



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY
2019-2020

**Conditions at Solano County
Animal Shelter**

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I. SUMMARY

In accordance with California Penal Code §925(a), the 2019-2020 Solano County Civil Grand Jury conducted an inquiry into the conditions of the County Animal Shelter located at 2510 Clay Bank Road in Fairfield, California. For the past two decades, the Solano County Civil Grand Jury has recommended changes not only for the facility but also for the system of processing animals.

II. INTRODUCTION

Solano County Animal Care Services and Shelter provides animal services to all seven cities in the County. It is responsible for tracking rabies vaccinations, dog licensing, the care and housing of stray, quarantined or impounded animals, as well as enforcement of State and County laws pertaining to animal control. In an effort to defray the costs of caring for abandoned or stray animals, the Animal Shelter has begun offering spay and neutering services. In the past two decades, the Solano County Civil Grand Jury has conducted several inquiries and investigations into the animal services in the County. Previous Grand Juries found Solano County's animal care and control services ineffective in meeting the needs of the community and recommended the facilities be replaced.

III. METHODOLOGY

Tour:

Solano County Animal Shelter

Interview:

Shelter staff

Websites:

www.mk2eng.com > portfolio_GM_Solano County Animal Care Services

https://www.solanocounty.com/sheriff/animalcare/general_information

<https://www.dailyrepublic.com/featured-stories/animal-shelter-renovati...>

<https://www.dailyrepublic.com/all-dr-news/solano-news/solano-county/county-cities-look-at-animal-shelter-renovation/>

<http://www.solanocounty.com/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?blobid=6451>

Solano County Civil Grand Jury Animal Care Services Report 2012-2013

Solano County Civil Grand Jury Animal Care/Animal Control Report 2017-2018

IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

The buildings housing the shelter have been in service since 1986. For decades, recommendations have been made to address the deficiencies at the Solano County Animal Shelter, including:

- The 2006-2007 Solano County Civil Grand Jury reported the facility as “inadequate in size and design.” The Grand Jury recommended making construction of a new shelter a “high priority.”
- The 2006-2007 Solano County Civil Grand Jury found that among the major issues facing the County was that the building containing the kennels had been deemed as “inadequate in size and design.”
- In July 2007, the seven cities in the County were asked to participate in the development of the Animal Care Facilities Master Plan (Master Plan) to find solutions for the housing of the animal population and to appoint a staff member to be part of the process.
- In June 2008, after an open solicitation process for the development of the Master Plan, the Board of Supervisors approved the selection of DLR Group Inc. of Sacramento to prepare the Master Plan.
- On June 22, 2009, the Master Plan presented to the Solano County Board of Supervisors included three recommendations for consideration:
 1. Replace the existing facility
 2. Substantially refurbish the existing facility
 3. Supplement the existing facility

The research to develop the plan indicated the existing shelter had “reached the end of its useful existence.” The research supported the recommendation that a new facility be established that would implement best practices in animal care and offer “humane care and compassionate customer service.” Additionally, the Master Plan recommended the new shelter provide a high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter clinic. The new facility would be located on a five-acre site that was to be central to the population and visible to passing traffic. The overall project costs were set at:

- Total Project Approach: \$27,967,400 - \$34,182,800 (3 Years)
- Total Phased Approach: \$29,542,300 - \$36,107,600 (5 Years)
- The proposed 2010-2011 County budget listed various issues facing animal care services.
- In December 2010, the County found mold infestation in the administration building. The building was destroyed and “temporarily” replaced with a modular building.
- In 2011, the Master Plan proposal to build a new animal shelter costing \$27 million to \$33.8 million at a new location was rejected due to concerns stemming from the economic crisis the area was facing. The County opted to refurbish the existing shelter, at the current Clay Bank Road site sandwiched in between the county jail and a Fairfield-Suisun School District bus yard.
- In 2011, the County and its seven cities opted to accept the plan to use tilt-up steel structures (series of concrete panels tilted up into place to form a building's exterior wall). One structure would be used for administration and veterinarian services and another for kennels, instead of the new animal shelter envisioned in the 2009 Master Plan.
- In 2015, the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to cover overruns and changes to the Solano County animal shelter expansion project. Although

originally budgeted at \$5.15 million, unanticipated expenses raised the cost to \$7.22 million. Mechanical system revisions, unforeseen site work, increased water connection fees and marketplace increases for materials and labor accounted for the overruns. Further, there was a need for heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems for the shelter building at just short of a million dollars. Funding for the additional costs came from a combination of public facilities fees and capital project funds. The capital project funds came from funds approved by the Board of Supervisors in the 2010-2011 fiscal year budget. An additional \$100,000 in capital project funds had already been approved by the Board for use in funding the heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems in the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

- By the time the 2017-2018 Civil Grand Jury toured the Animal Shelter facility, the Administration Office was relocated to a permanent structure.
- When the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury toured the facility, the Animal Shelter Administration Office was once again in a “temporary” modular building.

