

# Furry Friends Refuge

*An Animal Rescue and Refuge*

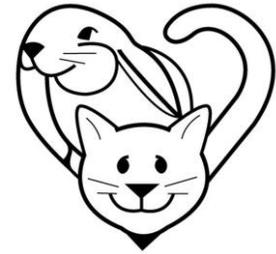
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**June 18, 2025 RFP Submission West Des Moines**

## **AREAS OF EXPERTISE AND SCOPE OF ORGANIZATION**

### **Furry Friends Refuge (FFR): A Proven Partner in Public Animal Welfare**

Since its founding in 2007, Furry Friends Refuge (FFR) has served as a cornerstone of animal welfare in the metro area. To date, FFR has adopted out more than 15,000 animals and provided spay and neuter services to over 30,000 pets—supporting both shelter animals and community pets to reduce overpopulation and public health risks.

From 2013 until the City of West Des Moines ended its contract, FFR operated as an **open-admission, no-kill shelter** for West Des Moines, Clive, and Urbandale. This included accepting all stray animals and prioritizing owner surrenders—ensuring residents had access to humane, reliable animal services. FFR continues to provide these comprehensive services to Clive and Urbandale. FFR has achieved and maintained a live release rate of above 95% for all animals entering its care for over a decade. FFR maintains advanced medical and behavioral programming for the animals in its care with a full time veterinarian on staff, multiple relief veterinarians, and a highly skilled local professional dog trainer who trains dogs, staff, and volunteers to handle animals safely and address behavioral needs of animals in FFR's care. FFR is frequently called to assist area police officers and animal control officers with fractious or aggressive animals due to their advanced handling skills. Throughout the duration of its prior contract with FFR, West Des Moines relied almost entirely on FFR for safe handling of cats and frequently relied on FFR staff to safely scan impounded animals for microchips.

FFR provided extraordinary services for animals in West Des Moines for over a decade while receiving only \$30,000 per year to accept and care for as many as 953 animals annually. No other organization has served more animals or supported more West Des Moines pet owners. FFR uniquely understands the City's community needs and has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity and commitment to meet them.

### **Strategic Investment in Local Infrastructure**

To ensure accessibility, FFR invested over **\$2 million** in facilities located within West Des Moines, including property acquisition, renovations, and ongoing maintenance. Its low-cost spay/neuter and wellness clinic was located near Valley Junction, intentionally placed to serve neighborhoods with high concentrations of low-income or at-risk pet owners. Its modern 7500 square foot facility at the city center of West Des Moines was completed in 2020. FFR specifically grew and tailored its capacity to meet the needs of its partnering cities, focusing on cats as the species with the greatest number in need.

## **A Modern, Integrated Approach to Animal Control**

FFR rejects the outdated “dogcatcher” model of animal control which focuses on sending officers out to pick up contained stray animals and issue citations. Instead, it provides **integrated, community-based services**—including a pet food pantry, low- and no-cost veterinary care, behavioral resources, and humane education. This approach addresses root causes of neglect and abandonment, promoting responsible pet ownership and improving public safety.

## **Legal and Law Enforcement Expertise**

FFR is led by an attorney and former prosecutor with specialization in animal law, including criminal neglect and cruelty. She has authored search warrants, prosecuted cruelty cases, and testified as an expert witness. FFR maintains strong working relationships with prosecutors across the three counties that cover West Des Moines, allowing them to easily engage effective enforcement and legal action where needed.

## **Emergency and Medical Services**

FFR operates a fully equipped medical clinic with a full-time veterinarian who has been a part of the FFR team for 9 years. The clinic offers services including x-ray, ultrasound, in-house diagnostics, advanced pain management including a class IV laser, electroacupuncture, and a high-volume surgical suite. Under its previous contract, FFR handled all after-hours emergencies for West Des Moines, providing life-saving care at all hours. These services remain active for current partner cities, addressing critical needs like hit-by-car injuries, gunshot wounds, and severe neglect. FFR continues these services in Clive and Urbandale, answering calls in the middle of the night to keep animals safe. The clinic additionally provides critical support to those unable to afford the cost of veterinary care at private vet clinics, assisting low income individuals with vaccines, spay and neuter, and other care for their family pets.

