

More Opportunities. Shorter Shelter Stays. Brighter Futures.

Understanding MADACC's New Adoption and Transfer Strategy

At MADACC, we are making important changes to how we approach adoptions and animal transfers. We want our community, volunteers, rescue partners, and supporters to understand why we're making these changes and, more importantly, how they will benefit the animals who depend on us.

Our mission has not changed. As Milwaukee County's open-admission animal control facility, serving 19 municipalities, we cannot simply stop accepting animals when our kennels are full. The next injured, abandoned, stray, or seized animal still needs somewhere to go.

What we can change is how efficiently we help animals move through our facility and into their next chapter.

Our new approach combines length-of-stay adoption pricing for all dogs with expanded opportunities for rescue and shelter transfers throughout Wisconsin.

Our objective is straightforward: reduce unnecessary shelter stays, improve animal welfare, and preserve our limited resources for animals who need additional care.

1. A New Adoption Fee Structure for Every Dog

We are introducing a length-of-stay adoption fee program designed to encourage timely adoptions and give every dog a greater opportunity to find a home.

This program applies to ALL dogs, regardless of breed, size, age, or appearance.

After a dog has been at MADACC for 14 days, its adoption fee will decrease. For every additional seven days the dog remains in our care, its adoption fee will be reduced again.

Although fees will continue to decrease for dogs with extended stays, no dog will become eligible for a fee-waived adoption simply because it has been waiting longer.

This is not a discount program for certain breeds, sizes, or ages. It is a consistent approach that recognizes that every dog deserves the opportunity to find a family as quickly as possible.

Some dogs find homes almost immediately. Others wait weeks or even months, often through no fault of their own.

We hope that adjusting adoption fees according to length of stay will encourage more families to consider dogs who have been waiting while reducing the time those dogs spend in a shelter environment.

An animal's adoption fee reflects neither its worth nor the love it deserves.

2. What Research Tells Us About Adoption Fees

There is a persistent misconception that people who pay little or nothing to adopt an animal are less likely to value that animal or provide responsible care.

Research challenges that assumption.

Studies conducted by animal welfare researchers, including researchers associated with the University of Florida and the ASPCA, have examined the relationship between adoption fees, veterinary care, attachment to pets, and whether animals remain in their adoptive homes.

These studies found no statistically significant differences in several important outcomes when comparing traditional and fee-waived adoptions.

While research cannot guarantee the outcome of any individual adoption, it does not support the assumption that higher adoption fees automatically produce better homes.

MADACC is not eliminating adoption fees for extended-stay dogs. Instead, we are using this research to support a responsible, structured approach to reducing financial barriers.

Someone's willingness or ability to pay a substantial adoption fee is not necessarily a reflection of the compassion, commitment, or care they will provide throughout an animal's life.

We believe that more accessible adoption fees, combined with appropriate adoption counseling and education, can help more animals find wonderful families.

3. Our Goal Is to Move Animals Through MADACC More Efficiently

Our goal is not simply to increase the number of animals adopted directly from MADACC.

Our long-term goal is to transfer more animals to approved rescue and shelter partners than we adopt directly.

This may sound surprising, but there is an important reason behind this approach.

Animals who are readily adoptable should have the opportunity to find homes quickly. Keeping them in our kennels longer than necessary uses valuable space, staffing, and financial resources that could be directed toward animals requiring additional attention.

Some animals need medical treatment. Others need behavioral support, time to recover, or simply a different audience of potential adopters.

Every animal who leaves MADACC through adoption or transfer creates an opportunity for us to help another animal.

A shorter shelter stay can also mean less time in an unfamiliar and potentially stressful environment.

We want to use our resources where they can make the greatest difference.

Importantly, moving animals more efficiently does not mean rushing inappropriate placements. Animal welfare, public safety, and responsible placement remain essential.

4. Not Every Wonderful Dog Is an Easy Adoption

Some of the dogs who wait the longest for homes are large dogs and bully-type dogs.

Through absolutely no fault of their own, these dogs frequently face misconceptions about their breeds, temperaments, and backgrounds.

People sometimes assume that a muscular dog with a broad head must be aggressive, difficult to handle, or previously involved in dog fighting.

Appearance alone cannot tell us any of those things.

Many of these dogs are affectionate, playful companions who simply need someone willing to see them as individuals.

Unfortunately, they may be passed over in favor of smaller dogs, puppies, or dogs whose appearance attracts more immediate interest.

We cannot change every adopter's preferences, but we can expand the opportunities available to these dogs.

A dog who struggles to attract interest in Milwaukee may be exactly what a family elsewhere in Wisconsin is looking for.

Our new length-of-stay adoption pricing applies equally to these dogs and every other dog in our care.

At the same time, our expanded rescue and shelter transfer program will provide additional opportunities to reach adopters throughout Wisconsin.

Every dog deserves to be evaluated as an individual, not judged by its appearance.

