

ANIMAL SERVICES DIVISION

DOING THE BEST WITH WHAT THEY HAVE

INTRODUCTION

San Luis Obispo County Animal Services Division (ASD) is a division of the County Health Agency. It is responsible for providing animal care and control services throughout the County and by contract with each of the seven incorporated cities. The administrative offices and animal shelter are located off Highway 1 at 885 Oklahoma Avenue, San Luis Obispo.

ORIGIN/PURPOSE

The purpose of this 2012-2013 San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) report is to provide information on how Animal Services Division is currently operating under the Health Agency. In January 2009, after a number of requests from the Sheriff's Office, the Board of Supervisors directed that administration of ASD be transferred from the Sheriff's Office to the Health Agency.

BACKGROUND

In the late 1980s ASD was a stand-alone county department. After operating independently for some time, the Board of Supervisors determined that a small department like ASD would benefit from the added resources of a larger agency and ASD was embedded in the Health Agency (known at that time as the Health Department). After seven or eight years, ASD was moved to the Sheriff's Office. After another seven or eight years in the Sheriff's Office and requests by the Sheriff, ASD was moved back to the Health Agency.

During 2006, while ASD was in the Sheriff's Office, at the request of both ASD and the Sheriff's Office, discussions for an audit of ASD by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) were begun. The Board of Supervisors approved the audit, which was conducted in

March of 2008. The Board also approved an administrative review for transitioning ASD out of the Sheriff's Office resulting in its placement in the Health Agency.

The HSUS audit was a means of evaluating ASD and providing recommendations for improvement based on the best practices endorsed by HSUS. The audit was comprehensive, starting with the facility, field services, kennel operations and progressing through management and the County administrative chain, including the budgetary structure.

Approximately 500 recommendations were made ranging from minor to significant, and ASD prioritized them according to the feasibility of implementation. Those that could be readily addressed, such as operational changes, have been made. Budgetary constraints have delayed the implementation of other recommendations such as those related to the aging facility. Since the release of the audit report in 2008, the Health Agency has twice updated the Board of Supervisors on the progress.

Woods Humane Society

Woods Humane Society (Woods), a non-profit animal shelter, provided animal control services for the County from 1955 until 1975 when it relinquished its contract to focus on adoptions. In 2008, the option of contracting the functions of ASD to Woods was suggested to the Board, but not pursued.

The Woods facility is presently located in close proximity to ASD offices and shelter and the two organizations work in close cooperation for the welfare of all animals. From 1961 to 1989, Woods was located off Broad Street on County airport property. In 1989, the County purchased the property because it was located in the "clear zone" for the airport. Woods leased the site back and continued to operate at the Broad Street property until 1995. In 2005, the Woods facility relocated to land adjacent to ASD and entered into a collaborative agreement with the County for the lease of the land.

As part of the agreement, Woods takes 350 animals annually from the ASD shelter and places them for adoption. Also, the Woods facility has a modern surgical center and has provided spay/neuter services for ASD since 2009. While a portion of the cost is passed on as part of the adoption fee, it eliminates the need for the new owner to take the animal to a private veterinary clinic for the procedure and return with the necessary documentation. Spay and neutering of adopted animals is also done to comply with State law regarding animal placement.

AUTHORITY

Section §925 of the Penal Code authorizes the Grand Jury to investigate and report on the operations, accounts and records of at least one county officer, department, or function each year.

METHOD/PROCEDURE

The Grand Jury obtained information for this report by:

- Visiting Animal Services Division and touring the facility;
- Reviewing:
 - information provided by the Animal Services Manager;
 - written and electronic documents;
 - the County Animal Services Division website;
 - previous Grand Jury reports;
- Interviewing:
 - the Animal Services Manager;
 - the Health Agency Director;
- Observing two Animal Control Officers during their shifts by doing a ride-a-long.

NARRATIVE

The Animal Services Division is under the direction of the Animal Services Manager who reports directly to the Health Agency Director. ASD's budget is about \$2.4 million, only a slight increase from past years. Funding for the budget comes from three sources: 1) fees imposed for adoptions, impounding, permitting and licensing; 2) contract services to the incorporated cities; and 3) the County General Fund. Additionally, Animal Services receives donations from the

public which are used to defray the cost of veterinary or other specialized care for sheltered animals which would otherwise be unadoptable.

