

THE GRASS VALLEY ANIMAL SHELTER

Missed Opportunities

SUMMARY

The Nevada County Grand Jury (Jury) investigated and compared public animal shelters within Nevada County. The Jury visited the three public animal control/shelter facilities in the County and determined that the Grass Valley Shelter has room for improvement. Deficiencies include a high rate of euthanasia, lack of a fully-accountable spay/neuter program, inadequate health and welfare practices and incomplete recordkeeping practices. This shelter also misses out on the potential benefit of volunteers.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

Three public animal shelters exist within the County of Nevada: Grass Valley, Truckee, and the third services Nevada County. (Grass Valley provides animal control services for Nevada City.) In recent years animal control in the County has received considerable attention in the local press. Additionally, after 37 years under the direction of one individual, a management change has recently taken place at the Grass Valley shelter. The Jury determined this justified a review.

BACKGROUND

Animal Control personnel of the three jurisdictions have similar enforcement and control responsibilities. Sheltering is handled in differing ways. Emphasis of the Jury's investigation was on sheltering. Sheltering includes the intake and disposition of strays and unwanted animals.

Truckee Animal Services has two animal control officers, one kennel attendant and one administrative secretary. Animal Services in the Town of Truckee are managed by the Community Development Department. The shelter took in 410 animals in fiscal year 2007/08.

Nevada County Animal Control and Protection has four animal control officers, one field services officer, 1.5 FTE kennel attendant positions and two office assistants. The Nevada County Sheriff's Office oversees the activities of Animal Control and Protection at the County shelter. The shelter took in 1,433 animals in fiscal year 2007/08.

Grass Valley Animal Control has three animal control officer positions and limited clerical services. Animal Control reports to the Grass Valley Police Department. The shelter took in 416 animals in fiscal year 2007/08.

PROCEDURE FOLLOWED

The Jury conducted its investigation through interviews, and Jury teams made visits to the shelters over a period of several months. The Jury interviewed managers and staff members of the shelters as well as animal welfare advocates. The Jury reviewed a variety of regulatory and advisory documents from sources including: the Humane Society of the United States, the National Animal Control Association, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the American Humane Association, among others.

Animal intake/disposition records, provided by staff of the jurisdictions involved, were inspected. The Jury also examined environmental health and treatment of the animals at the shelters as well as euthanasia rates. The spay/neuter practices of each shelter were also assessed. Based on this information, the Grass Valley shelter operations stood in contrast to the other public shelters within Nevada County. The focus of this report is the Grass Valley Animal Shelter. The two other public shelters in Nevada County are referenced as needed for comparison purposes.

For ease of understanding, the report is divided into four categories:

- A. Spay/Neuter Programs
- B. Euthanasia Rates
- C. Health and Welfare of Animals
- D. Records Management

All findings refer to the Grass Valley Animal Shelter unless otherwise noted.

A. SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAMS

When and if the population of the County of Nevada exceeds 100,000, the three public shelters will be required to spay/neuter all animals prior to release, barring a medical reason not to do so [California Law, Food and Agriculture Codes Section 30503 (dogs) and Section 31751.3 (cats)]. Both The Town of Truckee and the Nevada County shelter voluntarily comply now, ensuring that all stray and unwanted animals are spayed/neutered prior to adoption.

As of January 1, 2008, the State Department of Finance estimated Nevada County's population to be 99,186.

The Jury recognizes that overpopulation of animals is a significant problem, and a contributing factor to animal cruelty. The California Legislature recognized this fact as reflected in Section 1 of historical and statutory notes, Stats. 1998, c. 747 (AB 1856):

Section 1(a): “The Legislature finds and declares that overpopulation of dogs and cats in California is a problem of great public concern. The overpopulation causes public health problems, adversely affects city and county animal control departments, and results in needlessly euthanized dogs and cats.

