

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TO STRENGTHEN THE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP & OPERATIONS FOR ANIMAL CONTROL SHELTER SERVICES

Towns of Palmer, Monson, Ware, and Warren



Warren Commonwealth Community Compact (CCC) signed January 19, 2017

District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA)

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Introduction

In 2015, the Towns of Palmer, Monson, Ware, and Warren engaged the CMRPC and the PVPC to develop a business model and operating structure for a regional animal control shelter service partnership arrangement. Fueling the desire to regionalize were the increased requirements in State regulation of animal shelter facilities and municipal budget constraints limiting the individual municipalities to meet statutory responsibilities. The end result was the development and implementation of a regional program through an Inter-Municipal Agreement (IMA), and recommended strategies that address operational efficiency and adequacy. The participating municipalities moved forward with a commitment to a one-year pilot scale program that was overseen by a newly established Regional Animal Control Committee with representatives from the participating communities.

In 2017, the Towns requested DLTA support to review and assess available data produced during the pilot year that would help strengthen the existing partnership agreement and operations of the shared service arrangement for animal control shelter services. The principal objective was to achieve a cost-benefit analysis of the current arrangement, coordinate efforts to achieve community consensus to renew and extend the terms of the IMA, and to coordinate action steps to support a longer-term vision for constructing a new animal control facility. It is the desire of those involved in producing this report that planning and working together continues in the effort to improve animal control services in each participating community through regional collaboration.

The agreed upon objective of the study was to perform the following:

Phase I -

- Review current contract and any available data to assess cost and benefit of services between towns;
- Communicate with communities and the Animal Control Officer (ACO) to identify strengths/weaknesses of partnership arrangement and operations;
- Identify potential solutions to sustain partnership arrangement and improve operations;
- Coordinate renewal option of IMA.

Phase II -

- Begin discussions and help coordinate planning effort to secure an architect/engineering consultant to help complete the technical study and architectural design phases leading toward later construction of a new regional animal control shelter.

Through our process, it was duly noted that Phase II cannot begin until Phase I is complete.

Cost Benefit Analysis

The communities kicked off a pilot scale regional arrangement at the start of fiscal year 2017. Achieving an appropriate level of service at a reasonable cost that will sustain the operation has been the goal since the program was first established. Upon the initial analysis, we concluded that an assessment cost of \$1.00 per resident for sheltering services (Ware and Warren) and \$2.00 per resident for sheltering as well as ACO services (Monson and Palmer) would suffice the cost needed to meet needs on an interim basis, in the effort to build their regional relationship and phase in a consolidated model in the near future. The municipalities accepted the proposal and began with the following recommended arrangement:

U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 Census population of the participating towns

| Palmer | Monson | Ware | Warren | Total |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 12,140 | 8,560 | 9,872 | 5,135 | 35,707 |
| 34% | 24% | 28% | 14% | |

| TOWN | POPULATION x Cost | ANNUAL ASSESSMENT |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Palmer | 12,140 x \$2 | \$24,280 |
| Monson | 8,560 x \$2 | \$17,120 |
| Ware | 9,872 x \$1 | \$9,872 |
| Warren | 5,135 x \$1 | \$5,135 |
| TOTAL | 35,707 pop | \$56,607 |

The available budget funded:

- 1 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) - Animal Control Officer (ACO)/Site Director; and
- Multiple Per Diems

The immediate benefit to the towns through this arrangement is the use of an existing shelter and access to a full time Animal Control Officer (ACO) to oversee the shelter and respond to calls as needed. Although these benefits are recognized, the greatest challenge has been to provide the ACO enough staff support so that she is able to take personal time away from her work responsibilities. Another challenge has been to appropriately provide reports to keep track of data, although this has been getting better within the last few months.