Administration

Since ASD's transfer to the Health Agency, the Agency provides oversight and administrative support with operations such as internal County requirements for budgetary reports, personnel performance reviews and other required reports. The Health Agency Director estimates on average 3 to 5 hours of his week are related to administering ASD. In addition he has two support staff, including an Accountant III, to assist ASD staff in producing internal reports. Both the Health Agency Director and the ASD Manager also work closely with County Counsel in prosecuting cases of animal abuse.

General Operations and Policies

The Animal Service Shelter is an open door facility; it takes in all domesticated animals. If the Shelter has space available, there is no limitation on how long an animal is kept, providing it shows no defect of temperament or medical condition that would prevent its adoption. All animals offered for adoption are spayed or neutered, as well as vaccinated and have a micro-chip implanted for identification purposes. ASD registers the micro-chip with a private tracking agency; it is the responsibility of the owner to update the micro-chip information. Some animals, due to age, temperament, health, or current popularities in breeds, are less likely to be adopted. Consequently, due to limited space in the facility, they must be euthanized to allow more animals to be admitted.

Animal Services has made an effort over the past several years to move more and more towards a paperless system. Animal licensing records, kennel records, various medical and vaccination records, animal bite and quarantine records, as well as administrative and operational information are maintained on the computer. County permit records for all commercial animal operations, except veterinary hospitals and groomers, are also maintained on the computer. Special permits must be obtained by individuals wishing to own more than the allowed number

of animals and individuals breeding animals on a non-commercial scale. Additionally, ASD issues and processes permit renewal notices and applications.

Several recommendations in the HSUS audit related to formal Practices, Policies and Procedures (PPPs). As a result, ASD updated and expanded its existing manual to include more specific direction. There are currently over 40 PPPs covering various aspects of ASD operation, training and personnel standards (e.g., customer service policy, animal handling policy, menacing and aggressive animals). This manual is under continuous development and as new policies are implemented they are added to the manual.

Information/Education

ASD receives, files and cross references lost and found animal reports against impounded animals. These reports are made available to the public by phone recordings, postings on the ASD website and paper copies at the shelter. To promote adoptions the ASD website has a link to Pet Harbor which posts photos and descriptions of adoptable animals.

ASD provides the community with educational programs related to the humane treatment of animals, public safety and responsible pet ownership. Outreach includes classroom presentations at the elementary level and media advisories regarding topics like heat danger to animals and the effects of July 4th celebrations and precautions you can take to protect your pet.

Shelter Facility

The ASD shelter is approximately 8,400 square feet and was constructed in 1975 on County property that was previously a landfill. The facility includes administrative and staff offices, dog cages and runs, cages for cats, exercise yard and other animal enclosures.

The shelter capacity is as follows:

- 48 dog runs, 2 mobile kennels for small dogs, 2 isolation dog runs and 8 quarantine dog runs;

- 126 individual cat cages, 12 isolation and 12 quarantine cat cages;
- 2 rabbit hutches;
- one-quarter-acre livestock enclosure along with a small livestock yard;
- multiple small enclosures.

These areas appeared to be clean and uncluttered; however, the antiquated facility is small for the number of animals that pass through it and requires structural modification. By comparison, the Woods Humane Society facility is 25,000 square feet, has seven dog exercise yards, a free-roaming cattery, a state-of-the-art surgery center and a 1,300 square foot community room.

In 2012 the ASD took in 2,146 dogs, 1,934 cats and 576 other animals including birds, snakes and livestock. The majority of the animals impounded were strays, but some were confiscated during law enforcement actions, surrendered by the owners, quarantined or had been previously adopted and returned.

| 2012 Animal Outcomes for Dogs and Cats | | | | |
|---|----------------|--------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| | <u>Adopted</u> | <u>Returned to Owner</u> | <u>Other*</u> | <u>Euthanized</u> |
| Dogs | 1,220 | 615 | 23 | 288 |
| Cats | 1,388 | 61 | 148 | 337 |

** Includes animals that were transferred, relocated, went missing, or died at the shelter.*

Because of the shelter’s small size and design, it is noisy and there is little room to segregate animals, including limited space for isolation. This contributes to stress in the animals as well as the employees and volunteers. One of the HSUS recommendations was to provide a private room to assess temperament; however, space limitations prohibit implementing this recommendation. A renovation to expand the customer reception area of the animal shelter and improve the cattery is estimated to cost about \$1 million. The expansion has been delayed until the State mandated methane gas testing related to the underlying land fill determines it is safe.

