

Answers to Questions Asked During the Animal Services Consolidation Wildlife Meeting on Feb. 29

Question	Answer
Will FCPD and DAS publish the research and data they utilized to make this decision?	DAS and FCPD presented their findings at the January 30th Safety and Security Meeting. Their testimony and presentation materials can be found here: https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/animalshelter/fairfax-county-animal-services-consolidation-proposal
How do our neighboring jurisdictions who use animal control officers handle wildlife calls? What if a wild animal needs to be euthanized?	All our neighboring jurisdictions utilize Animal Control Officers to respond to wildlife calls and their ACOs are trained in capturing, handling, triaging, transporting and euthanasia of wildlife. ACOs also respond to calls for assistance with rabies vector species. As a comparison, in 2023, Fairfax County transported 9% of wildlife to rehabilitators. Whereas, Arlington transported 65% of wildlife to rehabilitators. Under Virginia law, ACOs can euthanize by chemical injection or fire arm.
DAS handles companion animals, how will it support wildlife?	The majority of animal shelters, including all our neighboring jurisdictions and most jurisdictions nationwide provide service to companion animals and wildlife. Fairfax County is the exception, not the rule. Under the proposed model, Animal Control Officers will respond to calls for injured, orphaned, and sick wildlife and they will be assessed, triaged, and transferred to a veterinarian or licensed wildlife rehabilitator for recovery and eventual release back to their native habitat. If the animal cannot be rehabilitated, they will be euthanized. Supporting wildlife doesn't just include field work, it also includes a coordinated approach to encourage peaceful coexistence with wildlife through education, outreach, and communication with the public, other government agencies, and policy makers. Under the proposed model, we will offer a one stop shop to support our community with all animal matters. Many residents call the shelter with wildlife questions or bring injured or orphaned wildlife into the shelter. The new model will alleviate public confusion and result in more efficient and comprehensive care for wild animals.
What are the benchmark jurisdictions you compared to?	The only other jurisdiction that utilizes Fairfax County's current model is Henrico County with a population of 300,000. The consolidation of animal services under DAS will bring Fairfax County into conformity with all our neighboring jurisdictions and major metropolitan areas of the U.S.. Benchmark jurisdictions utilizing a consolidated animal services service model include Montgomery County, MD, Suffolk County, NY, Nassau County, NY, St. Louis County, MO, Prince George's County, MD, Dallas, TX, San Antonio, TX, Philadelphia, PA, San Diego County, CA, Hennepin County, MN, Mecklenburg County, NC, Travis County, TX, Milwaukee County, WI, Orange County, FL, Cuyahoga County, OH, Franklin County, OH, Shelby County, TN, and Fulton County, GA.
What was encompassed in assessment of the community?	Most emergency calls for animal services in Fairfax County are not law enforcement matters. They are requests for assistance with injured, ill, orphaned, or stray animals, or involve minor code violations more appropriately addressed by an ACO.
There has been some serious animal involved cases. Stabbings and horrific dog abuse. How much more training will the "shelter animal control" need to be able to safely investigate and keep the public and more importantly the dogs and cats in Fairfax safe? Currently you have well trained officers. The shelter manager has said she has staff that want to become AC. How is that helpful when they will need more training and frankly how equipped will they be to be successful and keep the public safe?	Animal Control Officers have the power to fully enforce state and local codes pertaining to the proper care, treatment and control of animals in Fairfax County, including investigating animal cruelty and neglect, issuing summons, appearing before a magistrate and obtaining search and arrest warrants. ACO's scope of authority is almost identical to current animal protection police officers. Just as APPOs receive support from other FCPD units for complex investigation, ACOs will continue receive the same support.
Who are the specific stakeholders that have been spoken with?	DAS and FCPD met with animal services Directors from neighboring jurisdictions, industry leaders and experts nationwide. They also met with community leaders, faith leaders, human services professionals, wildlife advocates, members of the veterinary community, civic associations, and residents.
Were APPOs allowed to provide their opinion in their official capacity?	FCPD command, DAS leadership, and DCEX Arnold held meetings with all APP sworn and support staff.
How long will the training (academy) be for your proposed ACOs?	Training for Animal Control Officers is overseen by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, is 3 weeks in length, and is accompanied by extensive on the job training, including specialized training and continued education in wildlife handling and triage, criminal investigations, bite investigations, and community engagement.
For the caring of injured wildlife, can you clarify if they would be cared for in the same facility as domestic animals? Are there measures taken to mitigate the risk of zoonotic disease exposure between domestic animals and wildlife?	Under the proposed model, Animal Control Officers will respond to calls for injured, orphaned, and sick wildlife and they will be assessed, triaged, and transferred to a veterinarian or licensed wildlife rehabilitator for recovery and eventual release back to their native habitat. If the animal cannot be rehabilitated, they will be euthanized. Wildlife will not be brought into either of Fairfax County's animal shelters for care.