Section 1(b): It is the intent of the Legislature, by enacting this act, to reduce the number of unwanted dogs and cats in California. In order to reduce the number of stray dogs and cats on the streets, and the number euthanized in shelters each year, the birth rate must be reduced. Although the point may seem obvious, humans generally give birth to a single offspring, while dogs and cats give birth to litters. Additionally, dogs and cats reach sexual maturity relatively young and their gestation periods are comparatively short.

The single most effective prevention of overpopulation among dogs and cats is spaying and neutering.”

Findings

- A – 1. The Grass Valley shelter does not spay/neuter animals prior to adoption.
- A – 2. The Grass Valley shelter collects a refundable spay/neuter deposit when intact animals are adopted.
- A – 3. Grass Valley Department of Finance records indicate that not all adopters collect spay/neuter deposit refunds.

Conclusions

- A --1. Reliance on adopters to spay/neuter their animals is not a guarantee it will be done.
- A – 2. The Grass Valley shelter does not know how many of the animals adopted from their facility were spayed/neutered.

Recommendations

- A - 1. The Grass Valley shelter should institute a program to spay/neuter all animals prior to adoption.

B. EUTHANASIA RATES

All shelters find it necessary to euthanize some animals, primarily for medical reasons and/or aggression.

Findings

- B –1. The Grass Valley shelter routinely euthanizes feral cats; the other shelters in the County do not.
- B – 2. Three days are allowed to assess whether a cat is feral.
- B – 3. The shelter took in 416 animals in fiscal year 2007/2008
- B – 4. During fiscal year 2007/2008, 85 cats and 13 dogs were euthanized.
- B– 5. Using information provided by the Grass Valley shelter, the Jury calculated a euthanasia rate of 24%. This is in contrast to the Nevada County shelter euthanasia rate (3.1 %) and the Truckee shelter rate (1.7 %) for the same time period.

Conclusions

- B- 1. The euthanasia rate at the Grass Valley shelter is significantly higher than the other shelters in Nevada County.
- B- 2. The lower rate of euthanasia at the other two shelters implies there are alternatives to euthanasia.

Recommendation

- B- 1. The Grass Valley Animal Shelter should consult with other shelters regarding alternatives to euthanasia.

C. HEALTH AND WELFARE OF ANIMALS

People on-site at the shelters handle the day-to-day responsibilities of running a shelter. However, human interaction with the animals is equally important. Animal stress is alleviated, intellectual stimulation and socialization is provided and animals are afforded more opportunities for exercise. The Town of Truckee and Nevada County both use volunteers to supplement staff and care for the animals. As stated in the Humane Society of the United States Guidelines for the Operation of an animal shelter, the shelter "...should be a place of safety and comfort for the animals."

For each of the shelters, the Jury observed that kennels were clean, and the basics of food and water were provided.

Findings

- C – 1. The Grass Valley shelter does not use a volunteer program. Truckee and Nevada County shelters have active volunteer programs to supplement staff.
- C – 2. Hours for public access to the Grass Valley shelter are limited and inconsistent.
- C – 3. Animals are not vaccinated and not generally quarantined upon entry to the shelter.
- C – 4. No common area exists for cats to move about for exercise and socialization.

- C – 5. Dog enclosures do provide both indoor and outdoor accommodations. However, there is no established program for walking the dogs.
- C - 6. Limited or no bedding for the animals was observed.
- C – 7. A small amount of litter is provided in each cat cage.
- C – 8. Unused space in the shelter was observed.
- C – 9. Public boarding is allowed.

Conclusions

- C – 1. The Grass Valley shelter’s decision to not use volunteers limits its ability to offer increased and consistent hours for the public, needed exercise for the animals and day-to-day assistance for a limited staff.
- C – 2. Failure to vaccinate animals increases the probability of spreading disease throughout the shelter.
- C – 3. There is minimal socialization and exercise for both dogs and cats.
- C – 4. Bedding is inadequate to provide comfort.
- C – 5. Cats are not provided sufficient litter.
- C – 6. Space is available in the shelter to provide common areas for animals.
- C – 7. It is inappropriate for a publicly funded facility to compete with the private sector for the boarding of animals.

