



BARC Animal Shelter and Adoptions

Responses to Questions from RNA Committee Members and Public



1. Does the City of Houston cover the costs of spay/neuter surgeries by outside non-profit organizations or do the organizations cover the costs?

Yes, for the benefit of Houston residents, the City has a contract with SNAP, Houston Humane Society, and Emancipet to provide spay/neuter surgeries at no cost to City of Houston residents. Since the start of the program in 2013, the Health Pets Healthy Streets program has altered over 20,000 animals. At this time, the program is voucher based; citizens register with BARC to obtain a voucher which is honored at one of the three contractors to provide the spay/neuter surgery, a microchip, a city license and a rabies vaccine.

2. How do BARC's 2020 shelter intake numbers compare to 2019?

BARC intake for the period from January 2019 through November 2019 was 25,158 animals. Intake for the same period in 2020 was 18,847 animals. An independent survey across the country showed that intake numbers during the pandemic at all public shelters have dramatically decreased. Please note that the intake numbers cited above include owner surrenders, strays, injured or sick, euthanasia requests, quarantine and confiscated.

3. What is the increase in the number of daily intake appointments? How many were taken prior to the changes Director Damianoff mentioned vs. how many are being taken now?

When BARC's COVID-19 precautions (managed intake appointments and curb-side operations) were initiated in March a total of 25 intake appointments were allotted each day. From November 4 through December 31, BARC had a total of 40 intake appointments available to be scheduled each day. These 40 appointments do not include sick, injured, euthanasia or animal enforcement officer intakes which do not require appointments. Due to ongoing growth in the pandemic, BARC has returned to limited intake appointments as of January 1.

4. Why did BARC initiate the change to intake procedures to appointments only?

First and foremost, BARC will never turn away any sick, injured, or dying animals and appointments are not required for these animals. BARC transitioned to the appointment-based system in March when the shelter staff was split to allow for social distancing to prevent an outbreak of COVID among staff that would have impacted the animals.

5. With the return of normal schedules hours at BARC, why were appointments still required?

During the period that the shelter returned to pre-pandemic staffing levels, we were still required to maintain social distancing and prevent potential COVID outbreaks among shelter staff. This is best accomplished through managed intake appointments. However, the number of appointments was increased to account for the staffing and normal hours. While we understand the inconvenience, these changes remain in effect to ensure the safety of BARC's staff, rescue partners, and customers as well as the animals in BARC's care.

6. Should citizens report stray animals to 311?

Yes. Reporting of stray animals to 311 will allow BARC staff to see areas of increased stray activity and provide targeted outreach services in those communities. It is extremely important that injured animals be reported as such so they can be prioritized.

7. What percentage or actual numbers of BARC intakes are owner surrenders vs. strays?

During the period from January through November 2019, the stray to owner surrender ratio was 54% to 36%. For the same period in 2020, the ratio was 42.5% to 43%. As a reminder, all BARC Animal Shelter statistics are posted and available to all persons interested at https://www.houstontx.gov/barc/at_a_glance.html and https://www.houstontx.gov/barc/asilomar_accords.html.

8. Does BARC ensure all dogs/cats adopted are spayed/neutered? Same for Heartworm positive dogs, does BARC follow up on dogs that are adopted and in need of Heartworm treatment?

By ordinance, all pets that are adopted from BARC must be spayed/neutered before they leave the facility. The only exception is for animals in BARC's "foster to adopt" program. In this case, an animal's surgery is scheduled before leaving the facility for the foster home and the animal's adoption is made final the day of surgery at the time of pick-up. An assigned team member is responsible for contacting individuals who are in breach of contract. The only exception to this is if it is medically inadvisable due to age or declining health.

Any adopter that adopts a heartworm positive dog is eligible for free heartworm treatment through BARC (sponsored by Friends of BARC). If the adopter agrees to the sponsored treatment, the adopter must purchase 6 months of heartworm preventative medicine and the heartworm treatment is scheduled for necessary follow-up appointments.

9. Do the number of spay/neuters provided include those for rescue groups that are transporting out of state? What is the number of spay/neuter surgeries broken down by adopted dogs, rescue in state spay/neuter, transfer out of state spay/neuter?