ASD maintains a crematory for animals that have been euthanized, died at the shelter, dead animals from the roadway and deceased animals brought in by their owners. The unit is large

and costly to operate so deceased animals are stored in a refrigeration unit on the premises until the number is sufficient for the crematory to be operated efficiently. For this reason, ASD does not perform individual cremations for owners requesting specific ashes be returned; they will by request make referrals to private animal cremation services.

Staff

ASD's total full time equivalent staff is 19. The current Animal Services Manager also fulfills the State requirement of having a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine on staff or contracted. The Animal Services Manager, therefore, serves in a dual capacity. Other staff includes:

- one Administrative Services Officer,
- four Administrative Assistant IIIs (one of which fills the Dispatcher position),
- one Senior Account Clerk,
- one Shelter Supervisor,
- one Registered Veterinary Technician,
- three Kennel workers,
- one supervising Animal Control Officer (ACO),
- one Lead ACO and
- five ACOs.

Community Volunteers

ASD staff is augmented with volunteers from the community. These volunteers play a valuable role in its operations by walking and grooming dogs, socializing cats, providing adoption counseling, assisting pet owners in finding lost animals and giving assistance in finding homes for lost, found, abandoned or unwanted animals. Volunteers also photograph animals in the shelter for the web page, coordinate adopt-a-pet events, provide assistance with clerical work and offer foster care for animals waiting for adoption. While volunteers are extremely valuable to ASD, scheduling is problematic because volunteers schedule their own time which often does not meet the needs of the Division. There is not a coordinator to address this need.

Honor Farm Inmate Volunteers

In addition to the community volunteers, and in an effort to utilize all available resources, ASD has negotiated a work detail with the adjacent Women's Honor Farm of the San Luis Obispo County Jail. These volunteers, under supervision, clean the facility and assist in grooming and exercising the animals. One significant recent change was the replacement of Men's Honor Farm inmates with Women's Honor Farm inmates. The female inmates have demonstrated a more caring and cooperative demeanor, resulting in a better quality of care for the animals and a better working environment. While the Honor Farm inmates have proven to be valuable, their availability is limited. The same numbers of inmates are not always on the work detail due to court proceedings, administrative jail requirements or other programs in which they may participate. They only perform unskilled assignments and must be supervised by kennel workers who might otherwise be doing more essential work. Turn-over is high among the inmates which results in lost time for training.

Phone System

ASD's phone system is reported to be one of the busiest in the County. Because of the lack of staff and/or capacity of the system, callers may be on hold 15 minutes or longer. The phone system can stack six calls, but after that calls are dropped. ASD's phone system, however, offers an option for callers to leave a message for callback.

Medical Care

State law mandates injured or ill animals be provided with appropriate care. Animal Services provides extensive veterinary or other specialized care for sheltered animals which would otherwise be unadoptable (broken legs, deformities, diseases, etc.). This includes animals presented to veterinary clinics and/ or public safety agencies. Animal Services has arrangements with local veterinary clinics for these services. If owners are located, they are billed. If not, costs for these services are paid for by private donations and from Animals Requesting Friends (ARF), a national organization of the Humane Society.

Field Operations

The County is divided into three geographic areas for ASD operational purposes: North, South and Central. Animal Control Officers are rotated among the three areas so they are familiar with the entire county. Each officer is assigned a specially equipped animal control vehicle. Officers respond to calls from the general public, public safety agencies (police, fire, California Highway Patrol), veterinary hospitals and businesses. Some of these calls might be regarding loose, aggressive animals or animal nuisances such as excessive barking or unsanitary conditions. Reports of concern for animal welfare or reports of abuse are investigated. Site inspections of permitted animal operations are conducted. Animal transport is sometimes required; this generally involves transporting an animal the owner wishes to surrender to the shelter but is unable to transport. In these instances a fee is charged.

A Day in the Life of an Animal Control Officer

Two Grand Jurors each spent one day riding with two different Animal Control Officers. Both days began at 8:00 AM in the headquarters office reviewing the day's schedule of service calls and planning a tentative route. Prior to leaving, the officers checked with the dispatcher and retrieved the latest calls for their area and finalized the day's route. The following is one juror's observation.

