

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury

Calaveras County Animal Services

**A new shelter: 140 dog years in the making.
But are we close?**

June 2, 2025



Photos obtained from the Calaveras County Animal Services section of Petfinder.com
<https://www.petfinder.com/member/us/ca/san-andreas/calaveras-county-animal-services-ca362/>

SUMMARY

The Calaveras County Animal Shelter was built in the 1950s and it's no secret to the community the county remains in need of a new animal shelter in order to continue to support the current and growing needs of the animals, staff, and volunteers. Dating as far back as 1999, the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury (CCCGJ) has issued seventeen (17) reports expressing the need for a new animal shelter. The intent of this year's CCCGJ review of the Calaveras Animal Shelter was to determine if there had been any forward momentum towards the building of a new animal shelter. And if not, what potential roadblocks may be slowing down the progress. CCCGJ was pleasantly surprised to find the county has recently made more progress than was previously thought.

Despite the age of the existing facility, the members of the CCCGJ made several positive observations during our visit. All the animals appeared well cared for and the facility was clean and organized to the best of the staff's ability. There were also several volunteers donating a portion of their day to ensure the animals were able to spend time outside of their various cages and kennels which helps improve their socialization and reduces their anxiety.

However, some aspects were not so positive. Facility construction is outdated and falling apart due to age and basic use. Also, supplies, kennels, exam rooms and staff are all competing for limited space. The facility lacks a designated space for animals requiring quarantine which means the staff must leave adjacent kennels empty to provide separation between those that are quarantined from other healthy animals. As a result, open kennel availability may be limited when the need for quarantine arises.

Fortunately, the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors has taken some much-needed early steps on the path to building an updated shelter. The County's approved budget provided approximately \$4 million for the project. And while that money isn't immune from reallocation, it has enabled the County to contract with a local architectural firm for the creation of new building plans which is more progress than has been made on previous attempts to modernize the shelter facility.

Additionally, according to reasonable estimates based on similar projects, the previously approved funds aren't sufficient to cover the total cost of building a new facility which leaves the County having to explore additional sources of funding. This goal is entirely possible to achieve, but it will require the continued attention and support of the members of our county as well as the clear communication of that support to the members of our Board of Supervisors. Whether the County finally reaches the goal of bringing our animal shelter facilities into the 21st century or continues to ignore the needs of these vulnerable animals for another 20 years depends entirely on the level of commitment the community has to helping the animals in its care.

GLOSSARY

BOS	Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
CCAS	Calaveras County Animal Services
CCCGJ	Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury

METHODOLOGY

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury (CCCGJ) conducted interviews with relevant county and non-county employees, conducted a site visit of the animal shelter, reviewed previous CCCGJ reports regarding the state of the current animal shelter, along with other documents. The CCCGJ also reviewed previous, relevant Calaveras County Board of Supervisor (BOS) meetings to establish the timeline of events beginning with the original Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in 2022 through the present year (2025).

BACKGROUND

As a largely rural county, it's not uncommon for people driving through Calaveras County to pass by pastures containing large animals such as cows, horses, llamas, goats, sheep, or even elephants depending on what part of the county you're in. But we also have thousands of lesser seen animals living inside our homes such as dogs and cats that we tend to forget about. And while the larger animals need consideration, it's often the smaller pets that find themselves needing the most help finding new homes when their humans suddenly can't take care of them anymore. This is where the Animal Services Department steps up to provide for our county's non-human residents. This often happens during a pet surrender, or when Animal Control is called to pick up a stray found running the streets, or when the County has to perform a confiscation when living conditions aren't in the animal's best interest. Because this is such an important service aimed at providing for a population of residents that can't speak for themselves, it is the responsibility of the County to ensure that it is providing the best it can for the animals and the people responsible for its care.

Over the past several years the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury has published many reports aimed at improving the various facilities and functions of the Calaveras Animal Services Department. Due to the age of the current facility, historic increases in county population resulting in an increase in pet owners throughout the County, and the recent Board of Supervisors interest in exploring the estimated costs of building a new facility, the CCCGJ decided to investigate the process of how the county would go about building a new facility if the current conditions justified the estimated project cost.

