

# New Braunfels Feline Shelter Building Proposal

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To: New Braunfels Cat Coalition

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## Introduction

Texas is home to a significant number of stray cats, with estimates ranging from 1.4 million to as many as 3 million (Terry, 2024). Colonies are prevalent in both rural and urban environments. Due to the substantial population, Texas has set in place laws that help protect these felines while also looking out for the communities they reside in. In response, numerous Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs have been established. These initiatives, which involve humanely trapping, spaying or neutering, and returning feral cats to their original territories, have proven remarkably effective in population control.

A particular issue remains: are these cats truly safe when returned to their colonies? Do they have adequate shelter from inclement weather or protection from nearby predators? Turkish architect Didem Gokgoz posed this question back in 2008. In Istanbul, the cat population is similarly substantial, estimated to be at 125,000 (The Cat Houses of Istanbul: ‘Everybody Accepts Cats Must Have Their Own Life Spaces In The City’, 2021). These felines are widespread, visible in parks, restaurants, breweries, and even churches.

On her way to work, Didem Gokgoz would pass a park every day, seeing cats desperately searching for warmth during Istanbul’s winters (Sarıöz, Defne, 2021). After a few attempts, she met with a neighborhood official and proposed her idea to construct higher-end wooden cat houses. The official agreed to a trial, and the results were transformative: Istanbul is now known as the “City of Cats.” Beautifully crafted cat homes, well-cared for by local volunteers, can be seen throughout the city, and the stray cat population has truly prospered (Aaron, 2021).

New Braunfels shares significant similarities with Istanbul, particularly regarding its large stray cat population and the existence of TNR programs. This proposal outlines the

construction of aesthetically pleasing and practical cat shelters in designated areas of the city where the largest colonies reside. This initiative would do more than simply provide additional shelter; it would significantly improve the quality of life for these cats. It would also highlight the local community's collaborative efforts and deep compassion, ultimately enhancing the city's appeal.



*A Custom-Built Wooden Cat House in Turkey.*

## Background

The New Braunfels Cat Coalition (NBCC) has established a successful TNR program that has yielded phenomenal results since its implementation. We've seen a dramatic reduction in the number of cats euthanized at the Humane Society (Sallie Lewis, 2024). This success allows cats to remain in their established colonies to live their lives while simultaneously alleviating community concerns about overpopulation. Similarly to the results seen in Istanbul, cats that are

neutered and returned can be seen all around Comal County, whether they'd be in breweries, restaurants, and other inviting establishments.

As a lifelong resident of New Braunfels, I've observed firsthand the widespread presence of stray cats in our neighborhoods. More importantly, I've seen our community's remarkable collaborative efforts to care for them, whether through offering food or building basic temporary shelters.

## Objectives of the Proposed Plan

The primary objectives of this proposal are simple: to enhance the welfare of New Braunfels' stray cat population, as well as foster a harmonious coexistence between community cats and residents, drawing inspiration from Istanbul's successful model.

### **I. Enhance Feline Welfare and Quality of Life:**

- **Objective 1.1: Provide year-round shelter:** Construct durable, insulated, and easily maintainable cat houses that offer protection from extreme weather conditions (heat, cold, rain, predators).
- **Objective 1.2: Improve health and hygiene:** Design shelters that facilitate easy cleaning and promote sanitary conditions, thereby reducing the spread of disease within colonies.

### **II. Support and Expand Existing TNR Initiatives:**

- **Objective 2.1: Integrate shelters with TNR efforts:** Coordinate shelter placement and design with existing TNR routes and volunteer networks to maximize efficiency and impact.
- **Objective 2.2: Monitor colony health:** Create opportunities for volunteers to regularly monitor the health and well-being of cats utilizing the shelters.