- The first stop was a veterinary clinic to pick up a stray dog which had been dropped-off over the weekend.
- Next, a complaint call regarding possible unsanitary conditions led to an inspection revealing the complaint was unfounded. The area was clean and tidy.
- From there it was to a rural area to pick up two feral cats that had been trapped by a citizen. The scheduled calls and route were interrupted by a call from the dispatcher regarding dogs running loose and a neighbor's claim that one had bitten her dog. A neighbor's dogs had gotten out of the yard. The bitten dog had no visible injury. The officer spoke with both parties and resolved the conflict. It was then determined that one

of the loose dogs was unlicensed. The officer collected the fee and issued a license on-the-spot. The owner was advised to keep the dogs in her yard.

- Dispatch called with another report of loose dogs in a neighborhood and the officer went to that location. The officer spoke with the owner, who stated the dogs had become a problem and had been given to a friend. They were no longer there.
- Dispatch called requesting pick-up of a stray dog. The officer responded and, after retrieving the dog, found it had been micro-chipped. The animal was taken to the shelter. The owner will be notified and an impound fee charged.
- The officer then responded to a call from an elderly woman living in a senior housing facility who had been caring for a stray cat. The senior housing facility does not allow pets. The officer retrieved the cat from under the bed and took it to the shelter.
- Dispatch called to request the pick-up of a toy poodle found at a Paso Robles golf course and taken home to Creston for safety by a citizen. The officer drove to the rural area to pick up the dog.
- Dispatch also called for pick-up of a dead animal, but there was insufficient time to respond and that call was rescheduled for the next day.

By the end of the day, three dogs and four cats were retrieved. All animals were taken to the shelter for processing, which includes vaccination, before being put in individual enclosures. The Jurors were surprised by the length of time and travel required for each call.

Both Grand Jurors were impressed with the officers' patience, professionalism and compassion when interacting with the public in the performance of their duties, which at times were physically difficult, stressful and emotional.

CONCLUSIONS

The Animal Services Division (ASD) is doing the best that they can with what they have. They do this despite an aging facility, being understaffed and having a challenging work environment.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) audit suggested upgrades to the facility. The shelter itself is 40 years old and needs to be expanded, remodeled and/or replaced. While an expansion is planned for the entry that will increase the public reception area and provide improved housing for the cat population, it is only a fraction of what is needed.

The phone system lacks capacity and there is insufficient staff to answer telephone calls.

The HSUS audit pointed out that ASD was understaffed. For daily operations, ASD has responded to this situation by using community volunteers and Honor Farm inmates. While the volunteers bring enthusiasm and compassion, the lack of a volunteer coordinator complicates their contribution as a resource. Volunteers schedule their own time and no comprehensive schedule can be developed. The Honor Farm inmates cannot substitute for full-time kennel workers.

With all staff resources plus volunteers and inmate labor committed to daily operations, ASD is forced to rely on assistance from the San Luis Obispo County Health Agency in order to keep up with internal County administrative tasks such as budgeting, inventory reporting and managing personnel.

The ASD work environment can be stressful. Staff deals with people who have lost, or must surrender animals that in some cases are like their children. They must deal with customers denied the adoption of an animal as well as those searching for a lost pet. This takes place in an environment dominated by the barking of dogs under stress and the awareness that terminal illness, serious injuries and, in some cases, lack of space will result in euthanasia.

A notable area of ASD strength is field services where Animal Control Officers cover the entire county helping citizens and animals alike. They provide a valuable service to the County.

The Grand Jury is aware that current economic conditions have caused the budgets of many departments to suffer. The HSUS audit documents the need for additional ASD staff and rehabilitation of the facility. Recommendations not requiring additional funds have been

implemented; however, major improvements to the facility and staffing increases are still unaddressed. The Grand Jury believes that ASD's seven to eight year oscillation between the Health Agency and the Sheriff's Office, after being an independent department, may be related to this underfunding. It appears that after a number of years, budgetary pressures grow to such an extent that ASD becomes a candidate for orphanage. This situation should be corrected by fully funding ASD's needs, stabilizing it within one county entity, or allowing it to operate as a stand-alone department.

Informational report, no response required.