

We were shocked to find out from the media that the County is proposing to cut our service contract by 50%, from \$500,000 to \$250,000. We feel there is much that is not understood about our services and the array of benefits provided to the community. Below, I have attempted to address some of the main points.

First, our contract with the County is exactly that, a contract. It is not “funding,”-- not a gift, nor a grant. It is a service agreement to provide state-mandated County services to animals that are:

- Stray and abandoned
- Victims of cruelty whose owners are being prosecuted
- Bite/rabies quarantined
- Dogs in the process of being deemed dangerous by the courts
- Animals otherwise brought to us for legal reasons

In most counties (see Table 1 below), there are county-run animal control facilities and completely separate humane societies because the humane societies don't typically care for the types of animals mentioned above. Rather, the humane societies focus on prevention, education, and animals relinquished by their owners.

In Washtenaw County, HSHV serves both functions. Instead of Washtenaw County government running its own animal control facility, they contract with us, saving them immense expense and not a small amount of headaches.

Last year, stray and abandoned animals made up over 4,500 of the 6,700 total cared for in our shelter.

The County has always contracted with HSHV to provide this service because it is such a resounding win/win for the community. We have the expertise and the dedication to offer the highest quality animal care and customer service, and can do so at a fraction of the cost -- leveraging the tremendous resources of volunteers and private contributions.

We understand the County is in a very difficult financial position, but HSHV has been subsidizing this service with donations, at times at unacceptable degrees, for the length of this relationship. For decades our love of animals was exploited by the County and HSHV spent the bulk of our own funds supplementing state-mandated County services. This kept our organization in a state of disarray and stopped us from providing the mission-related prevention, education and support services needed to improve overall animal welfare in our community.

When we were planning to build our new animal shelter, our contract with the County was \$200,000 annually for these services - a level we knew we absolutely could not sustain going forward. Therefore, we offered the County the option to either pay us a fair amount closer to actual costs or to make plans to build and run their own animal control facility. This was a very important turning point. HSHV would have needed a shelter only half the size and half the cost if we weren't providing contracted County services.

Then County Administrator Bob Guenzel and the Board of Commissioners said unequivocally they did not want to provide this service themselves and understood the vast cost savings and benefits to the community in this contractual arrangement—a clear win/win. As such, we kindly agreed to a multi-year, incremental strategy that allowed the County to increase our contract over four years until finally reaching \$500,000 in 2010. After that, we agreed that HSHV would get an annual cost of living increase so that in 10 years we would not find ourselves in the same compromising financial position.

Last week the County Commissioners unilaterally changed that agreement without renegotiation or even notifying the HSHV. So today, we are at another crossroads and the County will need to decide whether they want to provide HSHV fair payment for services rendered or they want to provide some or all of the services themselves.

According to the County study on mandated vs. discretionary services (<http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/administrator/budget/2012-2013-budget-process/mandated-study>) (of which HSHV's contract was somehow left off), two animal control officers cost the County \$182,000. Last year those two Animal Control Officers brought in close to 350 stray dogs, out of the 4,500 stray and other legally-entangled animals for which we provided care. In fact, most animals in need are brought to us by concerned community members, people who want to know the animals are in good hands. There is no doubt that our community is made up of compassionate people who want the most vulnerable and innocent among us, children and animals, protected.

If it costs the County \$182,000 for two FTEs to simply pick up 350 stray dogs, how can they expect HSHV to care for 4,500 animals and the people and situations attached to them--especially with varying lengths of stay in our shelter from days to months depending on the legal process--for \$250,000?

The County has made no suggestions as to which services they would like to eliminate within this contract. Do they want us to stop taking in stray cats and watch the feral cat population explode? Do they want us to only provide services for half the year? Do they want us to needlessly euthanize healthy animals?

Perhaps our Commissioners are not aware that we have no control over the number of animals that come to us and, like most nonprofits, we already run on the thinnest of staffing margins, augmenting wherever we can with volunteer support. We do not have excessive compensation that can be reduced. Seventy percent of HSHV employees make less \$32,000 a year and receive typical no-frills "nonprofit" benefits.

