

**Macon County
Animal Services
System Summary**

March 11, 2025

Introduction/Purpose

Macon County currently operates an animal shelter and maintains associated animal services staffing such as kennel technicians, animal shelter attendants, animal control officers and volunteers to serve the needs of residents and visitors to Macon County. This document is intended to summarize those current services and assist the Macon County Board of Commissioners (BOCC) in determining the best path forward for animal services in Macon County. Several options for the provision of such services may be discussed, but the final decision on the most effective and efficient way in which to deliver such services will be determined by the Macon County Board of Commissioners.

History/Background Information

Animal services, particularly small animal sheltering services, were essentially provided by local volunteer non-profit agencies until 2007. Macon County did employ animal control officers prior to that time. In 2007, the Macon County Humane Society, a local non-profit provider, requested an increase in funding support from the Macon County Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners made the decision to assume the duties of animal sheltering in Macon County and initiated the process of building a shelter facility. The first and current facility was opened in June of 2009 and an associated animal control ordinance was adopted. The first animal control officer was hired in 1993 and was a part-time employee of the Macon County Sheriff's Department. That position was converted to a full-time position in 1994. The animal services division was converted to a regular county department in 1996. The animal services department was reassigned in November of 2015 to serve as a division of Macon County Public Health as a means to consolidate management structures and facilitate communications between Animal Services and Public Health, especially as they relate to rabies and dangerous dog situations. The County Public Health agency is mandated by N.C.G.S. 130A to be involved in rabies related cases. In January 2025, the Board of Commissioners reached a consensus and directed the initiation of this study to review the current Animal Services management structure and provide insight into what other options might be available.

Current Management Structure

Animal Services is currently under the overall management of the Macon County Public Health Director. Direct management oversight has been assigned to a Public Health Administrative Officer III. Twenty-five percent (25%) of that position's salary is allocated to Animal Services, but the job description does not delineate a percentage of duties allocated to animal services. A Shelter Attendant that is a full-time position manages the shelter on a daily basis along with a part-time Shelter Attendant (Kennel Attendant) also providing animal care and cleaning duties. The facility also has a very robust network of volunteers that contribute numerous hours to completing the mission of the facility. Three(3) full-time Animal Control Officers serve the County with one lead Officer managing the animal control operations and two other Animal Control positions. The Town of Highlands also retains the services of an Animal Control Officer that is 50% of a full-time position.

Financial Information

The 2024/2025 fiscal year budget for the Animal Services Department is \$427,783. The general breakdown of funding within the department is as follows:

			Total
Employee/Personnel Expenses	Full-time salaries	\$107,702	
	Part-time salaries	\$ 15,608	
	Overtime salaries	\$ 27,151	
	Other	\$159,894	\$310,355
Operating Expenses			\$ 86,750
Non-Capital Expenses			\$ 1,400
Capital Expenses			\$ 9,248
Building Improvements			\$ 10,030
=====			
Total Expenses			\$427,783

Revenues generated by the department are as follows:

Animal Adoption Fees	\$ 12,000
Fines	\$ 2,500
=====	
Total Revenues	\$ 14,500

The remaining expenditure balance of \$413,283 is funded from the Macon County General Fund. There are indirect costs also associated with the operation of the Animal Services Department such as services provided by the following departments that are funded separately and apart from the financial calculations listed above:

Garage
Maintenance
Information Technology
Finance
Human Resources
Administration

Services Provided

Animal Services currently provides shelter services for lost, unwanted, unclaimed, or other small animals in Macon County. The shelter accepts animals with very few restrictions. One restriction is that the animal must be from Macon County and anyone dropping off an animal must provide identification. The shelter is a kill shelter and staff are trained and certified to euthanize animals. Animal control officers enforce local ordinances and respond throughout the county for various animal related concerns or conditions. Staff coordinate or assist with various pet wellness and adoption clinics throughout the year. Staff also coordinate with other Public Health staff concerning rabies investigations and clinics, as well as the Dangerous Dog Board. Staff maintain an emergency response trailer designed to assist small animals during natural disasters or other emergency sheltering situations. A local veterinarian is contracted to provide services to the facility.

Historical Data

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Animals Impounded	776	625	904	1149	1390	1327
Animals Adopted	217	155	345	510	418	512
Animals Euthanized	96	27	48	65	90	44
Animals Fostered	8	2	1	3	18	54
Animals Returned to Owners	135	99	187	230	216	145

Required Services

Local governments are not required to have animal shelters, but are allowed to equip, operate, and maintain an animal shelter or fund a shelter operated by another entity as defined by N. C. General Statute 19A-23(5). Approximately 20 years ago shelters operated by local governments were exempt from state regulations governing private shelters, but around that time the General Assembly expanded the regulatory authority of the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to include local government shelters. The regulations were intended to:

1. Protect pet owners from theft
2. Prevent the sale or use of stolen pets
3. Ensure that animals in commerce are provided humane care and treatment
4. Limit the sale, trade, or adoption of animals that show signs of being sick or have congenital abnormalities

N.C. General Statute 153A-449 authorizes local governments (counties) to enter into contracts with private entities “to carry out any public purpose that the county is authorized by law to engage in.”

