

2023–2024
Yolo County Civil Grand Jury
June 12, 2024

Yolo County Animal Services
MOVING FORWARD



Photo courtesy of juror

YOLO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY
YOLO COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES
MOVING FORWARD



-Photo by Juror-

*“Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection”
– Mark Twain*

SUMMARY

The Yolo County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) completed an investigation of organizational and operational changes at the Yolo County Animal Services (Animal Services). The Grand Jury addressed the long-term difficulties at the shelter caused by underfunding, aging facilities, chain of command complexity, and the small size of the facility compared to the size of the community it serves.

The Grand Jury finds that some of the five major organizational and operational changes are strongly endorsed by the community and show good progress (explained further in the Discussion Section of this report). Overall, Animal Services avowed “piecemeal approach” to addressing the shelter’s shortcomings is clearly a practical effort in the short term with good community support.

BACKGROUND

Animal Services at 140 Tony Diaz Drive in Woodland primarily consists of a 4,800 square foot main building built in 1970, a 3,000 square foot dog kennel area built in 1974 and a 2,900 square foot cat annex built in 2003 [1]. A trailer outfitted for small animal surgery provided by the University of Florida, procured, and retrofitted by University of California,

Davis (UCD) Veterinary Shelter Medicine personnel, is also now functional at the Tony Diaz Drive site. The original 1970s era buildings were concrete block on slab construction with now dated heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) capability and, thus, less than ideal air circulation. While the cat housing has been revised to two-sided kennels to facilitate cleaning, reduce stress, and add more space, the dog kennels are not two-sided, and the porous flooring is particularly inadequate from a disease control standpoint. Windows, HVAC, flooring, and drainage at these four components have evolved in a patchwork fashion to improve conditions for animals and staff, as funding and other conditions have allowed. Veterinary standards, however, and the knowledge base [2][3][4] surrounding shelter design, construction, sanitation, and animal health have evolved considerably since the 1970s, such that both the hardworking Animal Services staff and the wider Yolo County community agree that changes are overdue and required to move toward greater conformity with today's accepted industry standards.

Toward the end of conforming to modern standards of animal care shelters, multiple groups in the county would like to have a fully modern new facility in Yolo County. However, for now, most or all groups envision what is termed a "piecemeal approach" where various, much smaller, efforts are embraced, funded, and fielded so that actual conditions and populations are incrementally improved.

The Grand Jury was unable to verify the existence of a regular process for inspecting the shelter facility and operations. An inspection would assist Animal Services to improve efficiency and understand where improvements are needed. There are consultants and other possible government entities that are able to provide guidance. An updated guideline for care in animal shelter can be found at the following resource:

<https://ismcah.org/index.php/jasv/issue/view/2>

APPROACH

The Grand Jury's approach to investigate Animal Services was comprised of:

1. Reading a range of publicly available documents such as a Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) funded report on Animal Services [1], the 2014-2015 Grand Jury report on Animal Services [5] and other reports on other shelters around the country.
2. Watching live and recorded video of Yolo County Board of Supervisors (BOS) and Yolo Animal Services Planning Agency, a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) meetings.
3. Touring Animal Services at 140 Tony Diaz Drive, Woodland, California.
4. Conducting a series of exploratory interviews with Yolo County community stakeholders with the history and experience in the field and at the shelter site.

5. Conducting a series of corroborating and depth enhancing interviews with additional experts and interested parties in the community.
6. Requesting further documents from key personnel.

DISCUSSION

Despite its age, the August 2012 report “Yolo County Animal Services Study” [1] commissioned by LAFCO provides an excellent background on the conditions and difficulties at Animal Services up until a series of recently posed or implemented changes began to change the organization and operations.

At least five items make up this reconfiguration:

1. A Joint Powers Authority (JPA) entity, termed the “Yolo Animal Services Planning Agency,” was formed four years ago
2. In October 2022, shelter operations moved from the Yolo County Sheriff’s (Sheriff) department to the county administrator’s (CAO) office and in February 2024, the CAO delegated shelter operations to the Department of Community Services
3. Nearby unused space formerly belonging to the Probation Administration was added to Animal Services
4. The development of a new annex space just south of the Probation Ancillary building was proposed
5. The Board of Supervisors declined to renew the services contract with UCD Veterinary Medicine

This report focuses on the changes, the clear advantages and uncertainties. Normally a report on Animal Services would focus on animal shelter data: dog, cat and other animal processing, outcomes, and community service. We expect the five pending changes noted above will determine a new baseline level of service from Animal Services.