### III. Foster Community Engagement and Compassion:

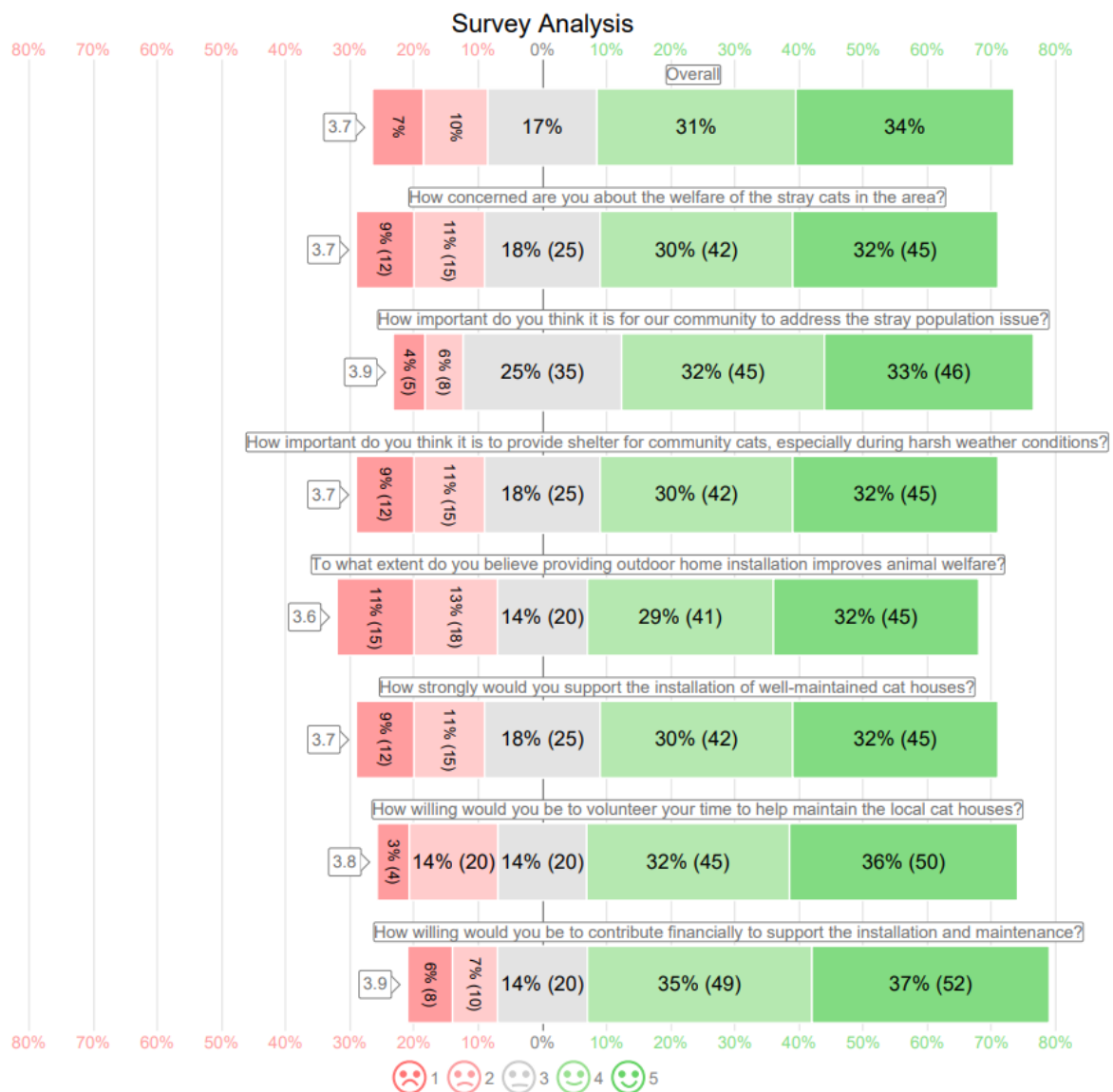
- **Objective 3.1: Encourage volunteer participation:** Design shelters that are conducive to community involvement in their maintenance, cleaning, and the daily care of the cats.
- **Objective 3.2: Enhance community aesthetics:** Design aesthetically pleasing cat houses that complement the urban landscape and contribute positively to the visual appeal of designated areas.

### IV. Establish a Sustainable and Replicable Model:

- **Objective 4.1: Develop cost-effective designs:** Create cost-efficient and scalable cat house designs that can be replicated in various locations throughout New Braunfels and potentially other communities.
- **Objective 4.2: Document program success:** Establish metrics to track the impact of the shelters on feline welfare, community perception, and TNR effectiveness, providing data for future expansion and advocacy.