The county's budgeted and approved Animal Services funds for the fiscal year 2023-2024 was \$4,100,000 and for the fiscal year 2024-2025 the total approved budget was \$3,995,015. This reduction in available funds is due to money having been spent on hiring an architectural firm based out of Stockton, California. However, with this money being located in the General Fund, it is not exclusively designated for the animal shelter build and is potentially at risk of being used for other purposes. This means that those Board of Supervisors members, who have previously supported the building of a new animal shelter, must continue to maintain that commitment and protect this money for the length of time it takes in seeing a new shelter come to fruition. If this commitment is not maintained, the County will risk having spent money on building plans that will end up sitting on a shelf and may become obsolete depending on changes in construction regulations or standards of animal care, neither of which provides any benefit to the animals

presently being kept in the current outdated facility.

DISCUSSION

The current process of trying to bring our county's animal shelter into the 21st century officially began back on December 13, 2022, when the BOS authorized the creation of a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) from local architectural and engineering firms for the purpose of building a new animal shelter. The purpose of a RFQ is to notify local service providers of the type of project the county wants to do, projected timeline for certain elements of the project, along with various legal or project requirements a company might need to be aware of before deciding if they're interested in competing for the job contract. If a company is interested, they submit a packet explaining why they think they're qualified for such a job which usually includes past projects of a similar nature as well as their ability to meet the various legal requirements. Once the deadline is reached for the interested companies to have submitted their qualifications packets, the applications are graded by multiple county departments based on how well they meet the contract requirements, then those scores are averaged for each applicant to determine the company with the highest average score, and that company is awarded the contract. In this case that architectural design company was LDA Partners, Inc., located in Stockton, California.

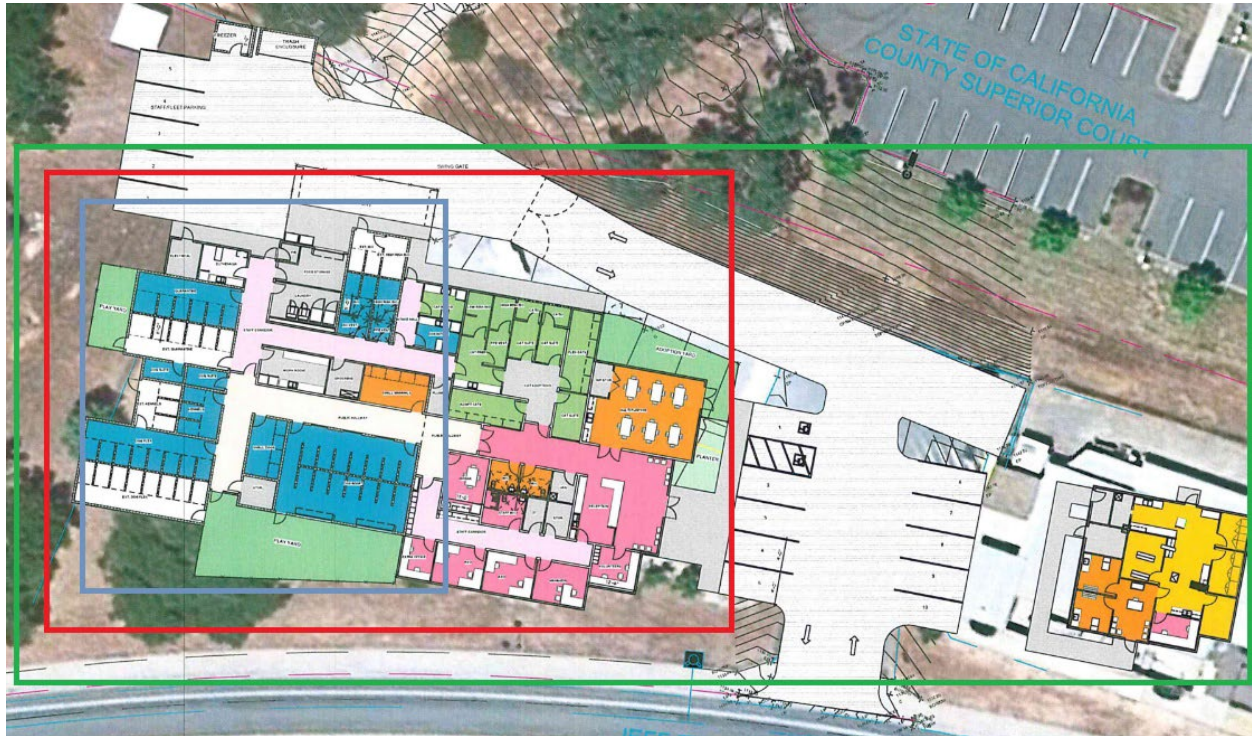
Upon the selection of LDA Partners the proposed project would be divided into two separate phases. Phase One would consist of programming and conceptual design (concept drawings), and Phase Two would include design development, construction documents, and construction administration (completed construction blueprints).

