



humane society
of Southern Wisconsin

February 4, 2026

Village of Footville
PO BOX 445
Footville, WI 53537

Dear Village of Footville Board Leaders,

Thank you for your recent letter and request for open communication regarding our contracted services. We are always happy to be transparent and explain the nuances of animal sheltering.

To start, we'd like to define the terms 'feral' and 'stray' to bring some clarity to our services. At HSSW (and many other animal welfare organizations), we use the term 'feral' to describe a cat that cannot be touched, handled, or even approached too much. Feral cats typically like to keep their distance from people although many feral cats do have caretakers that provide food, water, and shelter for them and/or their colony.

On the other hand, we use 'stray' to describe a cat that can be approached, pet, and seems to be accustomed to people. Stray cats have often lived at least some part of their lives indoors and are familiar with the comforts of a home. Stray cats may be cats that have gone for a little adventure out of their house and are looking for a way back to their family or found their way outside in some other way.

Stray cats are covered within our contracted services and can come to HSSW to be cared for, for us to try to reunite them with their families, for us to adopt them out, etc. However, **feral cats are not completely covered within our contracted services**. To explain further, if a resident brings a feral cat to us and the cat is sick or injured, we will take it in as if it were a stray cat. If a resident brings us a feral cat that is not sick or injured, we will ask that they place the cat back outside for the time being. We will also ask that they coordinate with our Surgery Team to re-catch the cat and bring the cat into be spayed/neutered and vaccinated another day at no cost to them.

We ask this because one of the best ways to help feral cats in your area is to T-N-R them. T-N-R stands for Trap-Neuter-Release. Since feral cats typically do not want to join the indoor cat life, a great way to help them is to Trap them, get them spayed or Neutered, and Release them back to their colony area. This will help to stop the colony from breeding and also to help reduce the amount of fights within the colony.

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We have a variety of ways of determining if a cat is likely feral or not including checking them for an ear-tip (a notch off the top of one of their ears), discussion with the resident who found the cat about the cat's behavior, examination of the cat and the cat's behavior at the shelter, etc. So, for example, if a resident brings in an ear-tipped cat that is not sick or injured, we will educate them on what an ear tip means (that the cat has been spayed/neutered, vaccinated, and is successfully living outdoors) and ask that they place the cat back outside as that is the cat's home.

Another important distinction to be made here is the difference between bringing in a stray pet and surrendering a pet. A stray pet would be one found wandering around outside seemingly lost and without their family and can be brought to us as contracted. Surrendering a pet would be someone bringing in an owned pet that for whatever reason, cannot be cared for by their family any longer. These pets must come to us by an appointment with our Cat or Dog Care Team. However, **there are some instances when a pet starts out in the stray category and moves to the surrender category.**

To explain further, typically residents bring in pets that they have found and have been with them for a very short period of time (usually not even hours, but at time a few days or so). These pets are typically considered stray pets and can come to us as contracted. However, at times they have been caring for the pet for weeks or months and for any number of reasons have decided after that amount of time to bring the pet to us. **Once they have been providing care (feeding, taking to the vet, etc.) for two weeks or more, we no longer consider that pet a stray pet and cannot take the pet in as part of our contracted services. We can set up an appointment for the pet to be surrendered though. There is a surrender fee associated with this process as surrendering is outside of our contracted services that municipalities pay for.**

We hope that this helps explain the specifics of our contracted services and possible perceived inconsistencies that you have received feedback about. We value our continued partnership in serving the pets and the people that love them and thank you for taking the time to have this open communication with us.

Thank you,

Kaitie Swedlund
Programs & Services Director

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