Options and Opportunities

The following options and possible opportunities are for consideration only and are not prioritized in any way. The ultimate decision as far as the future operation of Animal Services in Macon County will be made by the Macon County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), who will ultimately receive input from all stakeholders involved, including the public, animal welfare groups, staff, utilizers of the services, and many more. The priority should be on meeting the intent of the regulations listed above while

providing an efficient and effective service to the residents and visitors to Macon County in the most economically feasible way as possible.

Option #1. Animal Services will remain as it is currently. The management of the facility and the animal control officers will fall to the Macon County Public Health Department and ultimately the Macon County Board of Health (BOH). Staffing will be a mix of public employees assisted by volunteer groups. If there are concerns about staffing levels and the subsequent effects on service levels, the BOCC can address those through financial considerations through the normal budget process, but staffing direction and evaluation will remain with the BOH. The BOH has ultimate responsibility for guidance. The positions themselves are not reported to the N.C. Office of State Human Resources (OSHR) as other positions in the health department but the OSHR classifications for animal services are used as a guide.

Option #2. Animal Services will be converted back to a stand-alone department within Macon County Government. This was the format that the department operated under until moving to the management control of Public Health in 2015. For accountability purposes, there would be little impact as the department is funded as a separate line item in the Macon County fiscal year budget now and the positions are not reported to OSHR as noted above. This option could incur some financial increase as a department director would need to be promoted from within or a new position added and recruited. Direct management control would fall to the County Manager just as many other departments are within the local government system and the BOCC would have more responsibilities and more opportunities to provide guidance and direction. There does not appear to be another county department whose service could effectively be blended with Animal Services to create a joint management structure similar to what is now in place with Public Health. The only exception is for the animal control officer positions to perhaps become a subsidiary division within the Macon County Sheriff's Department. This would require the transfer of funding for such positions to the Sheriff's Department budget. Ultimate responsibility for guidance and direction would fall to the Sheriff. These positions were originally a division of the Sheriff's Department when first initiated many years ago. There may be some historical information available as to why this arrangement was converted that should be explored further if this is a serious consideration.

Option #3. Macon County will advertise for an outside agency to operate and manage the animal shelter and associated animal shelter functions. The one function that probably cannot be effectively outsourced would be the animal control officer positions. These positions would probably need to remain as an independent county department or converted over to serve as a division of the Sheriff's Department. Any proposals could be evaluated and considered on their merit. The BOCC could allocate some or all of the existing funding currently appropriated to fund animal services to such an outside agency with the exception of the funds necessary to cover the costs of the animal control officer positions which would probably be retained by the county. The existing facility could be leased for a nominal amount to an outside agency and could even be as low as \$1 per year based on the determination of the BOCC. Assuming the current budget for Animal Services is used as a basis for calculations, the approximate amount of funds available for this option to contract services from an outside agency is estimated to be \$235,974. The remaining \$191,809 would be required to maintain the animal control officer positions and associated costs. Any agreement between Macon County and an outside agency would need to be properly vetted with a clear understanding between both agencies as

to responsibilities and requirements, including any reporting requirements for operational capabilities and financial responsibilities. There would be an impact on staff members currently employed with Macon County as shelter workers. Macon County could highly recommend or even require contractually that those employees be offered positions with the outside agency but the ultimate decision of reemployment would fall to the outside agency and the current employees would certainly be affected throughout the process. Discussion would also have to consider certain indirect costs with the existing facility such as routine maintenance and upkeep and to what extent each agency would be involved or responsible. The timeframe for this option to occur would be an estimated minimum timeframe of six months and possibly longer to allow adequate time for a seamless transition to occur.

Conclusion

This study is intended to briefly offer some considerations for Animal Services in Macon County for the future and is not considered to be all-inclusive. There may be other options available such as a hybrid collaboration from the options listed above or even a completely different idea that becomes apparent during various communications as this information is presented and discussed. All options should be evaluated for effectiveness and efficiency, as well as both the short-term and long-term benefits and repercussions. The focus should be on what the required services are and who best to provide them. During discussions it may also be beneficial to review the existing animal control ordinance(s) in Macon County and ensure that they also match the needs of the citizens as well as the level of service that can be provided with whatever arrangement is considered going forward.