

YOLO COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES: "IF IT WALKS, CRAWLS, FLIES OR SLITHERS..."

SUMMARY

Yolo County Grand Jury completed an investigation of Yolo County Animal Services, and found that the services offered to the county are hampered by high costs and conflicting expectations.

A blatant case of nepotism in Animal Services has been rectified as a result of this investigation. However, there have been no consequences to the supervisor in a nepotistic relationship.

BACKGROUND

Yolo County Grand Jury received two separate complaints regarding the Yolo County Animal Services. These complaints covered a wide variety of issues, from which the grand jury abstracted a few basic questions. These questions included issues of nepotism, hours of operation, organizational structure, services, and funding.

California Penal Code Section 925 authorizes the grand jury to investigate and report upon the operations, accounts, and departments in Yolo County.

METHODOLOGY

During this investigation, the grand jury completed interviews with the complainants, staff and management from:

- Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA),
- US Postal Service,
- Woodland Police Department,
- Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO),
- Yolo County,
- City of Woodland, and
- City of Winters.

The grand jury also reviewed information published by Animal Services, and studies completed by Yolo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) which was assisted by UC Davis.

DISCUSSION

Yolo County Animal Services is part of the Sheriff's Department. It has responsibility for services to those parts of Yolo County not incorporated as cities. UC Davis and the cities of Woodland, Davis, West Sacramento, and Winters purchase animal services, by contract, from the Sheriff's Department. For convenience, this report will use the term "the cities" to include Woodland, Davis, West Sacramento, Winters, and UC Davis.

Conflicting Expectations

Animal Services works under a range of often conflicting expectations. Citizens with issues want quick and available services. Many people want to see fewer animals euthanized. Some want there to be no euthanasia, while others feel such a goal is impractical, if not impossible. Yolo County and entities receiving services all desire lower costs.

“Wire”, the online magazine reported, “The no-kill shelter movement splits the animal rights community. Advocates believe it is an important step toward recognizing the moral status of nonhuman animals. Critics, including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, say that no-kill shelters are a façade for profiteers who turn away the vast majority of homeless animals and keep the rest in dismal conditions. If you care about animal welfare, the dispute is ludicrously thorny.”ⁱ

Animal Services is caught up in that thorny dispute. Complaints and concerns about the shelter have to be considered in light of biases engendered by the complainer’s belief in what constitutes humane treatment of animals.

Data published on the Animal Services website indicate the percentage of animals euthanized at the shelter has decreased significantly over the past several years, and is on a downward trend.

Animal Services’ rates have increased significantly in recent years, causing cutbacks to services available to the cities. In some cases those rates have doubled. Contract negotiations between the cities and the county for Animal Services concentrates not on rates, but on which services can be cut back to meet budgetary demands.

Services

Animal Services staff is fond of saying, “If it walks, crawls, flies or slithers it is ours”. The services provided by Yolo County Animal Services can be divided into two kinds of activities, operating a kennel (animal shelter) and providing field services (animal control).

In order to provide these services, a variety of functions are necessary. These functions include front office and customer services, volunteer recruitment and management, veterinary medical, spay and neuter services, outreach and development, and system administration.

In 2013, LAFCO initiated a study of Yolo County Animal Services, looking at both the services provided and the governance required, in order to determine a method of providing animal services in a manner that maintains positive outcomes while controlling costs. The study concluded that governance issues would be resolved through a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) or similar arrangement.

To move toward implementing the recommendations in their study, LAFCO generated a request for proposals (RFP). The RFP sought a contractor to provide shelter service and another to provide animal control. The RFP allowed for one contractor to provide both kinds of services. There was one response to the RFP and it was from the Sheriff’s Department. Since there were no competing proposals, the JPA was not formed; therefore Animal Services remains within the Sheriff’s Department.

Animal Shelter / Kennel Services

The LAFCO RFP called for services that had longer hours. Currently, the animal shelter is open for limited hours:

- Tuesday – Friday, 10 am – 6 pm, closed from 1pm – 2pm
- Saturday 10 am– 4 pm, closed from 1pm – 2pm
- Monday (License and Redemptions Only, no phone service) 1 pm – 5 pm

Obtaining a pet license, pet adoption, or delivering an animal in need of shelter services is only available during those hours.

As a result of the LAFCO study, a group led by the Woodland City Manager is investigating options and funding for a new County shelter facility. Their hope is that, with a new facility, a new contractor can be attracted.