Staffing is an issue. According to Shelter administrators, at least one more employee would make a huge difference in conducting the business of the shelter. They also affirmed that the positions at the facility tend to be stepping stones to positions in other county departments. They went on to speculate that one reason employees do not remain is due to the conditions of the facility.

Originally the shelter was open six days a week. Because of budget cuts, the staff was reduced from six to five people and the shelter hours were reduced to five days a week. Administrators feel that increasing the staff would allow the shelter to once again open six days a week, instead of five. The five-days-a-week schedule was designed to save money, but the new schedule allows fewer opportunities for the public to see and adopt animals. That means the shelter has to hold animals an extra day leading to extra costs to the shelter; therefore, any possible savings are eliminated.

Work is complete on two of the three phases of the animal shelter expansion project. Phases 1 and 2 included site work, relocation of the “temporary” modular building used for administrative offices, and design and construction of a new 12,500-square-foot kennel at the existing Clay Bank Road site. The new kennel building includes a spay/neuter clinic that not only offers service to animals up for adoption but also to pet owners who bring in their animals for that service. The spay/neuter clinic (see Figure 1) is designed to generate revenue for the shelter and help defray the shelter’s operational costs.

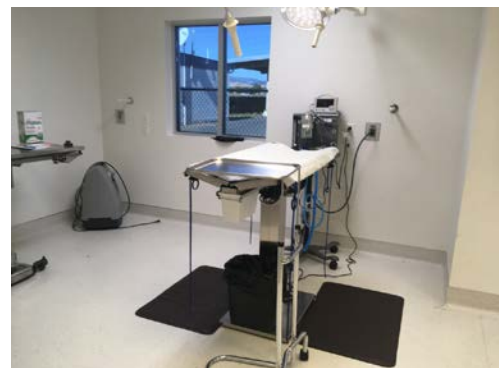


Figure 1 Clinic Operating Room

In 2012, Solano County entered into a \$5.15 million agreement with the seven cities of the County for animal care and sheltering services from 2012 through 2027. The approved project was funded by the issuance of certificates of participation with the member cities reimbursing the County for their portions of the costs over the term of the agreement.

Although improvements are slowly coming to fruition, there are still issues within the facility that have little to do with funding. While the improvements to the building are due to be completed by the end of 2020, the issue of maintaining cleanliness in the cages (see Figure 2), particularly for stray dogs, will not be solved by building a new facility.



Figure 2 Unsanitary Cage

During a recent tour of the facility, the 2019-2020 Solano County Civil Grand Jury found that it was not only cold, but there was evidence of rodent infestation with rat/mouse droppings in the living environment of the confined animals. In addition, the majority of the cages of the confined stray dogs were so full of water that most of the dogs were standing on their steel framed elevated dog beds to keep out of the water (see Figure 3). In many cases, the dog beds were full of feces, evidence that the dogs were avoiding the water in their cages and were relieving themselves on their beds. Staff explained that these cages were cleaned once a day; however, the cages of the dogs that were up for adoption (and therefore more likely to be seen by the public) were cleaned two to three times a day.



Figure 3 Standing water

Dogs that have been deemed vicious are quarantined in small cages and not exercised. The reason given was that the dogs were too vicious to handle. According to animal behaviorists and veterinarians, lack of exercise can contribute to aggression as excess energy can cause the dog to perform undesirable behaviors.

According to Shelter administrators, feral cats are the number one issue in the shelter's population. Of the 8,900 animals received each year at the shelter approximately 6,000 are cats. Administrators feel it would make a vast difference if they were able to stop accepting feral cats. They emphasized that there are enough community cat programs to deal with the feline population. The Grand Jury observed several feeding stations for feral cats outside of the Shelter's Administration Building.



Figure 4 Cat section

The Animal Shelter has some very nice cages housing cats that are available for adoption (see Figure 4). They include scratching posts and climbing towers for the “cat residents.” That area containing the upgraded amenities for the felines was privately funded specifically for cats.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING 1 – The area designated for stray dogs exhibits evidence of rodent infestation, creating an unhealthy environment for both the animals and staff.

RECOMMENDATION 1 – Clean the area and rid it of rodents.

FINDING 2 – The cages for stray dogs are cold and contain puddles of standing water creating an unnecessarily uncomfortable and unhealthy environment for the animals.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Rid the cages of the puddles of standing water.

FINDING 3– All the cages for the stray dogs were littered with feces, creating an unhealthy environment.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – Clean the cages as often as the cages for the adoptable animals.

COMMENT

Although the Shelter address is technically on Clay Bank Road, clearer directions are necessary since it is not physically located on Clay Bank. Visitors need to turn right at the second intersection on Clay Bank Road onto Fonstal Way. The Shelter is located on the left side of the roundabout.

REQUIRED RESPONSES (ALL FINDINGS)

Solano County Sheriff’s Office

COURTESY COPIES

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

Benicia City Manager

Dixon City Manager

Fairfield City Manager

Rio Vista City Manager

City of Suisun City Manager

Vacaville City Manager

Vallejo City Manager