## **Foster Care and Disease Prevention**

Nearly 50% of animals in FFR’s care are housed in foster homes, providing safe and sanitary environments—particularly for vulnerable populations like kittens, who are at high risk of disease in shelter settings. FFR’s trained fosters include bottle-feeding specialists who provide round-the-clock care for orphaned neonates.

## **Innovation and Data-Driven Reform**

FFR was the driving force behind the transition to digital recordkeeping within West Des Moines’ animal services, enhancing transparency and enabling more effective service delivery. At the time FFR stepped in, 67% of impounded cats were being euthanized. FFR’s intervention reversed this trend and helped position West Des Moines as a **national leader in lifesaving outcomes**, earning recognition from the No Kill Advocacy Center and Best Friends Animal Society.

FFR has taken in over **5,000 animals from West Des Moines alone**, with as many as 953 in a single year.

## Community Engagement and Volunteerism

FFR partners with local schools, employers, and social service organizations to offer vocational and life skills training to individuals with disabilities and special needs. In 2024, 77 Silver Cord students completed service hours with FFR—over half from WDM schools. FFR also maintains long-standing relationships with local Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops. More than 200 active volunteers support its work today, reflecting deep community investment in the organization’s mission.

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**Furry Friends Refuge has consistently demonstrated accountability, impact, and a deep understanding of community needs.** Its track record of high-volume service delivery, infrastructure investment, and life-saving outcomes makes it uniquely qualified to partner with cities committed to humane, effective animal services.

### SCOPE OF RFP

The scope outlined in the RFP and discussed at the pre-submission meeting makes clear that the city's proposal falls short of meeting the community’s needs.

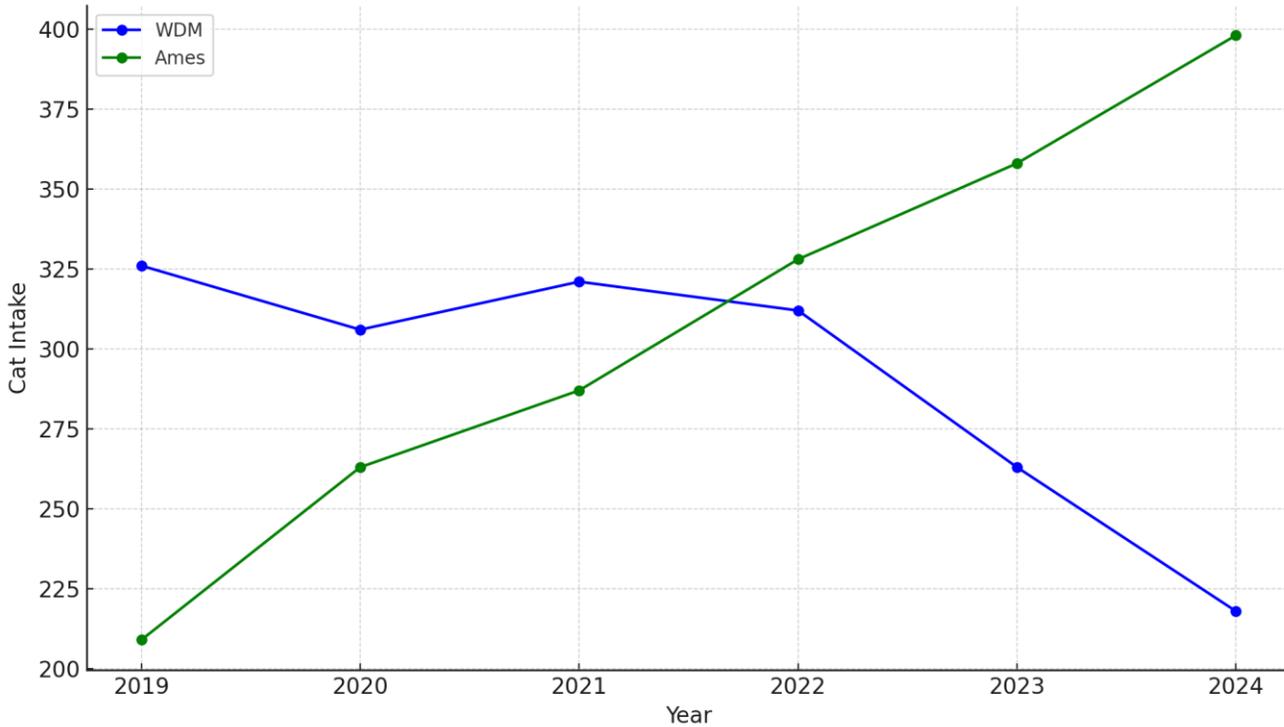
At the RFP meeting, Mr. Rank stated city staff estimated only 25–30 cats per year would require adoption services. In a June 4 email, he revised that estimate to 25–40. When questioned about the stark contrast between these figures and historical data, Mr. Rank explained the City intends to exclude many cats in need from adoption programs. He referenced “we did 45 cats,” likely alluding to annual TNR services, but declined to clarify further, dismissing requests for detail as a “fishing expedition.” This response underscores serious flaws in the proposal’s scope and assumptions.