Yolo Animal Services Planning Agency (JPA)

The JPA formation focusing on animal services was strongly advocated in the 2012 report cited earlier. For many reasons, not least of which is the bringing of West Sacramento fully to the situation, this is a great step forward. All interviewees by the Grand Jury supported this development. JPA board members as of February 2024, voting and not voting, are given in the table below. Each entity listed below has one vote and contributes to Animal Services’ budget.

Member Name	Organization	Voting or Not Voting
Josh Chapman	City of Davis	Yes
Bill Biasi	City of Winters	Yes

Member Name	Organization	Voting or Not Voting
Jesse Loren	City of Winters	No
Mayra Vega	City of Woodland	Yes
Rich Lansburgh	City of Woodland	No
Martha Guerrero	City of West Sacramento	Yes
Verna Sulpizio Hull	City of West Sacramento	No
Mary Vixie Sandy	County of Yolo County	Yes
Jim Provenza	County of Yolo County	No

Delegation of Shelter Operations to the Department of Community Services

The second item in the list of five changes to the structure of Animal Services is the reassignment to Community Services. Some stakeholders argue strongly that animal control is a community service, is rarely a law enforcement issue, and the Sheriff’s office often has more urgent priorities. Others note that the Sheriff’s office has long maintained control of several aspects of the Animal Services operation, including training certification and weapons control. A quick review shows a range of actual administrative “homes” for animal services in neighboring counties.

County	Animal Services Overseen by County Administration
Sacramento	Community Services
Solano	Sheriff
Sonoma	Health Services
Napa	Sheriff
Colusa	Sheriff
Placer	Environmental Health
Yuba	Sheriff
Mendocino	Community Services
Lake	Animal Care and Control
San Joaquin	Sheriff

The move to the Department of Community Services may or may not have a positive effect on funding for the traditionally underfunded Animal Services. The requested cash flow from the Yolo County’s General Fund by Animal Services has steadily increased year by year from

2011 to 2024 from \$100K to \$700K. While funding has consistently increased, the Grand Jury believes the budget will need to be increased at a higher percentage annually to better correspond with the increase in residents over the last decade.

For reference, in 1971 the population of Yolo County was 95,000 residents. There has been a steady increase in population to the present day. In 1980, Yolo County had 114,000 residents, in 2011 it had 202,000 and in 2022 there were 222,000 residents. Thus, Yolo County now has 2.3 times the number of residents than in the era where Animal Services had its original design and build.

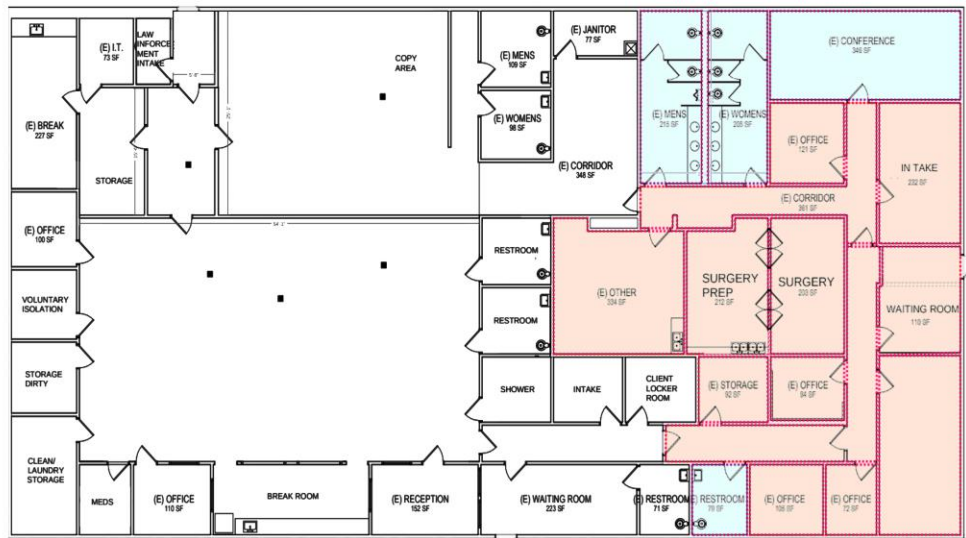
There are multiple paths to fixing the long-term trend of under resourcing animal services. The top five are:

1. Increasing revenue
2. Decreasing expenditures
3. Increasing the annual cash from Yolo County's General Fund
4. Increasing the efficiency of operations
5. Accrediting public donations directly to Animal Services if the donor so specifies, rather than to the county general fund

Animal Services Acquisition of Unused Probation Administration Space

At the February 27, 2024, BOS meeting [6] an agenda item was passed for converting the offered floor space (~2,800 Sq. Ft.) at the Probation Ancillary building near the current shelter. It was strongly supported by stakeholders at our interviews and at public meetings. All five public comments on these recent changes were strongly positive as were all 11 written comments received prior to the BOS meeting. This new space (shown in the graphic below) will be revised to accommodate in-house spay/neuter surgeries. Stray cat trap-neuter-return and low cost spay neuter for the public are envisioned. Moving activities to this area also allows portions of the original shelter to be reconfigured for the greater health and comfort of both animals and staff.

Completion and staffing of this space address the acknowledged need for expanded spay and neuter capability at the Animal Services.



Proposed New Space Utilizing the Former Probation Ancillary Building

Proposed New Annex Space South of the Probation Ancillary building

Yolo County personnel have proposed adding a new facility just south of the Probation Ancillary building discussed above. The location, the rough sizing of this concept and the details of who to partner with and how, are now topics of discussion with UCD Veterinary School, a prime target partner.

Advantages of the piecemeal approach to the shelter improvement can be further appreciated by a short discussion of local efforts to build an entirely new shelter. The piecemeal approach was the best the Animal Services could do with limited funding.

1. Consider a fully new shelter designed by Indigo Architects for Animal Services in 2016[5]. Cost estimates were in the \$20M to \$30M range. Modern humane features notable in this design are better use of natural lighting, provision for efficient cleaning, fully effective ventilation, and climate control.
2. A less expensive new shelter was also designed, and subsequently built, for the City of Tracy by Indigo Architects [7]. This design was to be implemented in two steps ultimately reaching 12,000 square feet. The first portion is 5,638 square feet cost \$5.2M and opened in 2015. The design minimizes acoustic and visual stress for the animals and staff and facilitates ease of kennel maintenance and daylighting.

Termination of a Service Contract with UCD School of Veterinary Medicine (UCD)

The Grand Jury sought to understand the termination of many years of a repeating contractual agreement with UCD. The termination was described by interviewees as abrupt. In prior years, UCD sometimes had worked past the actual contract expiration date while a new contract was finalized. It was also discovered that UCD Shelter Medicine had reached out to Animal Services leadership regarding contract renewal via email multiple times with no response. Animal Services and BOS' decision to not renew has meant that Animal Services had no onsite surgical capability from July 31, 2023, through at least April 2024. This created a significant decline in services to the community and a logistical burden on staff and volunteers. Shuttling animals to other facilities resulted in added stress to the animals.

Morale at the Animal Services

The Grand Jury heard from four interviewees describing friction, toxic work conditions, poor workplace behavior, chain of command problems and poor communication issues within Animal Services and also between Animal Services and both UCD personnel and Yolo County SPCA.

FINDINGS

The Grand Jury makes the following findings:

- F-1 Funding for Animal Services has not kept pace with Yolo County population growth and the attending increase in requests for services.
- F-2 The decision to build additional veterinary space in the southeastern portion of the Probation Ancillary building near the existing shelter is acknowledged as a positive step in the piecemeal approach to incremental improvement of services.
- F-3 The Grand Jury's email and in-person requests for documents addressed to leadership at the Yolo County Animal Services received no reply or greatly delayed responses for the requested material. The Grand Jury finds there are shortcomings of the leadership and management skills at the shelter.
- F-4 Relations with both internal and external partners at the shelter became contentious resulting in ineffective and diminished delivery of services.
- F-5 Each department within Yolo County Animal Services (kennel/field/medical services) has a supervisor, except for the front office. This may lead to fragmentation of services and inefficiencies throughout Yolo County Animal Services.
- F-6 With the change in oversight from the Yolo County Sheriff to the Department of Community Services, the Grand Jury could not determine how weapons are stored when not in use by the Field Officers.