Moreover, the shelter is not an ideal facility that meets all state guidelines and lacks adequate space to continue to host in a regional capacity. Other than the State's increased regulatory practices for shelter compliance, the major concern with the existing shelter facility is its location. While it is easily accessible, it is positioned about 100 feet away from the Quabaog River which has consistently experienced flooding during extreme weather events. Pro and Cons of the current facility include:

PROS

- Shelter in good repair and in sanitary condition
- Walls and floors where animals are housed are constructed of impervious surfaces that can be hosed and scrubbed
- A washing area with hot and cold running water dedicated to cleaning animals and other items is available
- Heating and cooling available but could be better
- Holding cells to keep animals contained is available. Holding cells have entry access for animals to be inside or outside

CONS

- Ventilation to maintain adequate ambient conditions necessary to help with minimizing odor, ammonia levels, disease transmission risk, and unnecessary stress on the animals due to uncomfortable temperatures or environmental conditions
- No isolation room and quarantine room available
- Shelter Arrangement currently established on a floodplain
- No bathrooms
- Lacks adequate storage space
- Lacks proper waste water management for proper disposal of waste water

The municipalities are fully aware of these concerns and have committed to work together toward building a new regional animal control facility as a Phase II component of their plan as they work toward strengthening their partnership arrangement. Prior to exercising the renewal option of the partnership arrangement and extending it beyond the one-year pilot, it was important for the communities to learn if whether or not previously identified assessment was a fair amount for service per community. The current arrangement was reaffirmed when we discovered the Gardner Regional Animal Control program as a comparable example

Comparable Example - Gardner Regional Program

For over ten years, Gardner has been the host community for a Regional Animal Control Program that now serves the Towns of Ashburnham, Hubbardston, and Westminster. They perform animal control services and provide an animal shelter for all four towns. While the Shrewsbury region would rely on the Worcester Animal Rescue League for sheltering services, Gardner's call volume makes it a good comparison for sharing Animal Control services. See the table below for more information.

Calls come in through Gardner dispatch and are logged through Gardner dispatch. Information from the call is then relayed to the ACOs. Every ACO uses city phones and keeps a written log of all calls at the facility. That log is shared with the communities quarterly.

There are currently three full-time ACOs and they're looking to hire a per diem to fill in for vacations and sick days. They have 7am-5pm coverage seven days a week. They always tried to have two ACOs on duty at once. Any emergency calls after 5pm go to whoever was on duty most recently and counts as an automatic two hours overtime plus any additional time spent on the call. All three ACOs are certified Animal Inspectors; they do kennel inspections, barn inspections, and quarantines. They also have four part time staff in charge of maintaining the facility and taking care of the animals. Two are 19 hour positions and the other two are 12 hours. They also have some volunteers that help take care of the dogs. ACOs send out all rabies samples to a contracted veterinarian. For vehicles, they have one outfitted van and one pickup truck with slide-in Animal Control Unit. They dispose of roadkill for the whole region but have varying standards for what they will pick up in each town.

Located at 899 West Broadway in Gardner, the facility is made up of several use-oriented rooms. A cat facility has an indoor portion and an attached outdoor enclosure where the cats are kept. Cats that they determine should not be integrated with others are kept in cages in that room. There is a medical room where they keep quarantines, sick animals, and any animal that has to be isolated. The medical room has a separate entry door. There's a bathroom outfitted with a shower/hose down area and separate laundry room. There's a dog kennel with 15 runs and a fenced in outdoor area. There are also cages in the main lobby; they find guests enjoy seeing animals when they come in. Altogether, they can hold 30 cats and 15 dogs. Gardner has had the facility for 15 years and it is now used for all four towns. Funding for the facility came mostly through donations. Gardner's animal control facility not only

provides residents with a shelter service, it serves to centralize animal control operations and solidifies the agreement between the four towns.

The assessments are scaled based on a combination of calls volume and population. Once they had the initial budget and each community’s payment, they signed a 3-year deal that increased the payment amount by 2.5% each year. Each community is satisfied with the current arrangement and the shelter has an eye on the future with ideas for facility expansion.