Comprehensive stray animal data from the City of West Des Moines—readily available to staff and often including precise pickup locations—provides a more accurate picture of need. Comparable cities like Ames also offer a useful benchmark. The actual number of cats in need is closer to **ten times** the city's estimate. In just the two weeks before the RFP meeting, FFR received requests to help at least 25 stray cats and kittens in West Des Moines—equal to the city's proposed annual estimate.

Historically, West Des Moines has had over 300 stray cats annually (not including owner surrenders), a number that only declined after the City ended its contract with FFR. In 2024, that figure dropped to about two-thirds of prior years, while Ames—despite having a similar population—continues to see increases. FFR staff have witnessed residents bringing WDM cats to our facility, calling the city in front of us to hear neighborhood service officers state that any sick, injured, or feral cat would be euthanized. This does not reflect decreased need, but a deliberate reduction in intake and services.

While city officials, including Mr. Rank, defended the low estimates by saying, “We could be like Waukee and do nothing for cats,” this only reinforces how inadequate the proposed RFP scope truly is.

Cat Intake Comparison: WDM vs. Ames (2019-2024)



Year	WDM Cats	Ames Cats
2019	326	209
2020	306	263
2021	321	287
2022	312	328
2023	263	358
2024	218	398
2025 (Jan-April)	13	78

**Ames 2025 population 65,152**

**West Des Moines 2025 population 74,395**

Since West Des Moines allowed Heinz57 to stop serving cats under its contract, only 13 cats were impounded and provided services from January to April 2025. This level of service is unacceptable. Kittens that could be socialized are being left on the streets to become feral adults—exactly what the City's current proposal would permit.

On June 9, 2025, a judge in San Diego ordered a municipal shelter to intake kittens under 12 weeks of age and socialized kittens aged 12 weeks to 6 months and prohibit them from being released on the streets, after the shelter was sued for engaging in practices similar to those West Des Moines now proposes. *Pet Assistance Foundation, et al. v. San Diego Humane Society*, Case No. 37-2021-00007375-CU-MC-CTL

Animal control is already among the lowest-rated services in the city. Although the 2024 citizen survey reported a 63% satisfaction rate as being above the Plains region average, West Des Moines trails

significantly behind neighboring cities: 79% in Urbandale and 85% in Clive. The 63% rating reflects the period when Heinz57 was still impounding roughly two-thirds of the 300 stray cats annually in need. Since scaling back the number of animals helped in that contract by more than 70%, resident calls and visits to FFR requesting services no longer offered by the City have steadily increased.

Despite adequate funding, the City is not using its animal services budget effectively. In contrast, Ames allocates the majority of its animal control budget to shelter operations. Its two full time animal control officers assist in the field but spend most of their time at the shelter supporting essential services such as vaccinations, cleaning, adoptions, and medical care.

When West Des Moines had a local shelter open to the public daily, residents overwhelmingly brought stray animals directly to the facility. Furry Friends offered 78 hours of weekly availability (8 a.m.–8 p.m. weekdays, 8 a.m.–7 p.m. weekends) for both intake and reclaim services, with no appointment required. In contrast, the current system offers **no public hours**. Every drop-off or reclaim requires a scheduled meeting with a neighborhood services officer, a barrier that deters public use. A decline in impounds caused by inaccessible services is not a true decrease in need—the animals remain, unserved, in the community.