- F-7 The Grand Jury could not determine how firearm certification or any other specialized certification needed to qualify as a Field Officer is achieved in light of the transition from the Yolo County Sheriff's Department.
- F-8 The Grand Jury could not identify any formal facility inspection process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury recommends the following:

- R-1 The Yolo County Board of Supervisors should increase funding for Yolo County Animal Services to keep pace with Yolo County population growth and the attending increase in requests for services.
- R-2 The Yolo County Animal Services should continue development of additional veterinary space in the former Probation Ancillary building.
- R-3 The Department of Community Services should provide for a management/leadership consultant to improve leadership skills at the Yolo County Animal Services.
- R-4 The Department of Community Services should consider reviewing and modifying the Yolo County Animal Services leadership job descriptions to address the shortfall in communications.
- R-5 The Department of Community Services should request that the Yolo County Board of Supervisors authorize a change in the Animal Services organization structure to appoint a director of operations who would supervise the front office staff or appoint a front office staff supervisor. This position would report directly to the Director of Animal Services.
- R-6 The Department of Community Services should establish a policy by September 1, 2024, for how weapons are secured after hours.
- R-7 The Department of Community Services should establish by September 1, 2024, a policy defining how Field Officers will achieve firearm and any other certification to qualify as a Field Officer.
- R-8 The Yolo County Board of Supervisors should hire a consultant for an evaluation of the facility and workflow optimization and how it can be improved.

COMMENDATION

The many local partner organizations and volunteers who support the Yolo County Animal Services should be commended for their hard work and dedication to improve the current situation at the shelter.

The formation of the Yolo Animal Services Planning Agency, a Joint Powers Authority, is broadly acknowledged as successful.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section(s) 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses to its Findings and Recommendations within 90 days as follows:

- Yolo County Board of Supervisors
F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6, F-7, and F-8; and R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, R6, R-7 and R-8

INVITED RESPONSES

The Grand Jury also invites responses from the following individuals within 90 days:

- Director of Yolo County Animal Services
F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6, F-7, and F-8; and R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, R6, R-7 and R-8
- Director of Yolo County Department of Community Services
F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6, F-7, and F-8; and R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, R6, R-7 and R-8
- Yolo County Administrative Officer
F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6, F-7, and F-8; and R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, R6, R-7 and R-8

ACRONYMS/GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BOS: Yolo County Board of Supervisors

CAO: Yolo County Administrator Officer

DCS: Department of Community Services

Grand Jury: Yolo County Civil Grand Jury

HVAC: Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning

JPA: A Joint Powers Authority is a stand-alone organization formed by governmental entities for a specific purpose or project.

LAFCO: A Local Agency Formation Commission is a public agency with county-wide jurisdiction established by State Law (the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government

Reorganization Act of 2000). The intent of the Act is to discourage urban sprawl and to encourage orderly and efficient provision of services, such as water, sewer, and fire protection. LAFCO oversees changes to local government boundaries involving the formation and expansion of cities and special districts.

SPCA: The Yolo County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in 1974 by a group of dedicated people committed to improving the lives of animals in our community.

UCD: University of California, Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine

ENDNOTES

- [1] Yolo County Animal Services Study; Murrell, Tammie and Marks-Gibbs, sue, 2012, 83 pp
- [2] Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, 2010, 65 pp
- [3] Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, Association of Shelter Veterinarians (2010 – <https://oacu.od.nih.gov/disaster/ShelterGuide.pdf>)
- [4] Animal Control Management: A Guide for Local Governments, Geoffrey I. Hardy, Humane Society of the United States for International City/County Management Association (2001)
- [5] <https://www.indigoarch.com/yolo-county-animal-shelter23>
- [6] https://destinyhosted.com/agenda_publish.cfm?id=96561&mt=bos&vl=true&get_month=2&get_year=2024&dsp=agm&seq=14397&rev=0&ag=3702&ln=126456&nseq=14405&nrev=0&pseq=13995&prev=0&vl=true#ReturnTo126456
- [7] <https://www.indigoarch.com/tracy-animal-shelter>

Reports issued by the Civil 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 Civil Grand Jury.