Would ACOs be available to the public for services calls 24/7 the same way APP currently is?	The proposed ACO model will have the same work schedule. To note, APPOs are not 24/7, they are on call from 0030-0600 hours.
How will the deer management program continue without APPO who are trained in animal welfare and humane euthanasia, which FCPD officers are not?	There will be no changes to the deer management program. Archery and sharpshooting will continue to be overseen by FCPD. ACOs are trained in animal welfare and humane euthanasia.

<p>Did you just say the Deer Management Program will stay under the control and responsibility of the Police Department?</p>	<p>The Wildlife Management Program, to include Deer Management, will stay with the FCPD under this proposal. FCPD will continue working with other county agencies to find the best home for this program. There is no intention of changing this program in any way.</p>
<p>Is it possible to put together a wildlife advisory committee to work with ACO in developing best practices? There are 14 rehabbers in FFX and them, and the orgs that represent them provide a service free of charge but there are things we are lacking and that includes support for the county. It would be helpful to get our voices heard and have an advocate for wildlife that reports to the shelter. Is there an animal advisory committee that might allow a wildlife position to help have our voices heard?</p>	<p>Under the new model, the Department of Animal Sheltering will form a wildlife advisory committee including community members, licensed wildlife rehabilitators and industry experts to ensure the program meets the community's needs and embraces industry best practices for wildlife issues. We will prioritize the placement of wildlife with licensed rehabilitators and invest in growing our County's support of wildlife rehabilitation to increase sustainability of this critical service.</p>
<p>Everything you are speakaing to already exists through the APPO. Why are we fixing something that isn't broken? We already have all of this and more. What additional benefits are there?</p>	<p>Fairfax County's 2016 decision to separate animal care and control functions between DAS and FCPD through the establishment of the Animal Protection Police (APP) unit, resulted in frustration of operations, the unnecessary impoundment of animals, and the dissipation of law enforcement resources. Fairfax County Animal Shelter has been at or over capacity for years, even with a second facility. Data shows nearly 75 percent of pets enter shelters because of human reasons ranging from lack of access to veterinary care to lack of pet friendly housing. Because we have two separate agencies with two different missions providing animal services to our community, we are missing critical opportunities to connect residents and their pets with shelter services that could support families staying together with their pets, reunite stray animals with their owners in the field, and prevent the unnecessary impoundment of animals.</p>
<p>Will the ACO in Fairfax County - specifically - be allowed to carry firearms?</p>	<p>ACOs are legally allowed to carry firearms; however, the decision is still being studied internally.</p>
<p>Thank you for hosting this session! As a part of the community cat efforts, how often do individual cats recieve rabies vaccines? In other words - is it just once when they are spayed/neutered or is there a program in place to regularly re-trap individuals and ensure they recieve required booster vaccines to reduce risk of rabies exposure to humans and other animals?</p>	<p>To participate in the community cat program, residents first attend a training workshop; many topics are covered including the importance of vaccinations. The basic community cat package includes spay/neuter, FVRCP and rabies vaccinations, a basic exam while under sedation, and an eartip (the universal sign a community cat has been altered and vaccinated); additional services are available for a nominal cost. Community cat caregivers are encouraged to utilize the program for yearly or 3-year vaccinations, and every year the clinic sees previous clients who come in for rabies vaccination boosters. These services are free to residents, thanks to the program being funded by our nonprofit fundraising partner.</p>
<p>Why didn't FCPD implement the recommendation from the 2016 study which would create a commander position within APP? Wouldn't that fix a lot of the issues that Dir. Currier has?</p>	<p>The decision to implement an APP sworn commander position is a personnel decision and it would be speculative to say whether one position could fix issues that are based on two separate agencies with different missions providing services that are typically consolidated under one unified department.</p>
<p>ACOs are required to enforce title 3.2 chapter 65 of the Virginia code. Is Col. Blakley stating that ACOs will not perform that function?</p>	<p>ACOs would be able to enforce all areas of the law, as authorized by the Code of Virginia.</p>
<p>Please could you state what the position of the MAJORITY of wildlife rehabilitators are regarding this proposal.</p>	<p>FCPD and DAS have not done a formal survey of licensed wildlife rehabilitators. However, most rehabilitators that work with Fairfax County also successfully work with Animal Control Officers from neighboring jurisdictions of Prince William County, Arlington County, the City of Alexandria, and Loudoun County, including ACOs that are licensed wildlife rehabilitators and understand that ACOs scope of authority and responsibilities include caring for and transporting wildlife.</p>
<p>Follow up to my last question. VA code 3.2-6566 states that Animal Control Officers shall interfere to prevent the perpetration of any act of animal cruelty in their presence. Under this new model, will they abide by this law?</p>	<p>ACOs would be required to follow the Code of Virginia.</p>
<p>Why is this added to a budget discussion and not voted on separately?</p>	<p>An organizational restructure does not come to the Board of Supervisors for a vote. The FY25 Budget was the best option for the community to provide comment via the Budget Public Hearings and the BOS could take action to provide their input and approval/disapproval.</p>