## Survey Analysis

For this proposal, we drafted and conducted a survey with many New Braunfels locals to gauge their thoughts and opinions on establishing cat shelters in different neighborhoods. We asked them questions based on a number scale to understand their feelings on various topics. We distributed the surveys anonymously to citizens around the city and used a Likert Chart to display the findings. Here are the results:



The Likert chart shows that there are many locals who are concerned about stray cats in the area. Although some didn't show concern or interest in the project, a significant number that took the survey wanted to help support the installation of cat homes in approved areas. Whether that would be with help building or simply providing monetary assistance.

## Interview

Mr. Felts, a construction worker with 30 years of experience across various fixtures, structures, and other projects, provided further information during an interview. He received background information about Istanbul's cat shelters and analyzed several images of the Turkish city. We asked if replicating the shelters in New Braunfels was feasible, and he affirmed it, stating their simple construction. He also pointed out that mass-producing them could be cost-effective.

He detailed the initial planning for a project like this: first design a simple model using composite materials to ensure long-term durability. He cited materials like wood, with aluminum or steel framing, to go along with the other materials. Then, place the home in a designated area and observe the cats' behavior. He suggested that if the cats don't adapt to the initial model, address those problems to enhance the homes' quality. He explained his choice of materials, citing their long-term cost benefits but also for the safety and health of the cats. He further suggested incorporating a removable side panel or roof for easy cleaning, especially since these homes would be in the community. Composite materials, he added, would prevent rot and deterioration.



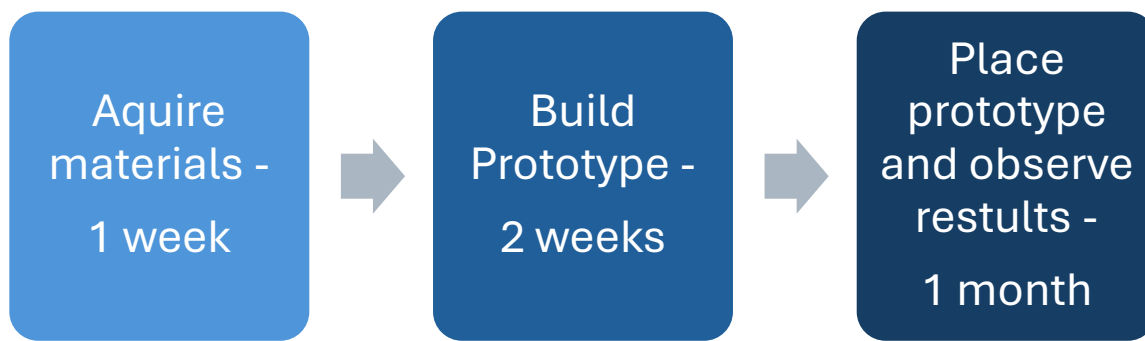
## Methods

Before constructing the prototype, there are several crucial initial steps. Together with the New Braunfels Cat Coalition, first determine several points of interest where large cat colonies of various sizes and ages exist. Then, conduct specific surveys within those neighborhoods to ask permission to install trial cat shelters in areas that won't obstruct anyone. Verify local ordinances and homeowner association rules to determine the best possible area for a trial run. Present mockups of the trial home to help solidify explicit permission to proceed with the project.

Once a location is decided and permission is secured from the local community, construction of the first trial home can begin. Once finished, placed in the specified location and then conduct routine observations to record results or findings

## Scheduling

Mr. Felts noted that the initial design and construction of a prototype cat home could take an estimated three weeks to complete, with various factors influencing the timeline. We should then test the prototype for at least a month to see if the cats use and are receptive to the shelter. The total time estimated for this project can be between 2-3 months. If the proposal is accepted and the project begins on July 1<sup>st</sup>, we can conclude the trial by September 1<sup>st</sup>, assuming we adhere to the schedule. The example flow chart below illustrates the timeline for building and testing the home in an agreed-upon location.



