

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury

ANIMAL SERVICES

October 15, 2020



SUMMARY

The Grand Jury decision to investigate the Animal Services Department was in accordance with California Penal Code §925 which states in part " investigations may be conducted on some selective basis each year."

It was determined that the Animal Services shelter continues to be inadequate, understaffed, unsanitary, underfunded, overcrowded, unappealing, in dire need of repair, and lacking in adequate outdoor facilities.

A new shelter needs to be built within the next two years on County owned acreage as recommended by the Board of Supervisors.

Until a new facility is in place, the existing shelter needs to undergo a total rebranding. An updated marketing strategy will be more inviting to County residents, volunteers and staff.

GLOSSARY

AS	Calaveras County Animal Services
AEMA	Administrator of Environmental Management Agency
BOS	Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
CAO	Calaveras County Administrative Officer
CCGJ	Calaveras County Grand Jury
FOCAS	Friends of Calaveras Animal Shelter
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding

METHODOLOGY

Meetings were held to plan an investigation, conduct interviews, and formulate an informative report.

Tours of the following places were completed:

- 1) Calaveras Animal Services Shelter
- 2) The Front Street Animal Shelter in Sacramento
- 3) Calaveras Humane Society facility

The CCGJ interviewed the following:

- Animal Services Personnel
- Calaveras County Officials
- FOCAS Board Member
- Front Street Animal Shelter Representative
- Human Resources Personnel

BACKGROUND

For over 20 years, the CCGJ has reported that the Calaveras County Animal Services shelter has outlived its effectiveness and requires a complete replacement. During that time little has been accomplished until recently.

After reviewing past CCGJ reports from 1999 to 2019, it was found that each year's recommendations were virtually the same and each report concluded that the shelter needed to be replaced.

As a result of the 2018-2019 CCGJ report, the BOS agreed that the shelter needs to be addressed. On September 10, 2019, the BOS told the CAO to do a study and report back to them in six months with a plan of action. At the BOS February 18, 2020 meeting, the CAO presented a recommendation to build a new facility on the available County-owned 6.9 acres west of the County courthouse. The BOS instructed the CAO to carry forward with a formal study. The BOS did not designate a time frame for the completion of the study.

DISCUSSION

The animal shelter continues to be a low priority for County leaders. There are currently 34 cat kennels. This is insufficient during the three kitten seasons per year and emergencies. There is inadequate ventilation in the feral cat section resulting in an extremely unpleasant odor which was evident during the CCGJ tour. Drainage is not up to code. The drain to the outside is an approximately three to five-inch hole in the cinder block (Figure 1). This inadequate drainage results in the water flowing back from the outside into the feral cat area during heavy rains (Figure 2). There is no proper drainage for the cleaning of urine and excrement from the dog kennels. Although the kennels are cleaned daily with anti-bacterial agents, due to the cracks in the concrete, bacteria cannot be completely eliminated (Figure 3). When hosing down the kennels the water flows through the dog enclosures into a drain at each end of the kennels (Figure 4). This has the potential to spread disease to the dogs.



Fig. 1 - Floor drain in dog kennel area

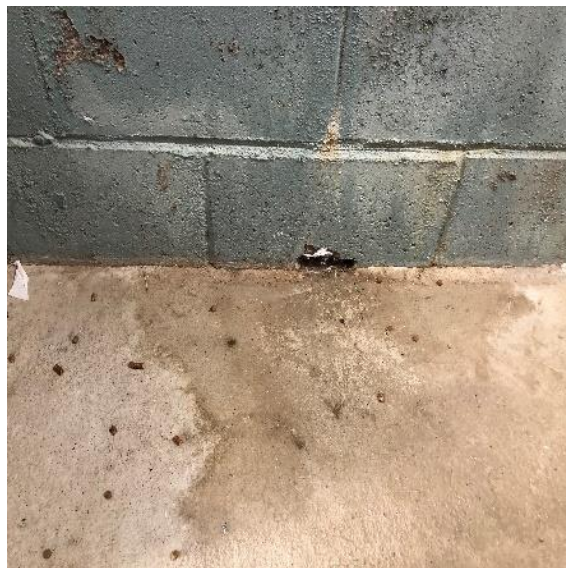


Fig. 2 - Drain hole in feral cat area



Fig. 3 - Crack in floor/wall - dog kennel area



Fig. 4 - Hole and crack in dog kennel floor

The outdoor play/socialization area for dogs is insufficient. It is too small and void of exercise opportunities. The large animal area consists of moveable panels and has no shelter/barn for livestock.