I can't see how the County will be able to staff an animal shelter with \$500,000 currently paid to the HSHV, and I certainly do not see how they could run a shelter for \$250,000 per year. Given the county's payscale (<http://annarbor.com/news/top-50-highest-paid-workers-in-washtenaw-county-government-all-have-six-figure-salaries/>) they would be able to hire very few people to take care of 4,500 animals, and would have to spend millions to build a new facility. In addition to people responsible for daily care and cleaning and the constant onslaught of new animals, phone calls, lost reports, people bringing in animals, people looking for animals, people needing help or making complaints on a slew of animal related issues, all requiring constant, immediate and knowledgeable attention, the County would need a

director of their animal control facility and a veterinarian to treat sick and injured animals. (Animal cruelty laws require that a sick or injured animal be provided with proper veterinary care, even if it is destined for euthanasia after a required holding period. As you can see in Table 1, euthanasia is very high in government animal control facilities.)

I don't expect the County Commissioners to understand the headaches and heartaches of this work or the science or laws or standards behind animal sheltering; or that it is physically grueling and dangerous work dealing with unknown fearful and fractious animals likely to bite; that these particular animals are the most vulnerable in our community and the people attached to them are frequently caught in the crosshairs of life, "at-risk," some mentally unstable or involved in other illegal and violent crimes; or that their animals come with an inordinate amount of medical problems and traumas, often the direct result of neglect and abuse and that these animals are victims, plain and simple, that require (and deserve) trained and dedicated professionals to assess and treat them.

I also don't expect them to realize that everything with animals is more difficult simply because they can't talk to us. An animal can't tell you she was hit by a car, where her owner lives, that someone beat her with a tire iron, or that he is feeling ill and has never been vaccinated against parvovirus. Rather, this takes careful time and attention, close observation, investigation, and assessment by the expert people trying to help them.

I don't expect them to understand that in order to have a facility that provides care beyond a "death row," we need health and behavior experts to be treating each animal as an individual, always going the extra mile to give them a second chance, while also keeping the adopters, staff, volunteers, the public and the rest of our animal "herd" safe and happy--a high-risk and perplexing balancing act faced every day at HSHV.

I don't even expect them to understand the burden of euthanasia. That unlike human services, when we run out of options, we have to put our beloved clients to death -- a huge emotional weight we carry for mistakes not of our own making.

But, what I do expect them to know is they are darn lucky that we do this work for them.

Currently, Washtenaw County provides minimal animal control. On average, most communities of our size would have 5-8 officers covering a variety of animal related duties, many of which HSHV now does at NO cost to the County. In addition, (see Table 1 below) the County's current funding at \$500,000 is already less per capita than every nearby county, and yet, our outcomes are by far the best.

What also needs to be understood is that for more than two decades HSHV has done almost all of the animal cruelty investigations for the County (about 500 cases a year) at no cost to them, even though animal cruelty is against the law and should be enforced by Animal Control or regular law enforcement. HSHV also provides 24/7 assistance to sick and injured wildlife and stray animals. Picking up a potentially rabid skunk is a public health service and should be the job of Animal Control. But, we provide this service (running over **1,200** calls a year) for free. We do all of our cruelty and rescue work

with five full-time employees who have extensive training and expertise for nearly the same amount that it costs the County for a department of two.

All told, our County-related work costs HSHV around \$900,000, yet we are only reimbursed \$500,000 and now the County wants to cut that in half.

It is important to note that our cost estimates for County animals do not include "saving" the animals and all the ways HSHV goes above and beyond to treat and rehabilitate, to reunify lost pets with their owners, and to facilitate adoptions. Rather, it only includes cost of care within the required stray animal hold times. Extra costs are carried by our donors and our incredible volunteer base. Last year our volunteer hours came to the equivalent of 17 FTEs. They are a critical part of our life-saving efforts.