Field Services / Animal Control

According to the Animal Services web site, “...we investigate barking and noise complaints, inspect kennels, pick up loose and contained animals including livestock, respond to animal bites and attacks, rent traps, and provide welfare checks on animals. Often we are called upon to provide emergency services and transport for other rescue personnel who are not equipped to move animals, such as the Fire Department, CHP, and Health Department. Some services require a fee.”ⁱⁱ

Fewer services are provided to some cities than have been provided in previous years. Two year contracts are “negotiated” between Animal Services and the cities. In 2012, looking toward the 2013-2015 contract, the Sheriff’s Office proposed a new rate structure to the cities without making the basis for the new rates transparent. However, this rate structure represented an almost doubling of fees, and there was no opportunity for negotiating that rate. The only option that some cities had to protect their budgets was to cut back on services.

These services are available during normal business hours by Animal Services staff. After hours, these same staff are available on call. Services provided after hours to the cities are usually at a higher rate (paying for overtime), and are outside of the base contract.

Field services are typically initiated by calls to 911. The County Dispatch then contacts the area’s first responders, usually police in the case of animal disturbances. The police then have the responsibility of responding to, investigating, and / or resolving the problem. If need be, they make the decision to call Animal Services. Animal Services are always called in when there are animals acting aggressively, injured or sick, or are of a species known to carry rabies.

System Administration

The grand jury learned about a serious case of nepotism. Human Resources was unaware of a situation in which a senior staff member in Animal Services reported directly to a relative. Upon learning of the violation as a result of this investigation, Human Resources had the staff member re-assigned. The duties remain the same, but the supervisor of record has changed. There are no

rules in the nepotism policy regarding discipline, and there were no negative consequences to the previous supervisor for maintaining a nepotistic relationship for several years.

Nepotism has been an issue raised across Yolo County administration, and the Board of Supervisors has directed Human Resources to conduct an assessment of nepotism occurring within Yolo County government. The report has been delayed because of the difficulty in obtaining necessary information. However the report is expected to be completed later this year.

One of the issues raised in the initial complaint had to do with the confusion caused by the contract for services between Animal Services and the SPCA. The grand jury found no support for the allegation of problems caused by the contract.

FINDINGS

- F1. Shelter, animal control, and related services are only available for limited and inconvenient hours.
- F2. Animal services, as provided by the Sheriff's Department and contracted to the cities, continue to become more costly. The high cost limits the availability of services, and the negotiating process does not clarify how rates are developed.
- F3. There are no provisions in the county code for any consequences to supervisors for violation of the nepotism policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. By September 1, 2015, the Chief Animal Services Officer, in coordination with Human Resources, shall alter and stagger work schedules so that shelter services are available for longer hours.
- R2. City Managers for Woodland and Winters shall continue to develop alternative options for animal services, and report their progress to the respective City Councils.
- R3. By January 1, 2016, the Yolo County Sheriff, in coordination with the County Administrator, shall be more transparent and negotiate rates for animal services, as well as negotiating the amount and types of services. The Sheriff's Department shall give each City the opportunity to renegotiate the contract and the rates for July 1, 2016.
- R4. By August 1, 2015 Human Resources shall recommend an amended nepotism policy to the Board of Supervisors to include consequences that would hold violators of this policy responsible for their actions.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the grand jury requests responses as follows:

From the following individuals:

- Yolo County Sheriff, R3

From the following governing bodies

- Yolo County Board of Supervisors, R4

INVITED RESPONSES

From the following individuals:

- Yolo County Chief Animal Services Officer, R1
- City Manager, Woodland, R2
- City Manager, Winters, R2
- Director of Yolo County Human Resources, R1 and R4
- Yolo County Administrator, R3

DISCLAIMER

This report is issued by the 2014-15 Yolo County Grand Jury, with the exception of one juror, who was recused. This grand juror did not participate in any part of the investigation, which includes interviews, deliberations, and the making and acceptance of this report.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 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.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Documents reviewed include:

- Animal Services contract with the City of Woodland, including staff recommendations to the City Council, July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2015
- Animal Services contract with the City of Winters, including staff recommendations to the City Council, July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2015
- Animal Services contract with the City of Davis, including staff recommendations to the City Council, July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2015
- Animal Services contract with the University of California at Davis, July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2015
- 2011 Yolo County SPCA Annual Report, December 6, 2011
- Yolo County Animal Services Governance Study: Staffing, Programming, and Budget Projections to Consider a New Model for the Provision of Animal Services, Adopted by the Yolo LAFCo Commission, September 26, 2013
- Animal Services online statistics as of November 1, 2014
- UC Davis Small Animal Hospital Contract with Animal Services, July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2012
- Yolo County Code, Section 2-6.44 Nepotism Policy

ⁱ Palmer, Brian, “Are No-Kill Shelters Good for Cats and Dogs?” May 9, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2014/05/no_kill_animal_shelters_and_peta_what_is_the_most_humane_way_to_treat_stray.htm.

ⁱⁱ Yolo County Sheriff’s Office, Animal Services FAQs, 2015, <http://www.yolocountysheriff.com/services/animal-services/>