted

## Matrix Section 7.12

**Recommendation:** The Animal Services Division policy and procedure manual should be comprehensively reviewed and updated to ensure that all policies are in compliance with current operational practices.

**Update:** SOPs are evaluated daily; the staff revises them on a regular basis and creates new ones as the need has arisen. More than a dozen have been created since Aug 2014 and many new ones governing euthanasia, cleaning, drug control and management, etc have been generated. They will be kept current and new ones will be addressed as need dictates.

**Recommendation:** After updating, a training session should be held for all staff to ensure understanding of the new policy manual. Additionally, a portion of each staff meeting should be devoted to policy review and discussion.

**Update:** SOPs are distributed to staff as they are written, and a signature is required for file that signifies that the employee has read and understands the policy. There is no formal training program to "teach" policy -- it is a learn-as-you-go program

## Matrix Section 7.13

**Recommendation:** MCAS should develop a comprehensive training program covering all staff and each unique position. Key areas of focus should be on: new hire training and on-going training for each position including volunteers.

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**Update:** MCAS has turned its entire shelter staff over and has hired individuals with significant experience. While entry level positions, there is a wealth of experience in the area we have been fortunate enough to take advantage of. Training has been less of a problem than learning the "Manatee County Way" which is done through mentoring and pairing with longer term employees. Each functional Supervisor is charged with developing his/her own training protocol for the introduction of new employees. This has not been a priority given the level of experience we have been able to hire in each of the three areas of expertise (shelter, field, medical).

## Matrix Section 7.14

**Recommendation:** MCAS should fill the dispatcher position at the appropriate level rather than with an individual classified as an Animal Control Officer.

**Update:** A Dispatcher position has been added to the ACO area and has been filled with a qualified and experienced individual with good customer service and communications skills. This person handles general inquiries to the main listed number and provides general information on services, hours etc. An additional front office person in the shelter operation is required to handle customer traffic and incoming calls to the shelter.

## Additional Matrix Suggestions:

**PP 23:** Create a standardized management system. Utilize enterprise risk management to plan for and control systemic risk on operations. Develop performance metrics to support data driven understanding of operations, and accountability. Develop compliance criteria for management system. Scheduled internal audits. Institute corrective action development and control plan monitoring to address internal audit findings.

**Response:** MCAS utilizes a best-in-industry data manager for tracking shelter animal population, dispositions, medical information, descriptions, etc. This system is referred to as "Chameleon". It is a comprehensive database manager with high level programmatic filters and a high level custom report generator (Crystal Reports). MCAS skills in using this system are not what they should be -- we just completed a week long training program -- this is where the problem lies. We found it invaluable in terms of skill improvements and knowledge expansion of what can actually be done with the system. This should be done at least twice a year with a Chameleon expert transferring "best practices knowledge and fulfilling "...how do I make it do xxx" requests. No additional management or reporting system is needed -- the existing system is well beyond our ability to use all its facets.

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**PP 24/25:** Develop SOP document control to include:

- Approval prior to release
- Review, update, and re-approve documents
- Changes and revisions are clearly identified
- Relevant versions of applicable documents are available at point of us
  
- Legible and identifiable
- External document control
- Obsolete document control
- Create customer service policies and procedures
- Train dispatch on proper call techniques
- Create professional environment
- Maintain accurate info across media outlets
- Improve website
- Review accessible on-line services
- Create function specific teams
- Develop/monitor workload measurements
- Diversify staff who attend offsite meetings and conferences

**Response/Update:** The majority of these were addressed in 23/24

**PP 26:**

- Implement cleaning standards
- Create structured volunteer training program
- Volunteers to assist in tasks beyond dog walking
- More positive relationship between staff and volunteers
- Create volunteer performance indicators
- Redesign website and maintain accurate and up to date

**Response/Update:** Trusted community service workers and volunteer cleaning personnel are used regularly and in emergencies but never alone -- always with an MCAS shelter staff member. Existing shelter cleaning protocols and standards are followed. Volunteers attend off-site adoption events, participate in comprehensive training programs, assist adoption families in evaluations, photography, bathing animals, etc. In the case of the DTMT facility the entire operation including adoptions and staffing/scheduling is handled by volunteers. There are many subjective areas in the above list of suggestions and we work them as we can.

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**PP 28:** Improve clarity between volunteers and staff about authority, roles, accountability

**Response:** Done; they work together much better; volunteers have defined roles and boundaries and are much better accepted. Less friction

**PP 30:**

- Greater public education and events should be undertaken to maximize animal licensing efforts.

**Response:** none

- **Enhance screenings and criteria for determining whether an individual is an appropriate candidate to adopt an animal from the shelter.**

**Response:** Adopter screening is an argumentative subject, with two schools of thought. When we hold adoption events we always try to match animals to prospective adopters, we ask about home or apartment lease clauses that prevent certain animals, and we scrutinize the potential adopter to satisfy ourselves that the person is truly able to care for the animal they have expressed an interest in. This has always been our standard procedure, and the experienced volunteers are always major contributors to this effort.

**PP 31:** Adopted target for dependency on general fund

**Response:** MCAS has a plan for licensing fee increase from the current \$15 per animal to a proposed competitive level of \$25 per animal. This increase will go a long way towards offsetting any incremental costs recently incurred and should fund other internal improvements. Coupled with the emphasis on renewals, the goal is for MCAS to be at or near an ability to cover all its costs. This has been a goal for 5 years 0-- we are gaining on it.

**PP 33:** Safety issues – understand concerns

**Response:** Paramount; driving aggressive animal decisions

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