

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD AGENDA LETTER



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
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Agenda Number:
Prepared on: 5/1/06
Department Name: 012
Department No.: CEO
Agenda Date: 5/16/06
Placement: Administrative
Estimate Time: 45 minutes on 6/6/06
Continued Item: NO
If Yes, date from:

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Michael F. Brown
County Executive Officer

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SUBJECT: Animal Services Operational Review - Project Team Report

Recommendation(s):

That the Board of Supervisors, set a hearing for 45 minutes, on June 6, 2006, to consider recommendations regarding the Operational Review of the Animal Services subdivision of the Public Health Department, as follows:

1. Receive and file the Animal Service Project Team Report; and
2. Defer to Budget Hearings in June budget expansion requests to fund the most critical needs identified in the Project Report.

Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:

The recommendations are primarily aligned with Goal No. 3. A Strong, Professionally Managed County Organization and, Goal No. 2. A Safe and Healthy Community in Which to Live, Work, and Visit.

Executive Summary and Discussion:

In response to a Board request, the Animal Services Project Team was created to analyze issues, recommend strategies and options, and develop regional support and community consensus for the short and long term funding, organization, and governance of the Animal Services in Santa Barbara County.

The Project Team was comprised of staff from the Public Health Department, the County Executive Office, with consultation from County Counsel and County Auditor–Controller staff as necessary. The Team reviewed the Animal Services budget, organization, staffing, service levels and identified, collected and compared important operational benchmarks from other entities to determine best practices in animal services.

Overall, the Report’s results indicate that the Santa Barbara County’s Animal Services operations follow many current best practices and policies for public animal control organizations. In fact, recent operational reviews conducted by private consultants for two animal control agencies in California (Kern County and Sonoma County) make numerous reference to Santa Barbara County’s Animal Services as an example of a program that is well-managed and innovative in its various partnerships.

The Report also reveals the unique model of 24-hour/365-day service provided in Santa Barbara County – and its frailty. An excerpt from the Report, which details the County Animal Shelter System, is provided in the background section of this letter. The background information is presented to demonstrate the interdependence and partnerships that exist and support the current levels of service provided in Santa Barbara County. The actions of each partner impact the overall health and well-being of the system – both operationally and financially. To this end, a copy of the Report has been provided to representatives from partnering agencies, volunteer groups, and other interested stakeholders.

Report Recommendations

The Project Team has presented thirteen major recommendations. All of the recommendations are vitally important to Animal Services, and the Project Team believes they are necessary to ensure best practices, increased efficiency, accountability, and customer service. However, the Project Team is also aware of its charge to balance fiscal resources, quality operations, and community service expectations and values. As such, the team categorized the thirteen recommendations into three areas: “Critical Need”, “Maintaining the Status Quo” and, “Need Further Study”. Recommendation 8, moving Animal Services into the General Fund, has already been acted upon by the County Executive Office and has been included in the Fiscal Year 2006-07 Recommended Budget. The Public Health Department has submitted Budget Expansion Requests for FY 2006-07 that the Public Health Department believes are important to provide basic services at three shelters. The funding requests, will be considered in conjunction with all other budget expansion requests, in June 2006.

Following are the major recommendations of the Project Team. The Executive Summary of the Report (Page 1-2) contains the recommendations and a reference to the pages within the report where additional information related to each of the recommendations may be found. It is interesting to note, that many of the recommendations support the status quo— which is a reflection of the fact the County’s Animal Services program is already functioning in many areas at a high level and has incorporated numerous best practices. This is evident through contacts and comparisons with other entities. Further, the Report reveals that our County’s Animal Services, like others surveyed, suffers from high vacancy rates and employee turnover.

Recommendations in Critical Need

- ◆ Recommendation 8: Move the Animal Services program to the General Fund beginning in FY 2006-07. (This recommendation is included in the Fiscal Year 2006-07 Recommended Budget. This is consistent with the treatment of other general fund type services provided throughout the County. This will result in cost avoidance of approximately \$300,000 for the Animal Services Program)
- ◆ Recommendation 11: Reinstate the Kennel Attendant (1 FTE) at the Lompoc shelter to 2002 level and add 1 FTE or 0.5 FTE Kennel Attendant. (The recommended action would cost between \$43,000 - \$48,000 annually, per position)
- ◆ Recommendation 12: Add a minimum of 2.0 Kennel Attendants at the Santa Maria Animal Center for FY 06-07. (The recommended action would cost between \$43,000 - \$48,000 annually, per position)

