Adoption Policies (Revised November 2021)

Overview

Adoption, or the process of re-homing animals, is at the heart of animal sheltering. A strong, efficient, nondiscriminatory, and thriving adoption program is a critical part of fulfilling MCASAC's mission.

The adoption program will utilize a friendly, conversation-based approach to match adopters with animals who are well-suited to the adopter's lifestyle and expectations. This approach is referred to as "open adoptions," also known as the Adopter's Welcome model recommended by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

The Adoption Counselors, under the direction of higher-level authority, will be primarily responsible for guiding potential adopters through the process and striving to achieve positive outcomes for as many animals and adopters as possible.

Adoption Mission

The MCASAC adoption department strives to place as many animals as possible in healthy, safe, and happy homes and locations; minimize the length of stay of adoptable animals; and support the lifesaving efforts of the Office of Animal Services (OAS). Adoption Counselors say "yes" to potential adopters as much as reasonably possible.

Values

1. Welcome and encourage all people to adopt
2. Reduce, if not eliminate, all barriers to adoption
3. Make it easy and enjoyable to adopt
4. Conduct same-day adoptions
5. Take a conversational approach
6. Build connections between animals and people
7. Trust adopters
8. Treat all animals and people as individuals
9. Follow best practices

10. Provide exemplary customer service.

11. Welcome returned adoptions.

12. Be honest, open, and transparent.

General

1. Any time the Adoption Center is open to the public, visitors are welcome to walk around and view the animals housed in areas open to the public after signing in at the front desk.

2. Adoption services (including meeting animals and adoption counseling) are provided first come, first served, by appointment.

3. To begin the adoption process, potential adopters must submit a questionnaire, provide the required items, and schedule their appointment. All must be done by the same method (online or in person). None of these actions guarantee that an adoption will occur.

4. The ability to make an adoption appointment is offered after all required items are received. Potential adopters who submit their information online will be emailed a link to schedule an appointment. A Customer Service Representative (CSR) at the Adoption Center will schedule an appointment for those who submit their information in person.

5. If completing the process online, an adopter may submit the required items any time after the questionnaire is submitted. Questionnaires do not time out. Questionnaires and items submitted online or by email are stored indefinitely in the AdoptMCASAC@montgomerycountymd.gov inbox. If the questionnaire and required items were submitted in person, the hard copies will be stored for 30 days. After that time, they will be destroyed and the adopter will need to complete the questionnaire again.

6. Animals are not placed on hold for potential adopters based on questionnaires or expressed interest.

7. Adopters may not meet or receive adoption counseling for any animal who is not available for adoption.

8. Adopters must follow the same process and meet the same requirements for animals housed in the Adoption Center as those housed in foster homes.

9. Returns to owners are not considered adoptions. If an owner surrenders an animal and later asks for the animal to be returned, the Admissions section of OAS will handle that request. If a family member, friend, or anyone other than the original owner asks for the return of a surrendered animal, they must follow the same process and meet the same requirements as any adopter.

10. Misrepresentations on a questionnaire or during adoption counseling may automatically disqualify a person from adopting, subject to exceptions at the discretion of a Supervisor, Manager, Deputy Executive Director, or Executive Director.

11. Adopters are required to sign the MCASAC Adoption Contract and agree to abide by its terms and conditions.

12. The County reserves the right to refuse an adoption for any reason, so long as that reason does not infringe upon federal or local laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, religion, ancestry, sex, age, national origin, marital status, handicap, sexual orientation, or genetic status.
13. Policies may be altered, or requirements waived on a case-by-case basis, at the discretion of the Director or their designee.

Requirements

Required Items

1. All adopters are required to provide a valid government ID. The adopter's ID is used for verifying their identity. The address on the ID and address on the questionnaire must both be recorded in Chameleon if different; they do not have to match.
2. Adopters who live in any city in Montgomery County except Gaithersburg or Rockville will be required to present valid licenses for each cat and dog they own and rabies certificates for each ferret they own.
3. Adopters who do not live in Montgomery County or who live in Gaithersburg or Rockville will be required to present rabies certificates for each cat, dog, and ferret they own.

