



To: Mayor Eisenbeisz and Assembly members, John Leach, Municipal Administrator

From: Friends of Sitka Animal Shelter (FOSAS)

Date: October 7, 2024

Re: Response to Administrator Leach's Memo of 9/30 and Assembly Agenda Item 24-156 for October 8, 2024

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The Mayor and Assembly members are in receipt of a memorandum from Administrator Leach regarding the future of the Sitka Animal Shelter (SAS). As partners of the shelter, we would like to provide some background on our organization, our perspective on this matter and address several inaccuracies within the memo.

### **Sitka Animal Shelter Facility and FOSAS Background**

Construction of the Sitka Animal Shelter was completed in 1996 with half of the funds coming from community donations, and for over 30 years, its operation has been a cooperative effort between the Sitka Police Department's (SPD) Animal Control Officers (ACO) and volunteers under the City's approval. The 2021 establishment of Friends of Sitka Animal Shelter (FOSAS), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, was to support SAS as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between CBS and FOSAS. From July 2022 - July 2023, in the absence of an ACO, FOSAS stepped in to maintain SAS operations, ensuring critical community services were not interrupted. We met with SPD in June 2022 to review and agree upon the division of tasks between FOSAS and SPD during this interim period. FOSAS was granted access to the Jarvis Street facility to carry out tasks that would ordinarily be carried out by the ACO, including volunteer management, intake and adoption of animals, and returning lost pets to owners (see timeline below for details).

The memo you received states that the CBS *“owns and operates an Animal Control Facility at 209 Jarvis Street”* and that *“Recently, a volunteer organization has operated an animal shelter from the same Jarvis Street facility to rehome animals”*. While FOSAS stepped in to help during the interim between ACOs, as permitted by SPD, FOSAS has never operated an animal shelter separate or different from the SAS at the Jarvis Street facility. Any animals rehomed from this facility by FOSAS were done so according to existing SAS protocols, via CBS SAS applications, and documented in records developed by the previous ACO.



Since the beginning of the Sitka Animal Shelter in the 1990s, volunteers have played a crucial role in caring for animals and supporting the ACO, under direction of the ACO.

## **FOSAS-CBS Memorandum of Understanding**

The MOU was reviewed and approved by the Chief of Police and City Attorney on 10/05/2022 and signed by Administrator Leach on 11/14/2022. The memo you received states that the agreement has not been successful and lists provisions believed to not have been honored. We provide clarification on these items:

- **Medical Care and Food for Shelter Animals:** *“Medical care and food for shelter animals have been billed to CBS budgets, although these are outside ACO responsibilities and should be funded by FOSAS.”* The ACO budget has long covered basic medical care including vaccinations, spay/neuter, dewormer, etc. (under account 5212 contracted services) and shelter necessities like food and supplies, as it has for over 30 years. The MOU (2.1–2.3) states that CBS shall continue to fund the ACO, operational needs, facility maintenance, and support for programs attendant to the shelter, while FOSAS may assist at its discretion. FOSAS funding is supplementary, not primary.
- **Volunteer Management:** *“FOSAS has expressed a desire to cease volunteer coordination, management, and training, which would place the burden of shelter operations on the ACO and SPD.”* Volunteer coordination, management, and training was conducted by the ACO from 1993 until July 2022 when FOSAS stepped in to help in the absence of the ACO. We recommended to SPD in May 2024 that when the ACO position is fully staffed, the ACO resume volunteer management as they did for 30 years, with support from FOSAS, to avoid conflation of duties. FOSAS continued to manage volunteers until July 26, 2024, when SPD banned all volunteers from caring for animals, effectively placing the burden on themselves.
- **Animal Records and Disposition:** *“FOSAS has requested to be consulted on the disposition of impounded animals and standards of care, which are governed by SGC and Alaska Statute, not by a volunteer organization.”* We have requested information on animals in the shelter as agreed upon in the MOU (2.4). Detailed records are required to be kept under Sitka General Code (SGC) 8.05.140. SPD and CBS have not responded to our requests for this information despite the MOU agreement to do so. Additionally, we have asked SPD to consider national shelter standards of care when developing their own operating procedures to ensure that animals are receiving acceptable care. Despite being in SGC and Alaska Statute, as Administrator Leach states in the memo, *“There are currently no Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or Administrative Policies in place for the ACO... The lack of clear, documented procedures increases the risk that animals may be adopted without having received basic vaccinations, spaying/neutering, deworming, or a clean bill of health.”* Hence our concerns for SAS animal well-being and recommendations to adopt basic national standards of care.