Ames also subsidizes owner surrenders, understanding that failing to provide this service leads to more strays and unsafe conditions for both people and animals.

Recently, the City hired a veterinarian for just half a day each Wednesday in DeSoto—about 20 minutes away from the city shelter each way. This is a steep decline from the three weekly TNR surgery days previously criticized as insufficient. There is no record of the City ever funding veterinary care for sick or injured animals. While the very recent addition of a vet for a couple hours one afternoon a week is an improvement, illness and injury will occur outside the limited Wednesday schedule. The City has claimed that animals at its facility would receive vet care when citizens rallied against their 2023 decision, yet records show that city staff administer lethal injections without veterinary evaluations. No medical treatments have been documented for any animal in city care since the city began operating its own facility. Under the former FFR contract, animals received both routine and emergency care throughout the week. Offering veterinary care only once a week not only fails animals with urgent needs—it also significantly extends their length of stay.

At the RFP meeting, Mr. Rank stated that because Ms. Gagne objected to the proposed stray hold period, the mayor insisted on extending it to 14 days. In fact, neither FFR nor Ms. Gagne has ever requested an extension of the stray hold period for cats. The concern was with the City's prior ordinance proposal, which sought to adopt out animals without a legitimate adoption program and imposed an arbitrary 7-day deadline post-stray hold.

Mr. Rank also asserted that FFR could choose to impound stray animals the City refuses to assist. Not only is this approach inappropriate—it is also against the City's own ordinances. Per §5-3-14 of the West Des Moines Municipal Code, such animals would not be properly impounded, leaving adopters at risk of legal claims from former owners. It is unacceptable for the City to offload core governmental responsibilities to a nonprofit while simultaneously increasing public spending without results.

Any animal services contract should contain a mediation clause ensuring that communication regarding concerns or conflict can be heard before an agreed upon third party.

## **PROPOSED COST OF SERVICES PROVIDED**

West Des Moines residents deserve dependable, transparent, and humane animal services that serve all domesticated stray animals, regardless of species. These services must be accessible to the public and centrally located so that residents know exactly where to look for a missing pet. If a stray from West Des Moines is mistakenly impounded by another entity, the animal should be retrieved and housed at the primary facility serving city residents.

Core expectations for animal services include:

- **Immediate scanning for microchips**
- **Public posting of impounded animals** (on the facility website, Iowa Pet Alert, and Petco Love Lost)
- **Vaccination, deworming, and flea prevention** upon intake
- **Veterinary care for ill or injured animals**
- **Return of only unsocialized feral cats** to outdoor homes; socialized cats and kittens should be placed for adoption
- **No arbitrary time limits for adoptability**
- **Essential community support programs**, including owner surrender services, low-cost veterinary access, behavioral help, and pet food pantry

The current terms of the City's RFP fail to meet these standards and do not represent responsible use of taxpayer funds.

### **Budget and Scope Recommendation**

West Des Moines currently allocates sufficient funds for animal services but is using the majority to fund four full-time field officers without investing in proper care or shelter operations. A reallocation of this budget is necessary to meet the City's responsibility to its residents and their animals.

### **Proposed Shelter Services Scope:**

- Housing of all stray, confiscated, and impounded domesticated animals in a modern IDALS licensed facility
- Maintenance of housing facility
- Intake documentation and microchip scanning
- Preventive care (vaccines, deworming, flea/tick treatment) for all impounded animals
- Veterinary care (routine and emergency) for all impounded animals
- Online and public lost/found postings
- Active reunification efforts—cross referencing social media and utilizing AI through Petco Love Lost
- Pick up of West Des Moines strays surrendered at other area shelters
- Adoption Services for all non-reclaimed animals
- Foster program for kittens and other animals in need
- Open public access to shelter staff 78 hours per week for drop-offs and reclaims
- Optional: City may impound bite quarantine cases at a veterinary facility or other boarding provider if desired rather than utilize FFR.

