



September 30, 2016

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Volunteers
caring for
bunnies
at the
Santa Barbara
County
Animal Shelter

Re: Report on Animal Services (Agenda Item 4, 10-4-16)
BUNS Memorandum of Understanding

Dear Chairman Adam and Honorable Board Members:

This letter is submitted on behalf of Bunnies Urgently Needing Shelter (BUNS). Members of BUNS have served on the AHA Oversight Team since its inception and on three of the four subcommittees (Owner Surrender, Adoption and Volunteer Programs) currently assisting the Oversight Team. While our primary role in the animal welfare community is to serve rabbits and guinea pigs in the County shelter system, we have attempted in the Oversight Team process to also serve as advocates, and sometimes mediators, for our fellow animal welfare organizations, shelter volunteers and Animal Services staff members who share the goal of providing the best possible service to animals in need in Santa Barbara County, and to the public. This letter, however, is addressed at one particular concern of BUNS, i.e., the status of the contractual agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that Board has previously directed Animal Services to negotiate with BUNS. Although we submitted a draft MOU almost five months ago, we have yet to meet with County staff or receive any substantive response to this draft MOU. We request that the Board will reaffirm its support for formal contracts or MOUs with BUNS, ASAP, and other responsible animal care organizations, and again direct staff to expedite the completion of these MOUS. Since we understand that departments other than Animal Services (specifically General Services, County Counsel and potentially others) are now also involved in review of these MOUS, we hope the direction to expedite the MOUs will also be extended to those departments.

As the Board may recall, the AHA report received in June, 2015 recommended, among other things, that the County enter into formal MOUs with BUNS, the Animal Shelter Assistance Program ("ASAP") and potentially other independent organizations that provide care to animals in the County animal shelter system. Although we did not agree with many of the conclusions and recommendation of the AHA report, we did concur with that one. Animal Services and the Public Health department have since also endorsed the concept of MOUs with BUNS, ASAP and others. However, the MOUs did not appear to become a priority for Public Health until its progress report to the Board concerning the AHA Oversight Team on February 16, 2016. At that time, the Board voted, by a 4-1 motion, to direct Public Health to "expedite the process of vetting and analyzing the appropriate MOUs related to groups providing prescribed services to the County." (Action Summary for February 16, 2016 Board Meeting, Item 16-00119.)

B.UNS.

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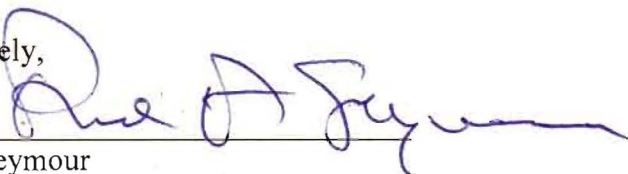
Following the February 16 hearing, we were told that BUNS (and the other groups) would be called in for discussions on proposed MOUs at some uncertain time in the future. To expedite matters, we drafted detailed (10 pages) MOU language covering all aspects of BUNS' operations in the County shelter system and submitted it to Animal Services staff in early May, 2016. The draft MOU primarily just codifies BUNS' existing relationship with the County. We anticipated that a few points in the draft MOU would require discussion, and that the County would likely add some recitals of its own and standard contract boilerplate provisions. The only response to this draft MOU to date, however, has been occasional emails reiterating that discussions of the MOU would be commenced at some unspecified time in the future. The most recent update from Animal Services Director Glick indicated that Animal Services staff was in discussion with the General Services department about certain property management issues implicated by the MOU, and that internal discussion of these issues was expected to consume another four to six weeks. Ms. Glick has also assured us that BUNS would eventually be included in these discussions, but again did not indicate when this might occur. We understand the completion of the MOU with ASAP has also been held up due to these issues, and that MOUs with the Santa Barbara Animal Care Foundation and CAPA have also been held up for various reasons.

We understand that BUNS' operations are not a problem area for Animal Services, and may therefore be less of a priority than some other matters. We also understand that Animal Services' management is facing other challenges at this time. However, we are still disappointed that the BUNS MOU and other MOUs have not been afforded the priority mandated by this Board. Our relationship with Animal Services staff is generally collaborative and cordial. Nevertheless, issues have arisen that do need to be resolved through an MOU process instead of with temporary workarounds. For example, in the last two months BUNS volunteers have wound up paying over \$ 140 in owner-turn-in fees to Animal Services out of their own pockets to assist individuals who were trying to relinquish rabbits that were breeding out of control. It is clearly in the best interests of all concerned to take unwanted rabbits into the Shelter system in these situations. However, the current County system for assessing owner-turn-in fees is not flexible enough to accommodate some less affluent owners in this situation, particularly where multiple rabbits are involved. Since BUNS, rather than the County, will pay all the subsequent costs of spaying/neutering and caring for these rabbits after intake, it seems reasonable that the MOU would provide for taking in such rabbits (or guinea pigs) without BUNS or its members having to pay fees to the County on top of all other expenses.

To avoid continued delay, it may be necessary for the Board to set a date certain for return of the MOUs to the Board for review and approval, e.g., before the end of this year. Since it now appears that departments other than Public Health and its Animal Services division are involved in the MOUs, we hope the direction to expedite completion of the MOUs will be extended to those departments also.

In closing, BUNS thanks the Board for your concern and support for the non-profit organizations such as ours and the many individual volunteers and dedicated County staff members that provide care for all species of animals in the Santa Barbara County Animal Services system. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the County for many years with the benefit of a long overdue formal MOU.

Sincerely,



Phil Seymour
BUNS