BARC's spay/neuter numbers include all animals that have surgery completed in-house at BARC. BARC does not currently track spay/neuter numbers broken down by outcome type. Total spay/neuter surgeries for the period of January 1 through November 30 is 6,478 for those completed at BARC and 1,907 completed by our partner vendors. Partner vendors include SNAP, Emanicipet, and Houston Humane Society.

10. Does BARC pick-up contained dogs like Harris County? Harris County covers a much larger area with a third of the budget of BARC.

BARC prioritizes service requests based on the severity of the situation. Threats to public health and safety are BARC's first priority.

In calendar year 2019 (January through December), BARC Animal Enforcement Officers picked up 7,073 stray animals from the streets of Houston, and had a total intake of 27,048 animals. In calendar year 2019, Harris County had a reported total intake of 18,025 animals. The City of Houston spans 640 square miles and is densely populated. Harris County Animal Control is responsible for 750 square miles of those portions of Harris County where there are no incorporated cities with their own animal control services.

11. While the animals that leave BARC go toward their live release numbers, do we also have verification that the animals being transported out of Houston are achieving live outcomes in their new states?

Yes, per the contract between the City of Houston and Rescued Pets Movement (RPM), the City of Houston audits RPM's records to ensure the animals are being transported to positive outcomes. All audits are available for public review.

12. How is a dog's temperament determined while at BARC?

BARC does not have funding to support an in-house animal behavioral therapist, but all BARC staff are trained to observe and assess animal behavior based on best practices from Maddie's Fund and ASPCA. Staff are responsible for properly documenting animal behavior during all interactions (upon intake, daily walks, play groups, etc.).

BARC policies, procedures, and in-person staff trainings are developed from the following resources:

1. "Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff" by the ASPCA
2. Classes conducted by a certified behaviorist in utilizing positive reinforcement while following animal handling guidelines according to "Low Stress Handling, Restraint and Behavior Modification of Dogs and Cats" by Sophia Yin, DVM, MS.
3. Fear Free, a program created by "America's Veterinarian", Dr. Marty Becker, that works to prevent and alleviate fear, anxiety, and stress in pets by inspiring and educating the people who care for them.

In addition, in 2021 BARC is working with Friends for Life's (FFL) behavioral specialist to review our processes and provide additional support in any way possible.

13. Are spay/neuter laws or ordinances being implemented in Houston to reduce overpopulation?

BARC has discussed the topic of mandatory spay/neuter regulations with shelters across the state. BARC does not oppose the idea, but there are many challenges and unintended consequences which could arise if not implemented carefully. Challenges include:

1. Limitations on animal control resources, (including the City of Houston) to enforce the laws.
2. Lack of access to no/low-cost spay/neuter services.

BARC provides free spay/neuter services, but resources are limited. Criminalizing the owning of an intact pet without access to high-volume, no/low-cost spay/neuter services could result in the mass owner surrender of animals to local shelters. The Houston area would need a significant increase in the number of no/low-cost spay/neuter providers.

14. How many active rescue animal organizations are in BARC's network?

BARC has a total of 79 active rescue groups that renewed their application status in 2020. BARC is recruiting and accepting new applications year-round for foster partners.

15. What is the basic, minimal cost to transport animals via RPM? Is any of this cost "reimbursed" by the receiving locations?

RPM receives \$75 per animal that is transported from BARC. No costs are reimbursed by receiving locations.

16. Does Wabash sell puppies? Wabash is currently being promoted in an animal welfare meeting. Can someone advise?

According to the Wabash Feed store website, most of the animals are mixed-breed rescues. If there is any question or concern about their operations, please contact BARC directly with details and BARC will follow up and investigate the matter. This can also be requested through 311.

17. I feed a colony of strays, not feral, that people have abandoned. I have paid to have some spay/neuter and vaccinated at SNAP. Where can I take them to get them off the street? Shelters I call are not taking strays.

Citizens that live within the city of Houston limits, can make an appointment to turn in stray animals at BARC. BARC's available appointments for intake, regardless of whether it is a stray or owned animal, can be found on the website at <https://barchouston.as.me/intake>.

18. Does BARC require any impounded animal to be spayed or neutered before leaving the shelter?

Yes. The City of Houston ordinance, Section 6-137, requires mandatory sterilization for every animal upon redemption from BARC unless the animal is not old enough or has a medical condition that makes it inadvisable to perform the surgery.