The shelter is very uninviting to the public. There is no curb appeal, no landscaping and paint is peeling off the exterior of the buildings. Buildings are small, workspaces are cluttered, and storage space is inadequate (Figure 5).



Fig. 5 - Work area

A robust marketing strategy can create a new identity, a better image and greater public awareness and community involvement.

AS management can do more to rejuvenate the current facility by reaching out to local community organizations for assistance such as: more volunteers, fundraisers, donations, social media improvements, painting and landscaping.

At the Front Street Animal Shelter in Sacramento, tour officials explained how their non-profits have established Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the organizations that support them. Their experience is that creating MOUs and contracts with non-profit organizations facilitates transparency and establishes guidelines for allocating funds and services. Such formal agreements also stabilize the budget for the shelter.

Front Street Animal Shelter was about to shut down until it was rebranded by changing its name, involving the local community, beautifying the facility itself, reaching out through social and traditional media, and having fundraising events. It is now a thriving shelter and is well received and supported by the community. During the CCGJ tour, many families were looking to adopt.

The Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency surveyed a large number of animal shelters and found that a majority of them have instituted foster programs. These programs are a staple of progressive animal sheltering. They are a way for animals to escape the stress of shelter life while getting great socialization and exposure for adoption. There is a national trend of having more animals in foster care as well as vetting potential foster parents. County Ordinance, "Title 6 - ANIMAL Chapter 6.08.060 Adoption and Foster and Placement Agreement" addresses the County requirements for a foster program. In October 2018, Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency drafted a foster program, but it has not been implemented. If the foster program had been in effect, it is likely animals would have been placed with foster families, emptying the shelter and enabling AS to focus on its duties. Fostering is an effective tool, especially during times of societal stress, as evidenced by media coverage of increased interest in fostering opportunities during the Coronavirus pandemic.

County Ordinance, "Title 6 - ANIMALS, Chapter 6.14.020", requiring dog owners to license their dogs, is not sufficiently enforced. Citizens may not be aware of this ordinance. Rabies shots, as required by the County licensing ordinance, protect dog owners and reduce the health risk of rabies within the community. AS does not promote the benefits of licensing to the community. According to AS management, dog licensing is an underutilized source of revenue for the County.

Friends of Calaveras Animal Shelter (FOCAS), a non-profit 501(c)(3) established in 2014, was created to support Calaveras County Animal Services. It is an animal welfare organization dedicated to enhancing a humane animal services program for the people and animals of Calaveras County by offering the following services:

- Free rabies vaccinations and micro-chipping clinics
- Medical support
- Adoption support
- Spay/neuter programs

- Direct shelter transfers
- Shelter enhancements
- Community education

FOCAS will be an even more vital force in their partnership with AS moving forward with a new shelter. With a new public awareness, their membership could grow, thus providing the fundraising and volunteer recruitment to support the furnishing of a new shelter with kennels, cat condos, equipment, furniture, and other resources.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, and RESPONDENTS

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses within 60 days from elected county official(s), and within 90 days from governing bodies. In order to be included and published in the next Grand Jury report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

After conducting interviews, touring facilities, and reviewing reference documents, the Grand Jury findings and recommendations are as follows:

F1. For over 20 years, the Calaveras County Grand Jury has found the animal shelter to be outdated and inadequate for staff, animals and the public.

R1. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that the County build a new shelter by December 31, 2022.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Calaveras County Administrative Officer

F2. Although the BOS agreed to build a new shelter on the existing 6.93 acres and instructed the CAO to propose a building plan, no timeline or target date was specified for the completion of the plan.