General Requirements

1. Potential adopters must be at least 18 years of age to adopt an animal.
2. Potential adopters must complete the following steps, in the following order:
    1. Submit the adoption questionnaire.
    2. Submit the required items.
    3. Schedule an appointment at the Adoption Center or with the Foster Parent.
    4. Meet the animal(s) with an Adoption Counselor, Volunteer, or Foster Parent.
    5. Complete counseling with an Adoption Counselor.
    6. Sign the Adoption Contract.
    7. Pay required fees, if any.
    8. Pick up and/or take home the animal.
3. Adopters are required to comply with all applicable state and local laws. Owners are required to provide each companion animal with adequate food, water, shelter, space, exercise, treatment, and veterinary care.

Adoption Requirements

4. The adopter must accept the animal as is and assume all risks of ownership, including liability and all post-adoption financial obligations. Adoption fees are non-refundable.
5. Animals may only be adopted as companion animals. They may not be used for any other purpose, including food consumption, fighting, resale for profit, experimentation, research purposes, primary use as guard dogs, or any illegal activities.
6. Small animals and birds adopted from Montgomery County Animal Services & Adoption Center (MCASAC) must be housed in indoor enclosures or cages of sufficient size to ensure the comfort of the animal.
7. Adopters are not required to be residents of Montgomery County or the State of Maryland.
8. MCASAC will not require all animals in the adopter's home to be spayed or neutered.
9. Adopters are only responsible for providing proof of rabies vaccination or pet licenses for the cats, dogs, and ferrets they own.

Policies

1. MCASAC conducts same-day adoptions. Adopters should be prepared to take an animal home at the time of the adoption appointment. Animals are not placed on hold for adopters to purchase supplies.
2. MCASAC accepts any animal back, regardless of the reason or the amount of time that has passed. Adopters may return an animal at any time by making an appointment with the Office of Animal Services (OAS).
3. Adopters may rehome animals. If an animal is rehomed, the adopter should notify MCASAC and provide the new adopter's contact information.
4. MCASAC neither requires animals to be adopted in pairs nor prohibits doing so.
    1. For adult animals designated as bonded pairs by MCASAC staff, first preference will be given to adopters willing to adopt both animals together. Only after reasonable efforts have been made to find an adopter willing to adopt both animals together will single adoptions be considered.
    2. Two animals not designated as a bonded pair may be adopted at the same time, provided that the Adoption Counselor and/or other MCASAC behavior staff determine the animals are an appropriate match.
5. If an animal is eligible for standard adoption (that is, not designated "rescue only" by medical or behavioral staff), adoption will take priority over rescue or transfer plans.
6. MCASAC will not perform landlord checks, home visits, or request veterinary references.
7. Adopters will not be asked about allergies, whether related to pets or otherwise.
8. Adopters will not be asked whether they rent or own their residence.

9. Adopters will not be prohibited from giving animals as gifts.
10. Adoptions will not be approved or denied based on scores, ranks, or numbers.
11. MCASAC will not require family visits (requiring all members of the household or residence to meet with the animal prior to adoption), nor will animals be placed on hold for such visits.
12. MCASAC will not impose age restrictions.
13. MCASAC will not require adopters to bring their residence dog(s) to the shelter for dog-to-dog introductions. Staff may recommend this if there is a concern about the pairing.
14. If there is a safety concern about an adoption, an Adoption Counselor may stop the process. A Supervisor, Manager, Deputy Executive Director, or Executive Director may then approve or deny the adoption.
15. MCASAC will not conduct cat testing (introducing a dog to a cat at the shelter to assess how they might co-exist). Dogs will not be introduced to cats at the shelter for this purpose.

16. Prioritizing Adoptions

a. If an adopter is a good match for certain longer-stay animals, an Adoption Counselor will suggest those higher-priority animals whenever possible.

17. Prioritizing Adopters

a. A person who brings a stray animal to MCASAC (the Finder) will have the first opportunity to adopt the animal. The animal's Foster Parent will have the next opportunity. This priority does not extend to family members or friends of the Finder or Foster Parent.

b. Animals will be held for 24 hours after they are made available for adoption for the Finder and/or the Foster Parent, if applicable. The Finder or Foster Parent must submit an adoption questionnaire before the animal is made available for adoption in order to be contacted at that time.

c. After the 24-hour Finder/Foster Parent hold period has passed, the animal will become available to the public. At the Adoption Center and in foster homes, the first person to visit with the animal will have the first opportunity to adopt the animal.

d. Once an adopter visits with an animal, the adopter may begin the counseling process for that specific animal. After counseling begins, the animal is no longer available to other adopters.

e. Adopters may begin adoption counseling for an animal at any time after visiting with the animal, provided the animal is still available for adoption. Adopters are not subject to a time limit after their visit.

f. If multiple potential adopters schedule visits at the same time, are interested in the same animal, and arrive by the scheduled appointment time, the adopter who submitted all required items first will visit with the animal first.