19. Why is BARC euthanizing with an entire empty ward?

Euthanasia does not have a direct correlation to shelter capacity. In a public shelter, euthanasia will always occur even if the kennels are empty, because it is inhumane to allow a very sick or severely injured animal to continue to suffer. The determination to euthanize is based on the animal's health, behavior, or a combination of both, and is only made upon the recommendation of a staff veterinarian.

20. At what capacity is BARC running? Are there empty kennels at BARC for cats/dogs?

Except for November and December 2020, BARC has run at half-capacity due to split shifts resulting from the ongoing COVID -19 pandemic.

21. Why are all animals at BARC not on Pet Harbor? Currently, only shows 65 dogs listed on Pet Harbor available for adoption if BARC's capacity is approximately 550 animals.

All animals that are available, including stray hold, in BARC's care are featured on Pet Harbor except for those with extreme medical needs or behavioral concerns, owned bite cases, court holds and cruelty.

22. How much of the BARC budget goes to paying RPM? How much to other rescue groups?

The City of Houston currently has a 5-year contract with RPM that was increased to \$4,091,475 in December to accommodate the additional transport of animals with CARES funding. The contract represents about 6% of our FY21 approved budget. In 2020, the City published a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for animal transport services and invited all local and national rescue, transport and animal welfare organizations to respond. RPM was the only qualified organization that applied for the contract.

23. How many kennels at BARC are reserved for RPM that sit empty?

BARC does not reserve cage space for RPM or any rescue partner.

24. How does BARC assist with feral and community cats and what are the details of the TNR program?

When BARC determines a cat to be feral, the cat is provided a rabies vaccine, sterilized, and released back to the community from which it came. BARC does not euthanize cats based on feral status. In addition, some cats that arrive at BARC are given a chance to become a candidate of the Working Cat Program. More information regarding the TNR program and Working Cat Program can be found here: https://www.houstontx.gov/barc/trap_neuter_return.html

25. Is there any transparency in what BARC's budget is going toward now?

BARC's budget, like that of all City departments and divisions, is published online:

- A. The City of Houston's FY2021 Adopted Budget is located at: <https://www.houstontx.gov/budget/21budadopt/index.html>
- B. BARC's FY2021 Adopted Budget is located at: https://www.houstontx.gov/budget/21budadopt/X_BARC.pdf
- C. The City publishes the raw data on the website: <https://www.houstontx.gov/budget/index.html>

26. Why did BARC choose not to participate in complete communities?

BARC is actively involved in the City of Houston's complete communities' through BARC's Healthy Pets Healthy Streets (HPHS) program. HPHS provides free spay/neuter surgery, microchips, rabies vaccines, and a one-year city pet license for each pet brought to our community events. HPHS targets the 5 districts with the highest animal intake and call volume, are of which are identified within the complete communities' program. BARC is always looking for additional ways to engage the community via the complete communities' program and would welcome any suggestions.

27. Is it possible to separate intake times for rescuers from the public to turn in animals at BARC?

BARC is happy to look into this option moving forward.

28. Do all active rescues receive the euthanasia list from BARC? Is there euthanasia daily? Are animals extended at BARC like they are at the Harris County Pets shelter?

Active rescues working with the BARC rescue team can select what type of information on BARC animals they would like to receive. For example, groups can opt for information on all animals or certain breeds, ages, bottle babies, medical needs, etc. Rescues who wish to be notified about animals on the euthanasia list need should contact BARC directly at barc.aid@houstontx.gov.

The determination for euthanasia is based on the animal's health or behavior, or a combination of both. For example, an aggressive or dangerous animal will not be put on an adoption, foster, or transfer list. BARC will not knowingly endanger the health and safety of the public or other animals. Each day, the euthanasia candidate list is sent just before 7pm. The shelter requests that holds be placed by noon the following day. Euthanasia can begin as early as 1pm the following day and tagged pets are to be picked up by the end of day.

29. Who audits BARC and how is the budget spent/not spent?

BARC is audited by the City Controller's office. BARC's budget is approved annually by the Mayor and City Council and is publicly available for viewing at the links cited in the response to Question 25, above.

30. BARC numbers are lower now, is this due to COVID-19? Is there more of a need of BARC due to COVID-19?

As described in the response to Question 2, BARC intake is lower this year due to the pandemic, and this is also true for shelters across the country. COVID-19 has changed the types of requests for assistance that BARC receives. We have responded by providing resources, including crates, food, litter, leashes, collars, etc.

