

# Darcie Barnes, DVM, MPVM

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Date: March 28, 2017

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors  
c/o Clerk of the Board  
105 E. Anapamu Street  
Room 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors:

My name is Darcie Barnes and as some of you may know, I am the only veterinarian currently serving on the Animal Services Oversight Team. Although some of you may be aware of my background, I will repeat it here so that I can introduce myself to the new Supervisors.

I worked full time from July 1993 until February 2014 in Santa Barbara County humane societies and animal shelters. I was Director of Veterinary Services at Santa Barbara Humane Society for 12 years, was the first full time veterinarian at the new Santa Maria Shelter for 3 years, and worked as the sole veterinarian at Santa Ynez Valley Humane Society for 6 years. For 4 years, I worked one day a week at Animal Services in Santa Maria, and am currently working on an "as needed basis" for Animal Services. When I was employed full time at the Santa Maria Shelter I regularly rotated between Santa Maria, Lompoc and also had intermittent duties at the Santa Barbara Shelter both with the dogs and at ASAP.

Since my practice has been exclusively in animal shelters and humane societies, my training and expertise is also in this area. In addition to my veterinary role, I have been involved in nearly every aspect of sheltering during my career: administration, shelter management, operations, volunteer management, and training.

I have also volunteered. I am a former Board member for the Santa Ynez Valley Humane Society (10 years) and am a current Board member for ResQcats (about 7 years).

The Oversight Team has been a wonderful opportunity to work on the AHA recommendations, big and small, and assist in improving Santa Barbara County Animal Services. I agreed with nearly all of the their recommendations, except for a few that

wouldn't be practical or fit our unique County structure. Although we haven't covered all the topics, we have covered most and have been dedicated to finding positive solutions. Finding positive solutions has often been a challenge considering our diverse and occasionally opinionated and contentious group. The inclusion of a mediator was an excellent idea because we all learned to listen and speak freely and openly about often emotional topics upon which there was initially little agreement. We would not have been nearly as productive without Dr. Nadler's guidance.

I am a member of the Oversight Team's Governance and Animal Welfare Commission sub-committee.

There was reasonably good agreement about maintaining and working within our unique governance structure both in the sub-committee and the overall Oversight Team. The sub-committee discussed the Animal Services On-line Survey put out by Public Health to get input from the animal welfare community as well as our hybrid model of governance and how it could be strengthened to function in a fiscally responsible way in today's budget climate. We developed a list of recommendations and suggestions that need further exploration to determine their feasibility.

Our reasonably good agreement about governance was not duplicated in the Animal Welfare Commission discussions where we achieved no consensus despite repeated efforts to do so. The wide spectrum of opinions ranged from no Commission at all to a large Commission with lots of powers and responsibilities. I think most agreed that there has been excellent progress in Animal Services as a result of the Oversight Committee and the flexible and co-operative response from Animal Services and the Public Health Department and that an advisory group has the potential to maintain that progress. We all want to ensure Animal Services will continue to improve for the benefit of Santa Barbara County animals.

The central problem in discussing and agreeing on an Animal Welfare Commission was disagreement over AHA's observation that external community members exert undue influence on Animal Services and AHA's suggestion that Animal Services needs to develop and be guided by its own chain of command and resolve problems internally through normal agency resolution procedures.

There was a wide range of viewpoints.

At one extreme, one group felt having a bureaucracy in charge is detrimental to the welfare of animals in Santa Barbara County and outside, appointed, interested parties are in a better position to make decisions and monitor Animal Services activities.

At the other end of the spectrum, another group felt no separate Advisory Commission was needed at all and everything should be handled internally. This point of view was driven by and reflected the strong fear that setting up an Advisory Commission might perpetuate the “undue external interference” that AHA indicated was a weakness and cautioned against, and that many of us in the animal welfare community have seen as a detriment to Animal Services for a long time. I discussed what I think are the origins and perpetuation of this outside interference in my letter to the Board of Supervisors dated 9/29/16, written for the 10/4/16 Board of Supervisors meeting, and won’t belabor them here.

In the middle of the spectrum was a group who believes that Animal Services is best able to make its own decisions and serve the entire County equally with advice as needed from an Advisory Committee without disproportionate external control. This group maintains that there should be an Advisory Committee (not Commission), appointed by Animal Services staff and Public Health, composed of County Staff, representatives from internal partners and interested external stakeholders.

It could likely include (at least initially) members that served on the Oversight Team, with new members added gradually by a process of nomination by members of the Advisory Committee or Animal Services, temporary inclusion on the Committee pending approval by the Committee, Animal Services and the Department of Public Health. I see building on the Oversight Team structure as a real strength because, thanks to Dr. Nadler, the Oversight Team has already built communication skills, knows the issues in depth and is eager to move forward in a positive way.

The middle ground Advisory Committee would build upon and support Animal Services’ existing expertise, act as an ongoing place for open dialog and serve as a vehicle for self-review, examining new ideas and keeping pace with current trends and knowledge about animal welfare, while maintaining an appropriate organizational style.

Its role would be to advise the Board of Supervisors, the Public Health Department and Animal Services by recommending programs, best practices and policies. The Committee would ensure that the actions of Animal Services are consistent with our community’s standards for the care, safety and welfare of animals. It would also assist in maintaining communication and collaboration with other animal welfare groups and stakeholders in Santa Barbara County. Additionally, this model could act in the case of complaints unresolved through the normal chain by creating constructive, positive solutions and answers for community members concerned about Animal Services’ policies, decisions and perceived omissions.

Although it would have influence many areas, this Advisory Committee would have no

responsibility for the day-to-day operations and functions of Animal Services.

I am in strong support of the middle ground model Advisory Committee. I think it is the most inclusive model and the one closest to the AHA recommendations about chain of command, responsibility and accountability and welfare of the animals. It incorporates the valuable expertise and experience gained by the Oversight Committee, Animal Services and the Public Health Department. It perpetuates the positive solution orientation and cooperation that has been nearly two years in the making while adding new blood and perspectives and making sure everyone has a say. I think it is the best option for Santa Barbara County and our beloved animals as we move forward from the Oversight Team.

Thank you so much for reading this letter and letting me be a part of the Oversight Team process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darcie Barnes".

Darcie Barnes, DVM, MPVM