Even though Gardner’s Regional population is less than half of Shrewsbury’s, funding for Animal Control is significantly higher. This not only allows Gardner to provide shelter services but also allows them to utilize three ACOs. They also have a robust facility/maintenance staff consisting of part-time employees and volunteers. Their ability to generate support from the community has been crucial to their success. Their operation would not be possible without volunteers and donations.

| Town | Population* | Budget** | \$ per capita | Calls*** | Intakes (all) | Intakes (dogs) | ACO FTE | Shelter FTE |
|-----------------------|--|-----------|-------------------|----------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|-------------|
| Gardner | 20,228 | \$108,483 | \$5.36 | 682 | Unk | Unk | N/A | N/A |
| Ashburnham | 6,160 | \$33,850 | \$5.50 | 123 | Unk | Unk | N/A | N/A |
| Hubbardston | 4,382 | \$18,513 | \$4.22 | 133 | Unk | Unk | N/A | N/A |
| Westminster | 7,277 | \$39,800 | \$5.47 | 175 | Unk | Unk | N/A | N/A |
| Region | 38,047 | \$200,646 | \$5.27 | 1,113 | 374 | 184 | 3+ | ~1 |
| Town | Population* | Budget | \$ per capita**** | Calls | Intakes (all)***** | Intakes (dogs)***** | ACO FTE | Shelter FTE |
| Palmer | 12,168 | \$24,280 | \$2.00 | Unk | 74 | 74 | N/A | N/A |
| Monson | 8,713 | \$17,120 | \$2.00 | Unk | 17 | 17 | N/A | N/A |
| Ware (shelter only) | 9,901 | \$9,872 | \$1.00 | Unk | 41 | 41 | N/A | N/A |
| Warren (shelter only) | 5,163 | \$5,135 | \$1.00 | Unk | 7 | 7 | N/A | N/A |
| Region | 35,945 | \$56,407 | \$1.58 | Unk | 139 | 139 | 1+ | 0 |
| * | 2015 5-year ACS | | | | | | | |
| ** | From FY17 Town budgets (mixture of proposed and approved); overall budget from Palmer, incl. shelter and animal care costs | | | | | | | |
| *** | Calls responded to (resulting in actions of some kind); does not include calls handled solely over the phone | | | | | | | |
| **** | Calculated based on former population as included in IMA, with regional total of 35,707 | | | | | | | |
| ***** | Prorated for full year from Regional Animal Control Receipts report dated 3/4/17 | | | | | | | |

Consolidating Animal Control in the Palmer Region

Reviewing the program in Gardner allowed the municipalities to recognize what is possible. In examining the FY17 Budget, we identified opportunities to make the Palmer Animal Control Program more efficient to address area concerns by creating a more centralized operation in the following ways:

- Centralized dispatch and reporting possible (all calls can be forwarded to Palmer)
- Centralized staffing and scheduling
- Shelter support hours can free ACO time for administrative tasks (reporting etc.)
- Efficiency savings in backup ACO time, some operating expenses

| FY17 Budget | |
|---|-----------------|
| Item | Cost |
| Palmer/Monson ACO Salary (1 FTE) | \$40,310 |
| Ware/Warren ACO Salary (~0.5 FTE, incl. backup) | \$17,560 |
| Palmer/Monson Backup ACO Salary (per diem) | \$6,400 |
| Shelter help | \$0 |
| Operating expenses | \$12,425 |
| Capital costs (vehicle, IT, facility, etc...) | As needed |
| TOTAL | \$76,695 |

This led to a budget that brings the Ware/Warren ACO under the Palmer agreement and updates current expenses to include a budget for shelter help.