5. Expanding Our Rescue and Shelter Transfer Program

MADACC is introducing a tiered transfer system designed to provide approved rescue and shelter partners with predictable opportunities to reserve eligible animals.

The program will operate through three priority tiers.

Tier 1: Primary Transfer Partners

Our primary transfer partners will receive the earliest access to eligible animals, including the opportunity to place holds while animals are completing their legally required stray hold.

Tier 2: Secondary Transfer Partners

Beginning at 7:00 p.m. on Day 5, our second tier of approved transfer partners will have the opportunity to place holds on eligible animals that have not already been reserved.

Tier 3: All Remaining Approved Transfer Partners

Beginning at 7:00 p.m. on Day 6, all remaining approved transfer partners will have access to eligible, unreserved animals.

Animals may be reserved according to these tiers but cannot be physically transferred until their legally required stray hold has expired and they are otherwise eligible for release.

Animals on safekeeping holds or otherwise unavailable for placement will not be included until they become eligible.

MADACC will continue actively pursuing direct adoptions throughout this process.

If we cannot find an appropriate adopter quickly, we want our rescue and shelter partners to have the opportunity to help.

This system is designed to reduce unnecessary delays, expand placement opportunities, and make it easier for organizations throughout Wisconsin to help Milwaukee County's animals.

Our priority is not which organization places an animal. Our priority is helping that animal find an appropriate home.

6. Making Adoption More Accessible While Promoting Responsible Pet Ownership

Competitive adoption fees may encourage people who previously considered shelter adoption too expensive to give MADACC another look.

Adopting through MADACC also offers important benefits.

Animals receive veterinary assessments and appropriate preventive care, and animals adopted directly through our program are sterilized.

These services help promote responsible pet ownership, reduce preventable disease, and prevent unwanted litters that contribute to shelter overcrowding.

We want more families to consider adopting animals who are already here and waiting rather than contributing to the demand for additional breeding.

Reducing adoption fees does not mean abandoning responsible adoption practices.

We will continue providing adoption counseling, sharing available medical and behavioral information, and helping families make informed decisions.

Our responsibility extends beyond the adoption itself. We want successful, lasting relationships between people and their pets.

7. Why Reducing Our In-House Population Matters

MADACC's resources are finite, but the need for our services continues to grow.

Every additional day an animal spends in our facility requires kennel space, cleaning, feeding, enrichment, medical oversight, and staff attention.

Prolonged shelter stays can also contribute to stress and create additional challenges associated with maintaining a healthy shelter population.

When animals move through our facility more efficiently, we can devote more resources to those requiring additional care.

Reducing our in-house population also helps ensure we remain prepared to respond to the next animal who arrives needing immediate assistance.

We will evaluate the effectiveness of these changes by monitoring adoption and transfer outcomes, length of stay, shelter population, and the continued needs of the animals entering our care.

Success will not be measured simply by the number of animals adopted directly from MADACC.

It will be measured by how effectively we help animals reach appropriate outcomes while maintaining the resources necessary to serve our community.

8. Every Animal Deserves the Same Opportunity

A senior dog is not worth less than a puppy.

A large dog is not worth less than a small dog.

A bully-type dog is not worth less than a dog whose appearance attracts immediate attention.

And a dog adopted for a reduced fee is not worth less than one adopted for hundreds of dollars.

Every animal deserves to be evaluated as an individual and given a meaningful opportunity to find an appropriate home.

We recognize that some animals will need more time and resources than others. Our goal is to make sure those resources are available when needed.

By helping readily adoptable animals find homes quickly and giving our rescue partners greater access to eligible animals, we can spend more time helping those who face additional challenges.

Our length-of-stay adoption pricing and expanded transfer partnerships work together to accomplish that goal.

This is not about lowering our standards. It is about expanding opportunities.

We are grateful to our adopters, volunteers, rescue partners, municipal partners, and supporters who make our work possible.

We hope our community will embrace these changes and recognize them for what they are: an effort to provide better opportunities for more animals while ensuring MADACC remains ready to serve every municipality and every animal that needs us.

We are not reducing the value of our animals. We are removing barriers to their futures.

Karen Sparapani
Executive Director, Humane Officer
Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission (MADACC)

Research Behind Our Approach

Our decision to introduce length-of-stay adoption pricing is informed by research examining the relationship between adoption costs and responsible pet ownership.

- Weiss and Gramann (2009): *A Comparison of Attachment Levels of Adopters of Cats: Fee-Based Adoptions Versus Free Adoptions*. Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10888700903163674>
- University of Florida shelter research: Research examining adoption success, attachment, veterinary care, and outcomes associated with paid and fee-waived adoptions.
- Maddie's Matchmaker Adoptathon research: Follow-up research examining animals adopted during a fee-waived event found high rates of retention and strong adopter attachment.

These studies do not establish an ideal adoption price or guarantee that every adoption will succeed. They do, however, challenge the assumption that higher adoption fees are necessary to secure responsible, loving homes.