- Host 4 reduced or free vaccine clinics for WDM residents annually
- Offer priority services for low-cost and no-cost veterinary care to WDM residents
- Offer priority services for owner surrender animals for WDM residents
- Loan traps and access to free TNR services to WDM residents
- Offer a microchip reading station allowing 24/7 access to citizens
- Pet Pantry food support access for WDM residents in need
- Emergency response services for disasters within WDM
- Legal support, investigation, reporting, medical analysis and testimony for neglect and cruelty cases

### **Proposed Fee Structure:**

- Up to 500 animals/year: \$100,000
- 501–749 animals/year: \$150,000
- 750–999 animals/year: \$200,000

Animal count includes all impounded stray, seized, protective custody, impounded and quarantined animals located within the city of West Des Moines. All unsocialized community cats provided TNR services who are located within the city of West Des Moines. An annual user fee of \$30,000 for services held at the shelter facility to cover a portion of insurance and property maintenance and upkeep.

### **Optional Field Services**

Field services may be contracted either to a separate provider (e.g., Polk County Animal Control or ARL of Iowa) or with Furry Friends Refuge for \$70,000 per full-time equivalent (FTE), based on the level of field coverage the City desires. Any routine coverage the City desires occurring outside of 8am-8pm M-F and 8am-5pm Sat/Sun would require an additional fee. FFR staff would otherwise assist urgent matters on an on-call basis outside those hours.

- FFR field officers would follow the Ames model: based primarily at the shelter, handling field calls as needed. FFR facility is centrally located within West Des Moines (particularly in comparison to public services building) which allows for timely response to calls for service
- Field officers can investigate cruelty/neglect and issue citations for animal-related nuisance cases
- Bite investigations may remain under the West Des Moines Police Department; FFR would be willing to sit on a committee regarding declarations similar to what occurs in neighboring communities and was explored by West Des Moines

Historically, 50–80% of residents have transported stray animals directly to the shelter rather than request pickup—reducing the need for field staffing and increasing efficiency. Initial annual fee of \$40,000 would be assessed to cover equipment, insurance, and upkeep of equipment. After the first year, an annual user fee of \$30,000 for field services to cover a portion of insurance, gas, and equipment maintenance.

The current city budget for animal services is \$536,338. The proposal submitted by FFR including 2 FTE field officers would provide better coverage and higher levels of comprehensive services to citizens. Even with fair increase of the current intake numbers, the cost for FFR providing this service would be \$282,000—a savings of over a quarter million dollars annually to taxpayers.

## Regarding the City's Dogs

West Des Moines would be free to handle bite quarantine holds separately from its agreement with FFR if it so chooses. The police department would investigate bite cases. In analyzing data from the date of termination of the contract with FFR, the overwhelming majority of bite cases resulted in home quarantines. Of note, the City indicates in its data it has not elected to euthanize an impounded dog in the entirety of providing services for nearly two years. In contrast, FFR has made behavioral euthanasia decisions for dogs every year. Based on the data reflected by the City's handling of these matters it is not anticipated that there will be a significant volume of these matters.

The City currently contracts with Heinz57 for post-stray-hold dog adoption services. In 2024, this involved 61 dogs (including two inappropriately transferred and returned to FFR). Historically, only about 20% of animals needing adoption services in West Des Moines are dogs.

The City's 2025 contract with Heinz57, at approximately \$178 per dog (not including initial care and stray hold). While FFR has no objection to the City's preference to continue this relationship rather than utilize Furry Friends for adoption services of unclaimed stray dogs, it is worth noting that this cost to taxpayers is layered on top of City-run stray hold services. It is essential that for the purposes of reunification of stray animals citizens have one centralized facility to visit to locate any type of animal held on a stray hold.

A functional, modern animal services program cannot rely on field officers alone. It requires a centralized, transparent, and public-facing shelter operation supported by veterinary care and comprehensive community engagement. We urge you to revisit the scope and budget allocation outlined in the RFP and consider a structure that truly serves West Des Moines residents and animals with efficiency, compassion, and accountability.

Sincerely,

/s/Britt Gagne

Britt Gagne, director Furry Friends Refuge