## Materials and Estimated Pricing

Considering the construction consultant's interview and the trial run to determine cat adaptability to different homes, it is recommended that the materials for the first trial homes should be to a simple standard but of good quality. Therefore, the trial run requires these materials for the outdoor cat shelter”

- Exterior Plywood
- Wooden Boards
- Rigid Foam Insulation
- Roofing Materials (like asphalt shingles)
- Straw for Bedding
- Waterproof Adhesive/Silicone
- Screws/Nails
- Hinges (to use for opening the roof)
- Bricks/Cinder Blocks (for elevation)

Item brands, sizes, and stores can affect prices. However, the estimated total is between \$100 to \$250.

## Plan for Evaluating Results

The evaluation plan for the constructed shelters involves conducting regular inspections over a minimum period of one month to document key usage and benefit metrics. Those metrics being:

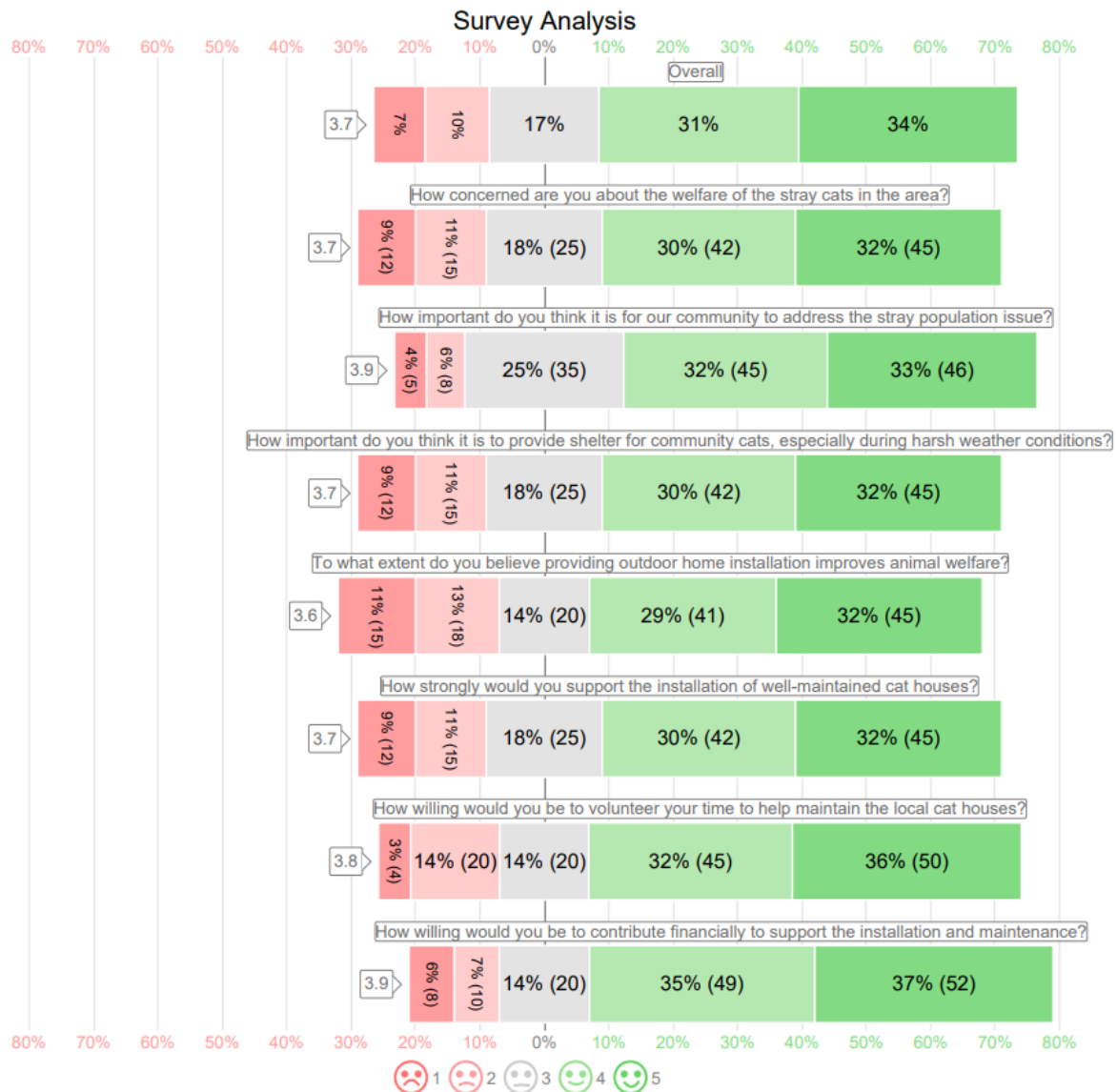
- Frequency of shelter use by cats (e.g., daily, weekly).
- Number of cats observed using each shelter.
- Types of cats using shelters (e.g., adults, kittens, ear-tipped).
- Condition of shelters (e.g., damage, cleanliness, need for repairs).
- Presence of food/water in/around shelters (indicating ongoing care).

