



January 22, 2010

Dear Mayor Parker and Council Members:

As you know, on December 18, 2009, Bill White formally announced a planned \$11 million animal campus, including a pet adoption center at Gragg Park (2999 Wayside). Although it is welcome news that the city of Houston is increasing funds for BARC animals, this location is not a sensible choice for a pet adoption center. I realize that Mayor Parker, and many of the current city council, did not choose this location for the pet adoption center and I would ask you to re-evaluate the wisdom of choosing this location.

As discussed in Nathan Winograd's recent assessment report, part of the reason for BARC's high kill rate is its physical location. Winograd states that BARC "... is in a warehouse/industrial district far removed from retail, residential, recreation, and other prime sectors of the city. It was built in an area of the city with no foot traffic, no retail traffic, far away from where people live, work, and play, ensuring it would be 'out of sight, out of mind'.... BARC appears to have been built for the purpose of warehousing and killing animals at the lowest possible cost". The proposed Wayside location is very much like BARC's current Carr location. I am enclosing pictures that I took of several blocks surrounding the Wayside location as well as several blocks surrounding BARC's Carr location. Please note the striking similarities of these two areas. Neither location is suitable for an adoption facility if the city's goal is to increase the number of adopters going to BARC. Locating BARC's new adoption center at the Wayside/Gragg Park location will be a death sentence for dogs and cats who would otherwise find loving homes if they were housed and shown in high traffic locations. High volume adoptions can only be maintained by having adoption venues in high traffic, highly visible locations all over the city.

Winograd has said "One of the primary inhibitors to maximizing adoptions for most shelters is the physical location of the shelter. Shelters tend to be placed in outlying parts of the city, far away from centers of commerce, retail and prime residential neighborhoods... far away from where the vast majority of adopters, volunteers and other members of the community work, live and play." This precisely describes both the Carr and Wayside locations. The city should emulate successful No Kill shelters such as the San Francisco SPCA which stopped killing by increasing their adoptions astronomically. They did this by making the animals available for adoption where people live, work and play, not by relocating them to other remote parts of the city. They had an intense focus on maximizing adoptions, and eliminating the hurdles that reduce them.

Instead of spending millions of dollars on a pet adoption center in a location that is hidden away from the vast majority of thousands of potential adopters, the city should secure venues in high traffic, highly visible areas. This wouldn't necessarily require building new facilities. There are empty retail spaces all over the city that would be excellent locations for adoption facilities.

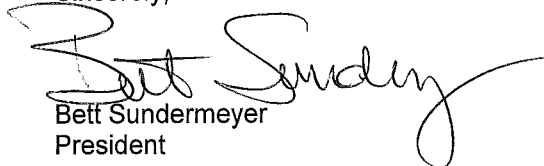
The city of Houston must invest in many more offsite adoption venues in high traffic, highly visible areas of Houston. The highly successful adoption event that No Kill Houston and Frisky Paws organized in the Westchase area is proof that these types of venues would greatly increase the number of animals adopted from BARC. BARC needs many of these venues all over Houston's 600 square miles to reach as many potential adopters as possible.

In addition to the above described problem, the Wayside location is in a zip code in which BARC picks up the most cats in the city (77023). In fact, BARC picks up more cats from this area than from BARC's Carr location (77026). BARC also picks up a very large number of dogs in the Wayside zip code. See attached maps showing intake numbers by zip code. People living in this area are not likely to adopt a pet from BARC when they are asking BARC to pick up the largest number of cats and dogs in the city. In fact, by placing a BARC facility at the Wayside location, the city will make it more convenient for people in this area to abandon more animals, while making it more difficult for other people to adopt them. Making it easy to surrender and hard to adopt will not result in lowering of the kill rate.

The Wayside location is in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. The citizens in this area do, very much, need the city's services. However, they need it in the form of access to low cost or free spay/neuter services in order to reduce the large population of animals that already exist in that area. The city's investment in free spay/neuter services for this area would be a much wiser investment and would pay off almost immediately in the reduction of homeless animals being picked up by BARC. This would also result in savings to the city as it has been proven that it costs more to pick up, house and kill an animal than it does to save him/her. And certainly killing an animal costs much more than never picking him/her up in the first place which would occur if more animals in this area were sterilized.

I hope you will put some thought into the above. I want BARC to be successful and to stop the killing. However, to do this, the city needs to make choices that have been proven to be successful in other cities. Houston does not have to recreate the wheel when it comes to stopping the killing in our animal shelters. Many are already doing it and we can too.

Sincerely,



Bett Sundermeyer  
President

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cc: David Atencio  
Alfred Moran