As an example, we sent about 1,000 orphaned baby animals to volunteer foster homes last year. Many of them come in off the streets legally as "strays" and are in need of one-on-one care and attention. They are simply too needy and vulnerable to survive in a shelter setting. In government-run facilities, ALL animals under 8 weeks of age are typically euthanized--not something this community is likely to endorse.

With strictly private donations, the HSHV provides a variety of additional one-stop shopping services to people and their animals (over 12,000 animals total), including:

- Shelter to animals surrendered by their owners
- Free/low-cost spay/neuters
- Free pet food program
- Reduced cost veterinary care to low-income residents
- Temporary housing for the pets of people in emergency situations related to domestic violence or serious illness
- Trap, Neuter and Return program for feral cats
- Humane Education program to teach young people responsibility and compassion
- Behavior Helpline
- Barn Buddies Adoption Program
- Prison Dog Training Program
- Lost and Found Services

In addition, each week we are visited by people from other shelters and animal control departments who want our advice on best practices. This year we won an award for best shelter in Michigan with the highest save rate and also won an award from Crain's for having one of the best managed nonprofits in Michigan.

During budget discussions I have heard County Commissioners say ***“If it’s animals vs. people, I choose people.”*** This is short-sighted and illogical in so many ways.

- 1) As stated above, housing stray and abandoned animals is a state-mandated service, something the County must provide either itself or through a contractual agreement.
- 2) Animals already come last. We spend hundreds of millions, if not billions, of tax dollars just in our county alone on health care, education, mental health services, substance abuse services, job assistance, domestic violence, food assistance, shelter, housing, jails, and the list goes on and on. I support a strong infrastructure of social support for vulnerable people, but why is the single service for animals being pitted against hundreds of millions of dollars in government subsidized care? (I have a family member who lived in Washtenaw County for two years. He is a life-long substance abuser. In Washtenaw County alone he received free substance abuse treatment, mental health services, employment assistance, rent and assistance, and a bus card. He has also been in and out of jail. His cost to the County in two short years could easily add up to \$500,000 and he is still unemployed.)
- 3) There are actually more animals than people in our County. The cat and dog pet population alone is estimated to be about 185,000 strong. This does not include feral cats or other pets such as birds, ferrets, hamsters, etc., or farm animals and wildlife.
- 4) Good animal care and control is just as much about public health and safety as it is about compassion for animals. Quality animal control prevents injuries to people, traffic accidents, and the spread of disease. Just ask the mother of the 17 year old Ypsilanti Township resident attacked by two stray dogs who, according to neighbors, had been a well-reported, but unresolved, problem for quite some time. Peaceful, safe and healthy communities must take proper care of their pet population. Pets and people are part of an interwoven community fabric.
- 5) Our animals come to HSHV because of one reason and one reason only... people. Domesticated animals are a human creation, for better or for worse. Humans create overpopulation. Humans lose their animals. Humans dump their animals. Humans hurt their animals. And humans, thankfully, want animals to have a safe place to go and they want them to have a second chance. They bring them to our door, report the lost, the abandoned, the abused and the injured, and then they adopt them into their families.
- 6) Animals make our lives better in countless ways.

Of course I am biased, but a tax burden of a mere \$1.44 per County resident seems like an amazing bargain for providing a comprehensive community safety net -- one that could never be matched by a government-run facility, for 185,000 pets, and the people who hurt them and the people who love them.

Table 1

County	Total Population	Euthanasia Rate	# of Animals Handled Annually	Animal Control Facility Budget 2011	Expenditure Per Resident
Livingston	180,000	45%	1,790	\$485,000	\$2.69
Monroe	152,021	78%	2,800	\$404,000	\$2.66
Oakland	1,202,362	43%	9,000	\$3,183,450	\$2.65
Macomb	840,978	72%	10,800	\$1,833,000	\$2.17
Jackson	160,248	68%	4,463	\$310,000	\$1.93
Washtenaw	346,500	18%	4,500 (does not include an additional 2,000 owner surrendered pets)	\$500,000 (current) \$250,000 (proposed)	\$1.44 \$0.72