On April 11, 2023, a contract agreement was reached between LDA Partners and Calaveras County for LDA to move forward with Phase One. Those Phase One concept plans were presented to the BOS during their board meeting on January 23, 2024. At that time LDA Partners presented a couple of options for the county to choose from. Option 1 was a plan for a new building that would house the dog kennels, cat kennels, and administrative office spaces but staggered the construction of each section of the building to allow for the animals and staff to continue utilizing the buildings currently on the property until their building section was completed. Option 2 was a plan for a new building that also housed the dogs, cats, and administrative offices but also included a separate optional building that would provide shelter veterinary services. This was seen as potentially beneficial as the county currently has to contract with local providers for veterinary care, resulting in animals requiring transportation to those veterinary facilities. Having those capabilities available on-site allowed the county to have more flexibility in how they served the community.

It was at this meeting after LDA finished their presentation that several things happened that ended up creating some confusion regarding how the process would move forward. First was the BOS being concerned about the cost of such a project. They had approximately \$4 million in the county General Fund they planned to use for this project and wanted to know what the various options were expected to cost. While it's impossible to accurately predict the final cost of a project at that stage of plan development, LDA Partners stated the rough estimate prices were based on other similar projects in nearby counties at the time. Those estimates were as follows:

- Option 1: \$7 million for a facility that only housed the dog kennels, which is the greatest need (below image outlined in blue).

- Option 2: \$10 million for a facility that housed dogs, cats, and includes office space for administrative staff (below image outlined in red).
- Option 3: \$13 million if they wanted to also add on the additional veterinary care building (below image outlined in green).



Picture obtained from LDA Partners PowerPoint presentation to the Calaveras BOS.

The members of the Board briefly discussed the need for a new building as well as the need to use the available funds responsibly, and that Phase 2 documents would be needed in order to more accurately estimate final project costs. They then instructed the county Administrative Office staff to draft a contract for Phase 2 construction documents so that the BOS could make more informed budgetary decisions. However, because the BOS had not made a decision on which option to pursue the Administrative Staff was unable to move forward with contracting for Phase 2 plans at that time.

The next BOS meeting to address the shelter project was March 26, 2024, where the Administrative Office staff presented an agreement between the County and LDA for Phase 2 plans not to exceed \$798,000, but the BOS didn't authorize that agreement because they still wanted the County and LDA to explore other options that would keep within the previously mentioned \$4 million budget. On April 9, 2024, the BOS directed the Administrative Office staff to bring back two options for consideration to move forward with Phase 2 designs. One plan consisted of a new facility for dogs only, and the second option for the facility housing dogs, cats, and office space for administrative staff. Those plans were presented the following month at the May 14, 2024 meeting and did not have significant estimated cost reductions.

However, the BOS did vote to move forward with Phase 2 documents for a facility to accommodate dogs, cats, and administrative staff at that time.

With the previously supplied rough cost estimates in mind, CCCGJ wanted to better understand what justified spending that much money on construction of a facility that housed animals. For reference, the \$10 million estimate provided a building for dogs, cats, and administrative office spaces that was approximately 10,695 square feet (sq ft). Those estimates sounded high when compared to a building of similar size built for people until further investigation revealed how much more an animal shelter needs to be able to handle than a human home does. These additional considerations do come with additional costs causing facilities of this type to range anywhere between \$900 - \$1000 per sq ft. In comparison, the cost for a building of similar size in the residential sector is approximately \$600 per sq ft.

For example, the materials of construction used in the current facility are not in alignment with the present-day standards for animal shelters. The concrete floors are old and porous making proper sanitation and drainage practices difficult. Updated flooring materials reduce the porousness which helps prevent contamination from animal waste from soaking into the floor. They are also more resistant to the harsh chemicals often used for sanitizing kennel spaces on the occasions that Animal Services has to treat sick animals.