## **Funding**

The memo states that *“The establishment of FOSAS and the current agreement have led to a decline in donations to the Pet Adoption Fund. Tangible donations, such as food, blankets, and animal toys, have also decreased as these have shifted to FOSAS’ fundraising account. This shift has restricted CBS’s ability to provide additional funding to FOSAS.”*

FOSAS is a non-profit organization that actively fundraises to provide support to SAS, as well as to local pets and owners, and to promote the well-being of animals. There is no expectation or agreement that CBS will provide funding to FOSAS. One of the main goals of FOSAS is to raise funds for SAS's unfunded needs through tax-deductible donations and grants, which FOSAS is uniquely positioned to do as a 501(c)(3) non-profit entity. Since 2022, FOSAS has raised and contributed over \$36,000 to SAS and has logged nearly 2,900 volunteer hours at the shelter. It appears that FOSAS's direct and indirect donations are not included in the figure in the memo.

<b>2022 - 2024 FOSAS Contributions to the Sitka Animal Shelter</b>	
Animal welfare/medical expenses	\$10,526
Outreach and education	\$13,762
Shelter building renovation/improvements	\$6,500
Amazon Wishlist purchases organized by FOSAS/purchased by community members	\$5,405
<b>Total contributions by FOSAS:</b>	<b>\$36,193</b>
<b>2022 - 2024 Volunteer Hours Spent at the Sitka Animal Shelter</b>	
Shelter volunteer hours coordinated by FOSAS	2,608 hours
Outer Coast/AmeriCorps Shelter hours coordinated by FOSAS	284 hours
<b>Total volunteer hours coordinated by FOSAS:</b>	<b>2,892 hours</b>



AmeriCorps Day of Service at the Sitka Animal Shelter, January 2024.



Unveiling of the new Sitka Animal Shelter sign, funded by Sitka Rotary Club and FOSAS, December 2023.



Renovations of the adult cat room with grant funding from the Alaska Community Foundation, November 2023.



Donation drive for food and litter at AC Lakeside hosted by a local school group, October 2022.

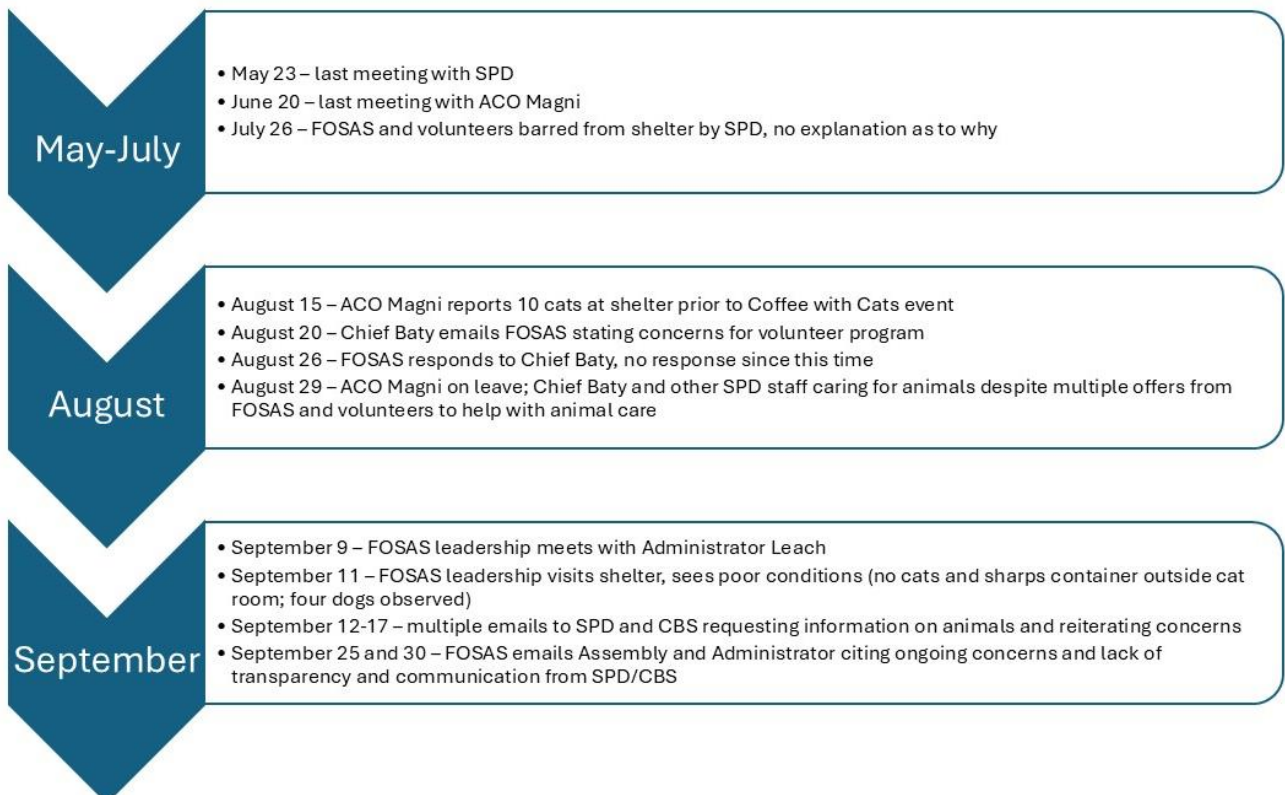
The "Fiscal Note" in the memo omits key details. The highest expenditure year, FY2022, reflects a period when SPD had a full-time ACO responsible for supplies and veterinary care. During this fiscal year, SAS transitioned from receiving veterinary care from Burgess Bauder at low or no costs to receiving veterinary care from the other local vet clinics whose rates are greater than Burgess's but are in line with the national average. These important distinctions are not included in the memo yet explain the significant increase in expenditures beginning in FY2022. On multiple occasions we have recommended that the SPD raise adoption fees to help cover the increasing costs for veterinary care. Additionally, this figure does not appear to include donations SAS received such as food purchased and shipped to SAS via Amazon wishlists by community members, litter drive donations from local youth organizations, and contributions made by FOSAS. It also does not include volunteer hours spent updating the shelter building or ACO vacancy funding saved from July 2022 - June 2023 when FOSAS carried out shelter services.