7. Should potential adopters schedule visits at the same time and be interested in the same animal, but one adopter is late for their appointment, the adopter who arrives on time will visit with the animal first.

Restrictions

1. MCASAC will not adopt any animal to a household where a person with a history of animal abuse or neglect, repeated violation of animal ordinances (as determined by OAS history), or history of domestic violence resides.
2. In accordance with the law, the finalization of adoptions of puppies and kittens before the age of eight (8) weeks of age is prohibited.
3. For social development reasons, puppies five (5) months old and younger will not be adopted to homes in which they will be left alone for more than eight (8) consecutive hours a day.
4. Dogs will not be adopted to homes in which they will be primarily or exclusively kept outdoors.
5. MCASAC is opposed to declawing, unless medically necessary for a particular individual. In most cases, declawing is not necessary and instead an elective procedure accompanied by both acute and long-term medical and behavioral complications. In instances where a potential adopter expresses interest in declawing a cat, the adoptions staff must provide a comprehensive overview of the procedure and offer counseling on humane alternatives. Should a potential adopter remain adamant about declawing their adopted animal, staff may elect not to proceed with the adoption and instead encourage the patron to do more extensive research before taking home a companion cat.
6. Due to the risk of transmission and the severity of the prognosis, cats who are FeLV (Feline Leukemia Virus) positive may not be adopted to homes with cats who are FeLV negative. Cats who are FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) positive may be adopted to homes with cats who are FIV negative.

Pre-Adoption Services

1. Veterinary Care

a. All dogs (at least 8 weeks old) and cats (at least 2 lbs. or as otherwise determined by veterinary staff) are spayed or neutered prior to going to their new home, unless a MCASAC veterinarian recommends against the procedure for medical reasons.

b. Dogs receive a heartworm test, Canine Distemper/Parvovirus combination vaccine, and Bordetella vaccine; are treated for common parasites; microchipped; and receive a Rabies vaccination if at least 12 weeks old.

c. Cats receive a Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) test and a Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) test; are treated for common parasites; microchipped; and receive age-appropriate vaccinations, including a Rabies vaccination if at least 12 weeks old.

They receive a Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) test and a Calicivirus/Panleukopenia combination vaccine; are treated for common parasites; are microchipped; and receive a Rabies vaccination if they weigh at least 3 lbs.

Ferrets receive a Rabies vaccination and microchip prior to adoption.

Rabbits are microchipped prior to adoption.

Other animals may be spay/neutered and/or vaccinated as recommended by MCASAC veterinary staff.

2. All dogs and cats must be licensed if the adopter lives in any city in Montgomery County except Gaithersburg or Rockville.

FEES

1. Adoption fees are as stated in Executive Regulation 16-17.
2. MCASAC reserves the right to lower or waive adoption fees at various times for special promotions.
3. Adoptions that have been completed prior to the beginning of the promotion will not be eligible for any refunds.
4. All adoption fees must be paid before an animal goes home.

WAIVED FEES

ANIMALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Adoption fees are waived for dogs and cats identified by MCASAC veterinary staff as having special medical needs.

CATS OVER 8 YEARS OLD

Adoption fees are waived for any cat determined to be over 8 years old by MCASAC veterinary staff.

HIDDEN GEMS

Adoption fees are waived for any animal who has been available for adoption for 30 days or more. Days do not have to be consecutive in the case of animals who have been adopted and returned within 30 days. Friends of Montgomery County Animals (FMCA) has agreed to sponsor this "Hidden Gem" program.

VETERANS AND ACTIVE-DUTY SERVICE MEMBERS

Adoption fees for cats and dogs are waived for active-duty service members and veterans per Maryland Act HB 563/SB 338. A service member or veteran may adopt up to one cat and one dog within a six-month period for free. Licensing fees still apply. They must present required documentation verifying their status.

valid identification that includes a notation of active duty/veteran status. Acceptable forms include:

1. Driver's License with veteran designation
2. Veteran ID Card (VIC)
3. Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)
4. Common Access Card (CAC)
5. State or Federally Issued Identification Cards
6. Discharge paperwork