R2. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that the BOS provide a target date of no later than March 31, 2021 to the CAO for the plan completion.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Calaveras County Administrative Officer

F3. Drainage design within the dog kennels does not permit them to be adequately sanitized, which increases the risk of disease within the canine unit.

R3. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that the Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency develop a temporary solution to this drainage issue by March 31, 2021.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Calaveras County Administrative Officer
- Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency
- Animal Services Manager

F4. The hole in the cinder block wall used for drainage in the feral cat unit is inadequate and subject to backflow during heavy rains resulting in an increased risk of disease for cats and employees.

R4. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that AS construct a proper drainage system for the feral cat area by March 31, 2021.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Calaveras County Administrative Officer
- Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency
- Animal Services Manager

F5. There are insufficient accommodations in the feral/intake room to properly house the number of animals brought to the shelter throughout the year.

R5. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends the AEMA request and the BOS provide funding for additional accommodations by March 31, 2021.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Calaveras County Administrative Officer
- Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency
- Animal Services Manager

F6. Limited public engagement with the AS shelter diminishes community awareness of the challenges facing AS staff and the animals in their care.

R6(a). The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that by March 31, 2021, the AEMA form a planning committee consisting of government and community members to work on a new image, improve range of services, and create a social media and marketing strategy designed to engage the public.

R6(b). The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that by March 31, 2021, AEMA and AS Management meet with Front Street Animal Shelter staff to learn how they transformed their facility.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency
- Animal Services Manager

F7. There is no clearly labeled direct link on the AS webpage to the FOCAS donation page which would facilitate public donations for AS.

R7. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that AS add a direct link on the AS homepage to the FOCAS donation page, as well as add enticing verbiage, by January 1, 2021.

Required Responses

- None

Invited Responses

- Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency
- Animal Services Manager
- FOCAS

F8. There is minimal AS partnership with non-profits other than FOCAS.

R8. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that AS partner more robustly with the non-profit sector by March 31, 2021.

Required Responses

- None

Invited Responses

- Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency

- Animal Services Manager

F9. AS developed a foster program in October 2018. The program has not been implemented due to a lack of consensus among County agencies regarding County exposure to liability.

R9. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends a foster program be implemented by January 1, 2021.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency
- Calaveras County Administrative Officer
- Calaveras County Counsel
- Calaveras County Human Resources

F10. Lack of enforcement of the dog license ordinance in Calaveras County reduces the ability of the County to ensure that dog owners maintain current rabies vaccinations for their animals creating a public safety risk, as well as reduces revenues to the County.

R10. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that AS develop a media campaign by February 1, 2021, to educate the public about the County Ordinance regarding dog licensing.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Calaveras County Administrative Officer
- Administrator of the Environmental Management Agency
- Animal Services Manager

COMMENDATIONS

C1. The Calaveras County Grand Jury commends the BOS for taking action on the development of a plan to replace the AS shelter.

C2. The Calaveras County Grand Jury commends AS employees for dedication to their jobs and the animals in their care.

C3. The Calaveras County Grand Jury commends the committed volunteers who have provided invaluable services to the shelter for many years.

- C4. The Calaveras County Grand Jury commends current management for making strides in improving the quality of the shelter.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

REFERENCE SOURCES

- FOCAS (www.focasweb.com)
- County Ordinance, Title 6 ó ANIMALS, Chapter 6.1.020 (www.animal.calaverasgov.us)
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- BOS agenda for the meeting on Tuesday, February 18, 2020 (www.calaverasgov.us)
- ASPCA (ASPCApr.org/asv)
- Calaveras Enterprise, Dakota Morgan, õLove During Lockdownö, March 26, 2020 (www.calaverasenterprise.com)
- ABC7News.com, Eric Thomas, õAnimal Shelters in Need of Temporary Homes for Pets During COVID-19 Pandemicö, San Francisco, March 19, 2020
- New York Times, Sandra E. Garcia, õStuck at Home, Americans Turn to Foster Pets for Companionshipö, March 19, 2020 (www.nytimes.com)
- Fox 40 News, Kristi Gross, õAnimal Shelters Feeling Strain of COVID-19 Impactö (www.fox40.com)
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