Recommendations

The Grass Valley Animal Shelter should:

- C – 1. Create a volunteer program at the Grass Valley Animal Shelter. Neighboring animal shelters could provide assistance in developing and establishing a program.
- C – 2. Use volunteers to enhance and provide twice daily socialization and exercise for dogs.
- C – 3. Extend and provide consistent public hours at the shelter.
- C – 4. Vaccinate for basic diseases.
- C - 5. Provide adequate bedding for the comfort of the dogs and cats.
- C - 6. Ensure there is sufficient litter in the cat cages to contain excreta.
- C – 7. Create a common area for cats utilizing available space.
- C - 8. Discontinue public boarding.

D. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Findings

- D – 1. An analysis of the Grass Valley shelter’s intake records for fiscal year 2007/08 showed that intake/disposition records were not being completely filled out. These records are hand written and less than half of the animals could be tracked from intake to disposition.

D – 2. No recent fee analysis has been conducted.

Conclusions

- D – 1. Thorough record keeping is necessary for proper management of the shelter.
- D - 2. Missing items on forms, such as bite history, present liability issues.
- D - 3. Increased fees could defray the cost of spaying/neutering the animals prior to adoption.

Recommendations

The Grass Valley Animal Shelter should:

- D – 1. Completely fill out and automate records so that each animal can be tracked from intake to disposition.
- D - 2. Review and update the fee schedule to determine if fees are sufficient.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

City Council, City of Grass Valley September 14, 2009



A CENTENNIAL CITY

GRASS VALLEY CITY COUNCIL
125 East Main St., Grass Valley, CA 95945

Office of the Mayor

Council Members
Lisa Swarthout, Mayor
Jan Arbuckle, Vice Mayor
Chauncey Poston
Dan Miller
Yolanda Cookson

Daniel C. Holler, City Administrator

September 1, 2009

The Honorable Robert L. Tamietti
Presiding Judge of the Grand Jury
201 Church Street
Nevada City, California 95959

SEP - 4 2009 *Rec'd HS*

Dear Judge Tamietti:

Please find enclosed the City of Grass Valley's response to the Nevada County Civil Grand Jury report on the Grass Valley Animal Shelter as published on May 12, 2009.

On August 11, 2009, during a regular session of the Grass Valley City Council, members of the City Council unanimously approved the responses provided by the Grass Valley Police Department on behalf of the Animal Shelter to the findings and recommendations contained in the Civil Grand Jury report.

On behalf of the City of Grass Valley, I extend to you our appreciation for the efforts of the Civil Grand Jury in preparing their report.

Regards,

Lisa Swarthout
Lisa Swarthout, Mayor

Enclosure

City of Grass Valley
Grass Valley Police Department
Grass Valley Animal Shelter

Rec'd by court 9/14/09
by Grand Jury 9/16/0

Response to Nevada County Grand Jury

Please find contained herein the formal responses from the City of Grass Valley, the Grass Valley Police Department and the Grass Valley Animal Shelter with respect to the published findings and recommendations of the Nevada County Grand Jury's report on the Grass Valley Animal Shelter dated May 13, 2009.

In accordance with California Penal Code Section 933.05, we submit the following:

A. SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAMS

FINDINGS:

A 1. The Grass Valley shelter does not spay/neuter animals prior to adoption.

AGREE

A 2. The Grass Valley shelter supports a spay/neuter program through the collection of a refundable spay/neuter deposit when intact animals are adopted. The deposit is refunded upon having the animal spayed/neutered.

AGREE

A 3. Grass Valley Department of Finance records indicate that not all adopters collect spay/neuter deposit refunds.

AGREE

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A 1. The Grass Valley shelter should institute a program to spay/neuter all animals prior to adoption.