The kennels in the current facility are all indoor spaces with the built-in floor drain located at one end of the room. As a result, when staff wash down the insides of the kennels, all the contaminated run-off travels across multiple kennel spaces to reach the drain, sharing all the waste and germs with the animals in the neighboring spaces as the water travels. The current standard of construction creates kennel spaces with an indoor and outdoor section that can be closed off for cleaning and safety using a drop-down door panel and uses built-in drainage for both inside and outside kennel spaces. This improves the ease and ability to clean each kennel while reducing the risk of cross contamination and also improves the quality of life for the animal by providing indoor and outdoor access.

Additional modernizations would include specialized HVAC systems that exchange air from the inside with outside air every few minutes instead of recirculating inside air, which helps prevent the spread of airborne illnesses. Higher density wall materials are designed to withstand the destructive nature of scared and anxious animals, and additional sound insulation to reduce hearing damage and unwelcome stimulation for animals already living in a stressful environment.

Animal Services also has the unfortunate responsibility of dealing with animals that die from old age, injury, or illness. As a result, they need to have spaces capable of holding or storing those animals such as isolation rooms and large refrigeration/freezer spaces to prevent the spread of illness.

There are countless other updates and improvements involved with the modernization of this sort of facility, but the main takeaway is that all of them are there to improve the health and safety of the animals being cared for. And as it was explained to the members of this jury, an animal that is healthy and feels safe has lower anxiety, is more relaxed and accepting of interaction which promotes the end goal of faster adoption.

Phase 2 plans have been completed and were submitted to the County as of March 2025. These “shovel ready” plans are construction blueprints that have undergone a process called Plan Check where various County departments will review them and clarify any portions that are unclear as well as ensuring they comply with the many local and State building code requirements. Though the current process of the Plan Check is ongoing, once the check is complete, the BOS will be able to seek additional funding sources such as grants or bond measures and eventually seek bids from local contractors for what they would charge to complete the project.

At the time of the writing of this report, the current remaining funds set aside for this build are at \$3,995,015.00, which includes the funds already authorized to be paid to the LDA architectural firm for the plans and services they’ve been contracted to provide. However, CCCGJ learned those remaining funds were located in the county General Fund and are not secured, which means, if the County has a more pressing need, that money may be taken from the animal shelter and used for other purposes. CCCGJ recognizes a few members on the Board of Supervisors, when speaking on other County projects, have publicly acknowledged the risks associated with irresponsible management of County funds when not dedicating appropriate funding towards development and completion of plans they’ve already committed resources to.

As the needs of the County are largely determined by the BOS understanding of what the residents of the County consider to be a priority, the continued dedication of those funds for the new animal shelter is overwhelmingly dependent upon how vocal and persistent the taxpayers are in making their desire for the new shelter heard by the BOS. This is more important now because the County has spent more money and completed more of the process than it ever has before. If the BOS permits these funds to be reallocated to other projects, or if the community fails to continue to stress the importance of this commitment upon the members of the BOS, we could easily find ourselves having paid for plans that sit on a shelf and do nothing but collect dust or become outdated due to future changes in animal care standards or building codes.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, RESPONDENTS

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Calaveras County Civil 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 CCCGJ report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

After conducting interviews and reviewing documents, CCCGJ’s findings and recommendations are as follows:

F1: The conditions and construction of the current Animal Services facility do not adequately provide safe care and housing for animals according to current industry standards.

R1: Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors provide their direction on whether or not the County will proceed with the construction of the industry standard compatible facility outlined in the plans purchased through the contract with LDA Partners, Inc., by October 1, 2025, in order to minimize the impacts of future financial market factors on plan viability.

Required Response

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Response

Calaveras County Animal Services

F2: The remaining \$3,995,015.00 set aside for this project are held in the General Fund and are not guaranteed to remain exclusively for the Animal Services build and may be redirected to other projects at the discretion of the Board of Supervisors. This could potentially negatively impact the efforts of the county to secure matching grant funding or donations.

R2: Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors consider passing a resolution to officially designate the remaining project funds located in the General Fund as Committed Funds according to the policies outlined in General Administrative Policy-Finance, B-01 Budget and Finance, Resolution 2012-087 and 20250128r007, effective date January 28, 2025, by October 1, 2025.

Required Response

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Response

Calaveras County Animal Services

DISCLAIMER

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

REFERENCE SOURCES

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