- ◆ Recommendation 13: Implement an in-house spay/neuter program utilizing a full time veterinarian and full time veterinary technician. (The recommended action would cost an estimated net of \$42,900 annually)

Recommendations Maintaining the Status Quo

- ◆ Recommendation 1: Continue to operate three shelters in Santa Barbara County. This model allows for regional services to cities and the unincorporated areas and strong local identification promotes community involvement.
- ◆ Recommendation 2: Continue the community partnerships with volunteer groups whose missions are to assist Santa Barbara County's abandoned and homeless animals in the animal shelters.
- ◆ Recommendation 3: Maintain Animal Services as a program within the Public Health Department. If other forms of governance are considered, solicit the contract cities for their input and evaluate the viability.
- ◆ Recommendation 4: The functions of field and sheltering services are interdependent in Santa Barbara County. Maintain both functions within the program and continue to contract with Cities for full services.
- ◆ Recommendation 7: Continue to prioritize training and consistency at all three sites through the Animal Services Academy and other training opportunities. While there is an aggressive program for training, vacant positions continue to impact training goals.
- ◆ Recommendation 9: Continue the business hours at the three shelters as currently scheduled six days per week. City contracts contain these hours and the community is accepting of the hours as currently defined. The current business hours meet the state mandate regarding holding periods for animals.

Recommendations that Will be Studied Further

- ◆ Recommendation 5: Evaluate the reasons for high turnover, recruitment and retention problems in supervisory positions.
- ◆ Recommendation 6: Perform a comprehensive classification and salary survey to determine whether Santa Barbara County Animal Services salaries are competitive and equitable. (May have a financial impact, the amount would be determined through the analysis).
- ◆ Recommendation 10: Perform the analysis to evaluate whether use of additional dedicated part time extra help staff to perform the animal license canvass program would be financially viable.

Governance

While the Report is comprehensive in its analysis of current operations and comparisons to other like entities, the Project Team did not fully explore governance options beyond those internal to the County. Additional study could be undertaken to explore external options such as contracting or privatizing animal services, transitioning animal services in the incorporated areas to municipal governments, and/or forming a joint powers authority, with Cities and or Non Profits, to manage and operate animal services in Santa Barbara County. As articulated within the Report, the provision of Animal Services in Santa Barbara County already operates similarly to a joint powers entity and incorporates aspects of privatization. The County has agreements with each of the cities in Santa Barbara County for the provision of Animal Services resulting in the cities being an integral financial partner. In addition, various non-profit entities operate portions of the system.

Although the Project Team has gathered some information and is prepared to discuss the pros and cons of forming a Joint Powers Authority, as well as privatizing, and contracting, the Project Team recommends that if the Board is interested in pursuing this information, additional study would be undertaken, and the Project Team expanded to include interested stakeholders, including representatives from the cities, non-profit animal welfare organizations, volunteers, etc.

Background – The Animal Control System in Santa Barbara County

County Animal Shelter System

Santa Barbara County operates three regional animal shelters in Santa Barbara, Lompoc and Santa Maria. Services are provided to each community or city by the shelter serving that region. Animal Services moves staff as needed to meet service requirements, when there are absences or increased service needs. This flexibility promotes the best availability for animal control services throughout the County although staffing shortages can stretch resources.

Santa Barbara County Animal Services provides full services to the all of the unincorporated areas of Santa Barbara County, which includes the unincorporated municipalities of Summerland, Montecito, Santa Ynez, Los Olivos, Ballard, Vandenberg Village, Mission Hills, Casmalia, Orcutt , Sisquoc, and Cuyama. The subdivision also provides full animal control services by contract to the cities of Buellton, Goleta, Guadalupe, Lompoc, Santa Maria, and Solvang. Full animal control services include provision of an animal shelter, opportunities for volunteerism, animal licensing program, stray animal patrol, rabies control, wildlife advice and assistance, pet adoption program, cruelty and neglect investigations, advice on animal and behavioral issues, dog noise investigations, dead animal pick-up, and 24-hour emergency response for injured stray animals, vicious animals, animals in traffic, police assistance and loose livestock. Agreements are also in place for the provision of animal control services to the Chumash Indian Reservation and Vandenberg Air Force Base.