The recommendation requires further analysis to include development and completion of Requests For Proposals (RFP) for spay/neuter services. The RFPs will need to be evaluated for costs, level of services, potential liabilities and risks to the City, animals and those adopting the animal. This process (expected to take six months or less) is underway at this time. It should be noted that the City of Grass Valley is not required to provide spay/neuter services based upon Nevada County population data as cited under California Food and Agricultural Code Sections 30521 and 31761. (See attachment - Appendix A). A spay/neuter program is under review and will be considered as one of the means available to manage animal population in the City and surrounding county area.

City of Grass Valley
Grass Valley Police Department
Grass Valley Animal Shelter

Response to Nevada County Grand Jury

B. EUTHANASIA RATES

FINDINGS:

- B1. The Grass Valley shelter routinely euthanizes feral cats; the other shelters in the County do not.

DISAGREE - A large number of feral cats received by the shelter have been routinely provided to patrons through an established "waiting list" who have expressed an interest in this type of cat and have accommodations to provide for them (ranch, farm, etc.). Those cats that are not "adopted out" in this fashion are then subject to euthanizing through approved methods.

- B2. Three days are allowed to assess whether a cat is feral.

AGREE

- B3. The shelter took in 416 animals in fiscal year 2007/2008.

AGREE

- B4. During fiscal year 2007/2008, 85 cats and 13 dogs were euthanized.

AGREE

- B5. Using information provided by the Grass Valley shelter, the Jury calculated a euthanasia rate of 24%. This is in contrast to the Nevada County shelter euthanasia rate (3.1 %) and the Truckee shelter rate (1.7 %) for the same time period.

AGREE - In part only as to the calculated rate for our Shelter; data was not provided for City review to support the calculated rates for the comparison shelters noted. The reason for the euthanizing action was also not stated.

RECOMMENDATION:

- B1. The Grass Valley Animal Shelter should consult with other shelters regarding alternatives to euthanasia.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future with an expected time frame of not more than six months.

City of Grass Valley
Grass Valley Police Department
Grass Valley Animal Shelter

Response to Nevada County Grand Jury

C. HEALTH AND WELFARE OF ANIMALS

FINDINGS:

- C1. The Grass Valley shelter does not use a volunteer program. Truckee and Nevada County shelters have active volunteer programs to supplement staff.

AGREE

- C2. Hours for public access to the Grass Valley shelter are limited and inconsistent.

DISAGREE - Hours of operation are consistent and readily posted for customer convenience. Hours are limited in part due to limited staffing levels and call response. Staffing levels have been reduced by one full-time supervising animal control officer position this past fiscal year.

- C3. Animals are not vaccinated and not generally quarantined upon entry to the shelter.

AGREE

- C4. No common area exists for cats to move about for exercise and socialization.

AGREE

- C5. Dog enclosures do provide both indoor and outdoor accommodations. However, there is no established program for walking the dogs.

AGREE

- C6. Limited or no bedding for the animals was observed.

DISAGREE - Animals are provided with appropriate bedding.

- C7. A small amount of litter is provided in each cat cage.

DISAGREE - Cats are provided with appropriate quantities of litter.

- C8. Unused space in the shelter was observed.

AGREE - While space was not being used during visit, the space is used as needed and allows for public boarding of animals upon request. Space also allows for growth in shelter activities.

- C9. Public boarding is allowed.

AGREE

City of Grass Valley
Grass Valley Police Department
Grass Valley Animal Shelter

Response to Nevada County Grand Jury

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- C1. Create a volunteer program at the Grass Valley Animal Shelter. Neighboring animal shelters could provide assistance in developing and establishing a program.

The recommendation requires further analysis including, but not limited to, the identification of a job description and/or scope of work to be performed, development of training program, policy and procedures, and designation of supervision responsibility of a volunteer program at the Shelter. Program development includes review of related risks associated with volunteers in the handling of animals and any potential liability to the City. The Police Department is in the process of expanding its volunteer program. The program will ultimately be expanded to the Shelter.

- C2. Use volunteers to enhance and provide twice daily socialization and exercise for dogs.