Since April, BARC received two large food donations. Blue Buffalo donated 34 pallets of food and treats in June and Best Friends Animal Society donated around 160 bags of puppy and dog food in October. Both donations assisted BARC in launching the pet pantry and resource program during the last 6 months for citizens in need. With the CARES funding we received in December, BARC also helped the community by partnering with nonprofit organizations to provide free spay/neuter services and pet food and medicines to pet owners impacted by the pandemic.

31. Has BARC applied for or received any CARES funding?

Yes. BARC received more than \$500,000 in CARES funding which provided needed services and supplies to pet owners impacted by the pandemic. The Pandemic Relief for Pets program ran through December and included the following:

- BARC/Houston PetSet Free Mobile Emergency Veterinary Services – December 15, 23, 30
- BARC/Houston PetSet Spay/Neuter Services - December 16th-17th.
- BARC Drive-thru Pet & Supplies Food Bank - December 19th 8AM -10AM
- Best Friends Adoption Weekend Event in partnership with BARC & RPM – December 18th-19th, 11AM-4PM
- BARC's Free Pet Wellness Weeks – December 20th -23rd and December 26th – 30th, 10AM-4PM

32. What can BARC do to expand volunteer and foster services?

BARC is grateful for the more than 300 volunteers who in 2019 assisted with activities such as welcoming adopters, photographing animals, participating in off-site adoption events, releasing TNR cats, etc. In 2019, BARC volunteers put in over 17,000 hours of volunteer time. Prior to the pandemic, BARC recruited volunteers on a regular basis to assist on and off property for a multitude of volunteer jobs. To accommodate social distancing and the cancellation of public adoption events, BARC had to limit volunteer opportunities in 2020. BARC looks forward to expanding volunteer opportunities following the pandemic.

Fosters are an essential part of BARC's network, and foster services are especially critical during the pandemic when deferred intake is preferable to shelter intake. Fosters have continued to pull animals from the shelter throughout the year and BARC has maintained its appointment based, curbside foster clinic 7 days a week with access to food, crates, leashes, litter, and other fostering supplies. BARC actively recruits new fosters year-round.

33. Does BARC have a scheduled veterinarian on weekends?

Yes.

34. If loose dogs and feral cats are collected or brought to BARC and do not have identification or are microchipped – do these animals get spay/neutered? What if these animals do have identification or are microchipped – can BARC spay/neuter without consent of owner? Is this listed in the ordinance?

City Ordinance requires that all animals that are brought into BARC, whether turned in as stray or owner surrender, be spayed/neutered unless deemed unhealthy or under-aged.

If the animal turned in has an identifier (tags, microchip, etc.), BARC will research the information and contact owner via email, telephone, and/or certified letter.

35. Has BARC’s budget changed recently? If so, how much and how often?

Below is a snapshot of BARC’s adopted budget from FY2017 to FY2021.

Fiscal Year	Budget
FY2017	\$13,805,780
FY2018	\$13,168,592
FY2019	\$13,154,295
FY2020	\$13,481,378
FY2021	\$13,567,402

36. Can BARC receive funding from TIRZ or management districts?

TIRZ spending is strictly limited by state law. There is slightly more flexibility with management district spending, but it would be a decision that each individual management district would need to make and negotiate.

37. What are BARC, RPM, and Emancipet planning to advocate for during the upcoming legislative session?

BARC does not set the legislative agenda for our partners. BARC works with local and state partners to support legislation that promotes responsible pet ownership, animal welfare, shelter management and data keeping. Most recently, BARC has advocated for an amendment to state law to make it a criminal offense to restrain dogs outdoors without providing adequate shelter and to define what adequate shelter is such as, protection from the elements.

38. What are the chances that BARC will or can implement Chicken Mike’s recommended changes to the City’s ordinance on chicken keeping?

BARC does not have the authority to change any ordinance; only the Mayor and City Council can approve amendments. Any changes proposed to any City ordinance must be shared and circulated with the community for feedback. We cannot quote “odds” of any change being implemented without waiting for community feedback and feedback from the City’s governing body.

39. Are there restrictions with using CDSF dollars for animal welfare services? If so, can they be looked at or lifted?

CDSF spending must comply with the gift of public funds doctrine, procurement laws, and restrictions on political advertising. Council Members have donated CDSF funds to BARC in the past for various targeted programs.