

June 13, 2024

Dear City of Utica Mayor Galime:

The statement in your June 13 press release is false and disingenuous given what Anita's Stevens Swan Humane Society (A-SSHS) officers have discussed with you and proposed as a responsible and humane approach to Utica's stray animal services.

First, \$250,000 was approved by the City of Utica in 2023 - 2024 and again for 2024 - 2025 to help cover the cost of animal services for the more than 1000 Utica animals per year. In addition, you reviewed our 2023 budget summary and are aware that \$250,000 falls woefully short of A-SSHS actual costs to care for the animals.

In 2021, A-SSHS incurred over \$900,000 in losses due to its contract with the City of Utica, pushing the shelter to the brink of closure. These year over year losses would be unacceptable to any organization.

Second, we did not abandon our mission, we lost a bid when you decided to look at other options. It was your decision not to accept ASSHS's contract rates that were offered to all municipalities within our service region, and instead, cut the approved \$250,000 budget by half. Other municipalities have accepted the ASSHS contract.

Third, since February 19, even though our partnership has ceased, we have continued to subsidize care for the City of Utica animals, that the city of Utica has refused, including 131 cats/kittens and 16 dogs/puppies.

ASSHS along with Utica residents are deeply concerned about how the pending reduction in services will impact animal welfare and public health. Addressing the stray animal situation is not merely a budgeting issue. Rather, it necessitates collaboration to adequately fund a realistic stray animal program along with careful planning to mitigate risks.

As commendable as it may seem to cut the contract cost, Utica's approach as it now stands will put the city at risk of incurring a ripple effect of additional costs and detrimental outcomes, such as:

- The burden of finding owners for stray dogs within an impractical timeframe
- The need to utilize city facilities for stray dogs until they are transported elsewhere
- The requirement for city staff to care for dogs

Critical questions arise from the city's reduction in animal services:

- How will a smaller shelter manage the large number of animals from Utica? ASSHS has been managing 1,000 to 1,500 animals every year for the City of Utica.
- Is there a contingency plan for overflow with other shelters?
- How many dogs will potentially be euthanized due to an inadequate stray management program?
- Who will care for Utica resident-owned surrendered dogs and cats?
- Who will care for stray, sick, or injured animals found by Utica residents?



As a longtime animal advocacy organization and partner, we feel obligated to encourage you to reconsider your approach. We also expect to be treated respectfully and professionally. As a 113-year-old organization and the largest lifesaving, non-profit animal shelter in Oneida County, ASSHS provides thorough and humane care for our community's animals – a commitment that is core to our mission and was reflected in our proposal.

Anita Vitullo

President of the Board of Directors
Anita's Steven Swan Humane Society