| FY18 Model Budget for Regional Scenario | | |
|---|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Item | Cost | Assumptions |
| Full-time ACO Salary (1 FTE) | \$41,320 | 2.5% raise |
| Part-time ACO Salary (0.5 FTE) | \$17,561 | 85% of Lead ACO rate; 2.5% raise |
| Backup ACO Salary (per diem) | \$6,000 | Savings; built-in redundancy |
| Shelter help | \$2,500 | 4 hours/week @ \$12/hour |
| Operating expenses | \$11,000 | Savings; centralized services |
| Capital costs (vehicle, IT, facility, etc...) | As needed | |
| TOTAL | \$78,381 | |

This consolidated arrangement would be ideal for the communities; however, it's important to move forward in increments to ensure greater success of the overall partnership goals.

Recommendation to Strengthen Program & Next Steps

Although the full scale consolidated approach would be ideal, it is better for the communities to work toward that model in incremental steps as they move forward with achieving their strategic outcomes. For the most part, the participating municipalities have already been taking steps in that direction. To-date, one full year of the pilot program has been implemented based on our previous recommendation, and the arrangement was revisited to determine the cost benefit of the services. The communities have agreed the services and cost have been worthwhile and resulted in the recommendation for renewal of the regional contract for another three years. Based on population estimates, and the desired service per municipality, the annual assessments for each of the Towns was agreed as follows, including a 2.5% increase at the start of every fiscal year throughout the duration of contract:

- Beginning July 1, 2017

| TOWN | POPULATION x Cost | ANNUAL ASSESSMENT |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Palmer | 12,140 x \$2 | \$24,280 |
| Monson | 8,560 x \$2 | \$17,120 |
| Ware | 9,872 x \$1 | \$9,872 |
| Warren | 5,135 x \$1 | \$5,135 |
| TOTAL | 35,707 pop | \$56,607 |

- Beginning July 1, 2018

| TOWN | POPULATION x Cost | ANNUAL ASSESSMENT |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Palmer | 12,140 x \$2 | \$24,887 |
| Monson | 8,560 x \$2 | \$17,548 |
| Ware | 9,872 x \$1 | \$10,119 |
| Warren | 5,135 x \$1 | \$5,263 |
| TOTAL | 35,707 pop | \$57,817 |

- Beginning July 1, 2019

| TOWN | POPULATION x Cost | ANNUAL ASSESSMENT |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Palmer | 12,140 x \$2 | \$25,509 |
| Monson | 8,560 x \$2 | \$17,987 |
| Ware | 9,872 x \$1 | \$10,372 |
| Warren | 5,135 x \$1 | \$5,395 |
| TOTAL | 35,707 pop | \$59,263 |

In addition to the contract renewal, the four municipalities committed to continue to grow their partnership by taking on our recommendation for Phase II as next steps. They will begin discussions and coordinate planning effort to secure an architect/engineering consultant to help complete the technical study and architectural design phases. This will lead toward later construction of a new regional animal control shelter.

We recommended for the FY18 Community Compact eligible communities (Ware and Palmer) to submit a best practice application to leverage support for this next phase. The availability of such funding assistance will help the communities achieve the following:

- Study Phase (NOTE: PVPC and CMRPC willing to possibly dedicate DLTA for aspects of this phase):
 - Procure a consultant to perform study
 - Set budget parameters for future construction
 - Review needs and develop basic architectural program (building size, configuration, etc.)
 - Select site for approval by partner communities (we have some pre-identified site options)
 - Develop preliminary cost estimates for design and construction for use in design phase Request for Quotes RFQ
 - Develop construction funding strategy
- Design Phase (Seeking Community Compact support)
 - Procure design consultant (construction oversight activities to be included in RFQ, contingent on future construction funding)
 - Finalize architectural program and complete the design
 - Develop bid-ready plans and specifications for use in future construction procurement
 - Develop final cost estimate for construction
 - Develop permit applications/seek permits

In addition to these available resources, we encourage the communities to apply for another round of DLTA funds from the regional planning organizations to assist with navigating the complexities behind the next phase of planning and implementation.