<p>Why do you expect the consolidation to lead to decreased shelter intake? What will make the change?</p>	<p>Data shows nearly 75 percent of pets enter shelters because of human reasons ranging from lack of access to veterinary care to lack of pet friendly housing. Because we have two separate agencies with two different missions providing animal services to our community, we are missing critical opportunities to connect residents and their pets with shelter services that could support families staying together with their pets, reunite stray animals with their owners in the field, and prevent the unnecessary impoundment of animals. ACOs will connect pet owners with a range of services including behavior and training support, free pet food and supplies, the PetHaven Program for victims of domestic abuse, pet-friendly housing support, and free and low-cost veterinary care.</p>
<p>Under your proposed model do you expect that you will be able to hire people who will remain long-term? What type of turnover to your comparison jurisdictions have with their ACOs?</p>	<p>Fairfax County offers an extremely competitive benefits package including a generous retirement program and retiree benefits. With a consolidated model we will be able to move applicants and potential candidates through the recruitment and onboarding process more efficiently and keep the focus on what they are passionate about: animal care and control.</p>

<p>I've heard conflicting things: (1) Wildlife management program are going to remain in the police department and then also (2) the shelter will offer expanded programming including things like wildlife intake rehabbing (like neighboring jurisdictions). Which is it?</p>	<p>1. The wildlife management program will remain in FCPD 2. ACOs will respond to calls for injured, orphaned, and sick wildlife and they will be assessed, triaged, and transferred to licensed veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitator for recovery and eventual release back to their native habitat. If the animal cannot be rehabilitated, they will be euthanized.</p>
<p>Under 3.2-6569, an ACO may seize an animal if it is cruelty treated, abandoned, or there is a direct or immediate threat to their life, safety, or health. Will these ACOs not utilize that provision of the law?</p>	<p>ACOs would be required to follow the Code of Virginia.</p>
<p>What would prevent the shelter from being absorbed by the police department so these services can be provided in a unified manner and the APPOs do not need to be civilianized?</p> <p>Charlotte-Mecklenburg is under a police department.</p>	<p>Similar to other examples provided during the presentation, such as the separation of the Department of Public Safety Communications from the Police Department to form a standalone agency, the size and complexities of animal services necessitate separation. Animal services is a specialized field and it is critical to have industry experts leading the mission. Our neighboring jurisdictions and jurisdictions nationwide find that having a "one stop shop" for all things animal related for the community is the most effective way to deliver services for all animals and provide education and support to residents. As has been discussed as one of the primary challenges under the present model, under the Police Department, the focus of APPO is enforcement.</p>
<p>Have you spoken with the wildlife rehabbers in your county? Neither of the two AERO rehabbers have been approached.</p>	<p>We have spoken with the Wildlife Rescue League, Nirvana Ridge Wildlife Rescue, and Blue Ridge Wildlife Center. We look forward to continued conversations with all licensed wildlife rehabilitators that serve our community.</p>
<p>Please provide a breakdown of the call data you provided on page 4, and specifically, the data relating to the number of loose animals that were returned in the field to their owners as a proportion of the total animals seized, despite not having microchip scanners.</p>	<p>Most calls for service in Fairfax County are for stray, ill, injured, or orphaned animals. The majority of the dogs coming into the shelter are strays and nearly 40% of all the animals entering the shelter are brought in by APP. Industry research shows that most animals are found less than a mile from their home. Neighboring jurisdictions, such as Alexandria City, are able to reunite 47% of dogs with their owners in the field; whereas, APP reunites only 20% resulting in dogs unnecessarily being brought to the shelter. ACO's will follow industry best practices with a robust "Return to Home" in the field program utilizing identifiers such as IDs or microchips to return a pet to its owner instead of transporting it to the shelter, resulting in the unnecessary impoundment of animals.</p>
<p>Why can't you implement these new ideas and programs today under the existing model?</p>	<p>There is goal conflict under the current bifurcated model. The Animal Protection Police have had since the inception of the current organizational restructure in 2016 to collaborate with the shelter in delivering services to the community that would have helped reduce the number of animals coming into the shelter, but they have been unwilling to.</p>
<p>If you have a community cat colony whose caretaker has not interest in trapping, how can you get them vaccinated?</p>	<p>Occasionally, there are caregivers who aren't able to trap cats themselves. In these cases, we facilitate getting someone to assist the caregiver access services for the cats. We are fortunate that so many residents in our county want to help community cats because of the many short- and long-term benefits that spay/neuter and vaccinations provide, in addition to the intake option we provide. The consolidation proposal would allow more field support to provide community outreach and dissemination of information about available resource and increase education and outreach to our community on the importance of keeping pets inside.</p>
<p>Can ACOs carry guns?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>