## Conclusion

If this project comes to fruition, imagine not only the transformative visual changes in cat-populated areas but also the dramatically improved quality of life for New Braunfels' beloved felines. The thousands of stray cats currently living in our beautiful city will find loving homes where they can come and go as they please. These shelters will also be a testament of the community's love and compassion for our animal neighbors. Ultimately, this will get the community more involved and promote greater care and empathy for all the lives around us.

# Appendix A: Survey Analysis

The survey was distributed to a total of 139 locals in the New Braunfels area. The results of the data were then compiled into a Likert chart for analysis. The questions asked are shown within the graph.



## Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire

Below is the copy of the survey that was distributed to the locals in the community.

- How long have you lived in this community? \_\_\_\_\_
- Have you personally seen stray cats in your neighborhood? (Yes/No)
- Do you believe there is a significant stray cat population in our community?  
(Yes/No/Unsure)
- Are you aware of the New Braunfels Cat Coalition and their TNR program?  
(Yes/No)
- How concerned are you about the welfare of the stray cats in the area? Circle  
your answer (1 being not at all concerned to 5 being very concerned). 1 2 3 4 5
- How important do you think it is for our community to address the stray  
population issue? Circle your answer (1 being not at all important to 5 being  
extremely important) 1 2 3 4 5
- How important do you think it is to provide shelter for community cats,  
especially during harsh weather conditions? Circle your answer (1 being not at all  
important to 5 being extremely important). 1 2 3 4 5
- To what extent do you believe providing outdoor home installation improves  
animal welfare? Circle your answer (1 being not at all to 5 being to a great  
extent) 1 2 3 4 5
- How strongly would you support the installation of well-maintained cat houses?  
Circle your answer (1 being strongly opposed to 5 being strongly supported).  
1 2 3 4 5

- How willing would you be to volunteer your time to help maintain the local cat houses? Circle your answer (1 not at all willing to 5 being very willing).  
1 2 3 4 5
- How willing would you be to contribute financially to support the installation and maintenance? Circle your answer (1 being not at all willing to 5 being very willing). 1 2 3 4 5
- What concerns, if any, do you have about the idea of installing cat houses in the community?
- If these homes were to be built, what kind of design do you prefer for them?

# Appendix C: Interview Questions

Below are the questions asked during the interview with the construction worker.

- How long have you been in construction?
- Can you tell me about your experience with small-scale outdoor structures?
- Are you familiar with the design of the community cat house as seen in Istanbul?  
What are your initial thoughts on replicating something similar?
- What's your general approach to a project like this? How do you typically plan, execute, and deliver?
- What materials would you recommend for an outdoor cat house that needs to be durable, weather resistant, and safe for cats? Why those materials?
- Considering it's for community use, what features would you incorporate to make it easy to clean and maintain?
- What steps would you take to insulate the cat house for both winter warmth and summer cooling given its outdoor use?
- How would you design the entrances to be welcoming for cats but potentially deter larger animals or strong winds?
- What are your thoughts on elevating the cat house off the ground? How would you achieve this and still be stable?
- How would you ensure the finished cat house is completely safe for animals with no sharp edges, toxic materials, or pinch-points?

- What is your estimated timeline for a project of this scope, from design to completion?
- How do you typically break down your cost for a project like this? Can you provide an estimate including labor and materials?



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