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September 30, 2016

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

Re: Public Health Report on Animal Services/Implementation of AHA
Recommendations (Agenda Item 4, 10-4-16)
Need for a Permanent Animal Commission

Dear Chairman Adam and Honorable Board Members:

This letter is submitted as an individual commentary but one member of the AHA Oversight Team. The focus is on one issue that should have been addressed in the current Oversight Team progress report to the Board, but was not – the issue of formation of a permanent Santa Barbara County Animal Commission. There is a tremendous level of public interest in this matter, and an acknowledged need for a permanent public and private partnership in managing animal affairs in the County. Given that it will necessarily take considerable time before an effective Animal Commission becomes operative, action towards forming an Animal Commission should not be further delayed. This letter specifically requests that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Set a date certain for a public Board of Supervisors hearing on creation of an Animal Commission no later than February, 2017.
2. Direct the AHA Oversight Team to conduct at least one public workshop on a proposed Animal Commission no later than the end of this year. The workshop should include consideration of proposals concerning the form, mission and by-laws of the Animal Commission submitted by any party, including alternatives proposed by County staff or developed by the Oversight Team itself.
3. Direct that the Oversight Team report on options and alternatives for the Animal Commission be made publicly available at least two weeks before the Board of Supervisors hearing on the Animal Commission, to assure that members of the public are fully informed and able to respond.

On February 11, 2016, prior to the last Oversight Team progress report to the Board (February 16, 2016), representatives of all eight non-profit groups and animal shelter volunteer groups represented on the AHA Oversight Team submitted a joint letter asking (among other things) that the Oversight Team be directed to take up consideration of models for a permanent

Animal Commission. The Board motion approved by a 4-1 vote on February 16, 2016 included direction to staff to research and report back on options for such a permanent advisory body. Although the motion did not set a deadline for this report, many of us thought it was clear from the Board discussion that this report was to be made when Public Health next reported on the progress of the Oversight Team, i.e., at the hearing now scheduled for October 4, 2016. However, when governance issues came up for discussion on the Oversight Team agenda in July 18, 2016, County staff announced that they did not intend to take up the issue of an animal commission or other permanent advisory body until January, 2017. At the most recent Oversight Team meeting staff announced that they also did not intend to report back to the Board after the current October 4, 2016, hearing for another six to eight months, i.e. until the end or near the end of the Oversight Team process in June, 2017. In other words, County staff would not even report back to the Board on its recommendations on an animal commission until the middle of next year. This should not be accepted.

It is understood that an Animal Commission cannot be created overnight. Moreover, successful creation of an Animal Commission must necessarily involve an open public process and thoughtful consideration of alternative models, which will take time. This is precisely why action to develop an Animal Commission should be commenced now, not at some indefinite date in the future. All the reasons that have previously been raised for creating a permanent Animal Commission remain valid:

- Non-profits and volunteers provide a tremendous amount of the staffing and funding for animal care in Santa Barbara County. In addition, our organizations and experienced volunteers possess a large share of the collective expertise on animal care present in the County. The governance model for animal services should accordingly ensure that volunteers, non-profits and interested members of the public are fully represented in matters affecting animal welfare in the County system and the County overall.
- We have an unfortunate history of conflict between Animal Services and other members of the animal community. The only way out of this is a governance model which promotes problem solving rather than conflict, public participation, partnership among all stakeholders, and accountability for all concerned.
- While the Oversight Team process is a step in the right direction and will probably result in improvements, it is not a complete solution. The mandate of the Oversight Team is limited in scope and does not extend to some critical areas of concern. In addition, although the Oversight Team includes a fairly broad range of stakeholder representatives, the Oversight Team process is not an open public process and does not guarantee representation and an opportunity to be heard for all concerned parties or for the general public.

In addition to the foregoing, at least some of us on the Oversight Team believe that the Oversight Team process may be falling short of its objectives, and not living up to its full potential for fostering better working relationships between Animal Services, volunteers and

animal welfare organizations. A tremendous amount of effort has been invested in the Oversight Team process by both staff and stakeholder representatives, and that effort is appreciated. Nevertheless, there is a strong concern that the partnership ethic that has been discussed and adopted by the Oversight Team is not filtering down to lower levels in Animal Services, and is even being contradicted at times in word or actions by members of the Animal Services leadership. Many volunteers I have talked to feel that there has been little change in attitudes in practice. While implementation of some of the beneficial changes approved by the Oversight Team has begun, implementation of others appears to be lagging. The most critical issues facing the Oversight Team – euthanasia policy and volunteer relations – have yet to be fully addressed by the Oversight Team. At the pace we are going, it also strongly appears that not all recommendations in the AHA report will be addressed during the remaining life of the Oversight Team process. Much less will the Oversight Team be able to meaningfully oversee or monitor implementation of its recommendations on many subjects in the time remaining. No doubt some of these issues will be addressed in coming Oversight Team meetings, and some reprioritization of goals may be necessary. Nevertheless, it seems clear that despite the magnitude of effort to date, more remains to be done than can effectively be accomplished during the remaining life of the Oversight Team process.

Some members of the Oversight Team are concerned that creating an Animal Commission while the Oversight Team is still meeting may result in a work overload for County staff and Oversight Team members. With all due respect for these concerns, they are not well founded. As a practical matter, if the Board creates an Animal Commission in February, 2017, appointments are not likely to be completed and actual meetings begun until March, 2017 at the earliest. The first steps of an intelligent commission will undoubtedly be to bring themselves up to speed on Animal Services existing policies and operations, familiarize themselves with non-profit partners involved in animal care, and review existing information and reports, including, no doubt, the AHA report and Oversight Team reports. The Animal Commission will hopefully then be in a position to begin taking meaningful action in June, 2017, when the Oversight Team process reaches its conclusion. The Board should be far more worried about a loss of momentum and public support if there is a long hiatus before the Animal Commission becomes effective than we are about a relatively short overlap in time between the existence of the Oversight Team and the Animal Commission.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these comments and suggestions. In closing, I again hope that the Board will take some decisive action at the October 4, 2016 hearing to place the Animal Commission back on track for formal Board action early in the coming year, and to direct Public Health and the Oversight Team to conduct a meaningful public process to develop options for Board consideration at that time.

Sincerely,



Philip A. Seymour