The recommendation requires further analysis including, but not limited to, the identification of a job description and/or scope of work to be performed, supervision of a volunteer program at the Shelter, related risks associated with volunteers in the handling of animals, and any potential liability to the City.

- C3. Extend and provide consistent public hours at the shelter.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted based upon current and established public hours and limitations of staff personnel.

- C4. Vaccinate for basic diseases.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted as the Shelter is not designed for the provision of medical care, long term boarding or diagnosis of animals. Taking on additional medical care of animals is not achievable under current funding levels.

- C5. Provide adequate bedding for the comfort of the dogs and cats.

The recommendation has been implemented through past and existing practices. Care for animals is adequate and appropriate bedding material is provided.

- C6. Ensure there is sufficient litter in the cat cages to contain excreta.

The recommendation has been implemented through past and existing practices.

City of Grass Valley
Grass Valley Police Department
Grass Valley Animal Shelter

Response to Nevada County Grand Jury

- C7. Create a common area for cats utilizing available space.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted and would allow for the greater potential exchange of disease, increased violence between animals and may allow not already spayed or neutered animals to cohabitate in the common area.

- C8. Discontinue public boarding.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted and is not justified by the Grand Jury's report. This is a service that benefits the community and the Shelter.

D. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

FINDINGS:

- D1. An analysis of the Grass Valley shelter's intake records for fiscal year 2007/08 showed that intake/disposition records were not being completely filled out. These records are hand written and less than half of the animals could be tracked from intake to disposition.

AGREE

- D2. No recent fee analysis has been conducted.

DISAGREE - A formal "Cost of Services Study" was conducted in March 2005 by Revenue & Cost Specialists, LLC followed by a report submission to the Grass Valley City Council. Additionally, a fee analysis is conducted internally on an annual basis with any recommended adjustments being submitted for formal review and action by City Council. Minor fee adjustments have been made as part of the current budget approvals. The original fee analysis was not fully implemented and the City at the time determined to charge a reduced fee.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- D1. Completely fill out and automate records so that each animal can be tracked from intake to disposition.

The recommendation had been initiated prior to this report with manual completion of existing forms pending the complete automation of this function.

- D2. Review and update the fee schedule to determine if fees are sufficient.

The recommendation had been initiated prior to this report and is a recurring step in the annual budget preparation by the Grass Valley Police Department.



GRASS VALLEY CITY COUNCIL
125 East Main St., Grass Valley, CA 95945

Office of the Mayor

Council Members
Lisa Swarthout, Mayor
Jan Arbuckle, Vice Mayor
Chauncey Poston
Dan Miller
Yolanda Cookson

A CENTENNIAL CITY

Daniel C. Holler, City Administrator

November 20, 2009

The Honorable Robert L. Tamietti
Presiding Judge of the Grand Jury
201 Church Street
Nevada City, California 95959

Dear Judge Tamietti:

Please be advised that the City of Grass Valley is in receipt of a letter dated November 4, 2009 from Robert Erickson - Foreman of the Nevada County Civil Grand Jury. In his letter, Mr. Erickson requests an update on the recommendations for Spay and Neutering services at the Grass Valley Animal Shelter in accordance with Section 933.05 (b)(3).

In response to this item, I have confirmed with Captain Rex Marks of the Grass Valley Police Department that the Animal Shelter did, in fact, institute a program to address this issue in September. The Shelter secured agreements with several area veterinarians as well as Animal Save to provide services on an "as needed" basis. The Shelter now maintains a menu from which the customers may select a service provider that meets with their budgets. Animals are then transported to the selected provider by Shelter staff and picked up by the adopting customer. Thus far, the program has been relatively well received by customers frequenting our Shelter. Captain Marks and his staff will continue to monitor the program and ensure its success.

On behalf of the City of Grass Valley, we appreciate the efforts of the Civil Grand Jury.

Regards,


Lisa Swarthout, Mayor

Cc: Robert Erickson, Grand Jury Foreman

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