The subdivision provides animal sheltering for the cities of Santa Barbara and Carpinteria. These cities have their own animal control field staff. In Santa Barbara, Animal Control is part of the Police Department and in Carpinteria, Animal Control is part of Code Enforcement. Stray animals from these cities are impounded at the County's Santa Barbara Shelter.

While three shelters are not mandated, the model works well for Santa Barbara County. The distinct regions of the county have come to have strong community identification with each of the shelter locations. Volunteer groups dedicated to each site have augmented the quality of the program and made extensive improvements to both the animal care and facilities.

Unique Model in Santa Barbara County

In the early 1990's, volunteer groups formed with the goal of assisting Santa Barbara County's stray and abandoned animals in the animal shelters. These groups are unique in that they are partners to the shelters that co-exist with the County staff within the shelters. Each group has a mission statement that defines the commitment to assist with the care and placement of homeless animals in the County's animal shelters. The groups are non-profit 501(c)3 organizations and perform fund raising and services for the benefit of the County's sheltered animals. This is a very unusual model, that has been highly successful in Santa Barbara County to help reduce euthanasia and to continue to improve the animal care, veterinary treatment and adoption programs. Santa Barbara County was a leader in this model and has achieved remarkable results through these community partnerships.

A more common model for municipal animal shelters is outside non-profit animal shelter partners that are breed rescue groups or organizations with their own facilities and separate operations. These partners may adopt animals from the shelters, but do not provide direct resources as in Santa Barbara County's model. Santa Barbara County also partners with groups outside the shelters, but to a much lesser extent than the extensive work that is done by the shelter volunteer groups.

Partnerships with the Cities

Although the Report speaks to the contracts with Cities and other agencies, it is important to illustrate the symbiotic financial relationship that exists between the Animal Services program and our municipal partners, mostly experienced with those with full service contracts.

In FY 2002-03, the Public Health Department instituted a per capita rate that encompassed both field and sheltering services that covered the reasonable costs of providing the services. The Board of Supervisors approved the methodology and the Public Health Department's recommendation that the cities have a four-year payment plan (in order to mitigate the financial hardship) to reach 100% of cost.

In the per capita rate methodology, consumer revenues received are reduced from the costs of providing services to derive the "net" cost of services. This "net" unfunded cost is then distributed to the cities and County (unincorporated area) based on population. This example is further complicated by the fact that the cities of Santa Barbara and Carpinteria pay fee-for-service for sheltering only and have their own field staff for patrol activities.

The Public Health Department intends to meet with the cities of Santa Barbara and Carpinteria in order to learn more about the history and consideration involved in these decades-old arrangements and explore other contracting models.

The per capita relationship (shared "net" costs) with the six full service cities is hydraulic:

- Increased costs mean a proportionate per capita increase for all
- Increased revenues mean a proportionate per capita decrease for all

However, because population growth is different in each jurisdiction, the dollar amount of any increase or decrease will vary. For example, if one city has a population growth and the other city remains the same, then the growing city will experience a greater contract increase even though the per capita rate is the same for all entities. Thus, growing cities will experience greater increases in contracts while other cities may even experience contract decreases.

This detail is included because it is important to know that the County and full service cities truly do have a symbiotic financial relationship. If one city chose to "back-out" of the current system, all other cities and the unincorporated County would be adversely affected. Conversely, if a city (Carpinteria or Santa Barbara) chose to join as full service, all other cities and county per unit cost would be positively affected.

This partnering relationship is further enhanced and subsidized by the volunteer groups' time and donations. The Santa Barbara County Animal Services system is like a triangle with County, cities and volunteer entities at the apexes. A change to any point disrupts the whole and its balance. With careful planning and the continued partnership, disruptions can be minimal.

Mandates and Service Levels:

Animal Services primarily performs a number of mandated services, primarily related to rabies control, stray animal sheltering, spay and neuter of adopted animals, and treatment of sick and injured animals. Each of these mandates is discussed in detail with the report (Pages 17-20). The Recommendations are not mandated actions.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Receiving and filing the Animal Services project team report and directing the County Executive Officer and the Public Health Department to report back to the Board of Supervisors on any relevant policy-related recommendations, will not result in any additional costs. Some of the recommended actions, if implemented, would increase the cost of providing Animal Services. With the exception of recommendation 8, which the County Executive Office has already included in the Recommended Budget for FY 2006-07, the "most critical" recommendations which would result in

General Fund cost increases will be presented to the Board for consideration during Budget Hearings as budget expansion requests.

Special Instructions:

None

Concurrence:

None