### **Questions**

The three questions posed to the City Administrator and SPD still remain unanswered (see timeline below for details on communication and events):

1. Will shelter volunteers be invited back to care for shelter animals, and if so, when?
2. Will CBS/SPD reinstate the policy of providing new shelter animals with veterinary intake examinations, rabies vaccines administered by a licensed veterinarian, spay/neuter and requisite treatments as necessary?
3. In accordance with our MOU, will CBS/SPD provide documentation to FOSAS regarding the disposition and outcome of all animals that resided at the shelter since July 26?

## 2024 Timeline with Specific Dates of Importance



**Conclusion**

It is unfortunate that Administrator Leach’s memo describes the agreement between FOSAS and CBS as "unsuccessful" and contains several inaccuracies regarding the history of the shelter, the volunteer program and FOSAS. FOSAS, like other "Friends" groups in Sitka, exists to support the City’s unfunded needs through collaboration and cooperation, not competition.

Regarding Administrator Leach’s proposed courses of action for the future of the Sitka Animal Shelter, each has merit. We encourage the Assembly to research these options as well as others beyond the three listed in the memo, consider input from the community and FOSAS before making a decision, and allocate more funds to the shelter budget to accommodate rising costs in food, basic medical care, and other operational costs if the future organization is not self-funded.

We agree that significant change is needed for SAS’s future and appreciate the City Administrator’s focus on this issue. We look forward to being a part of future discussions to determine what is the best fit for both the people and pets of our community.

Respectfully,

FOSAS Board of Directors



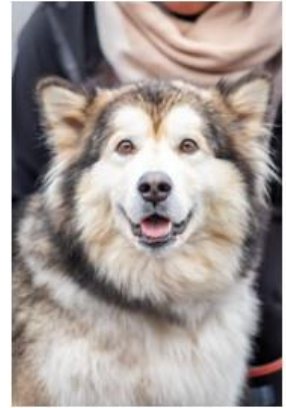
Murphy – Adopted  
May 2023



Avis – Adopted  
December 2023



Winks – Adopted  
April 2024



Sophia – Adopted  
June 2022



Miso – Adopted  
January 2022



Oliver – Adopted  
March 2023



Xoodzi – Sent to  
SPOT Program in  
October 2023



Orion – Adopted  
August 2023