

**Solano County General Services Department
Animal Care Services Division
2009-2010 Grand Jury Report**

REASON FOR INQUIRY

Under the authority of California Penal Code §925a, the 2009-2010 Grand Jury elected to inquire and report on animal control in Solano County with specific attention to the outsourcing for licensing of dogs and cats.

California Health & Safety Code 121690 provides that "...every owner of dogs older than four months shall get a new dog license at least once every two years as provided by ordinance of the responsible city, city and county or county. Also, every dog owner shall, at intervals of time not more often than once a year, vaccinate his or her dog against Rabies. Any dog in violation of this chapter and any additional provisions that may be prescribed by any local governing body shall be impounded, as provided by local ordinance."

GRAND JURY ACTIONS

- Visited the Solano County Animal Shelter
- Interviewed the Manager of Animal Care Services Division
- Toured the Animal Shelter
- Visited Humane Animal Services Office in Vacaville, California

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The primary reason for dog licensing is to enforce the California Rabies vaccination laws. Rabies is transmitted through saliva from the bite of an infected animal. Although rare in occurrence, Rabies is fatal to humans if not treated in a timely manner. Vaccination is the only viable control measure.

Licensing serves a number of purposes in addition to enforcing vaccination. Owner information on the license tag required to be worn by the animal provides a way to identify the owner. Animal Control Officers rely on the tag to establish that the Rabies vaccination is current, and to identify owners of stray pets.

Solano County Animal Care Services Division (Animal Care) is responsible for enforcing the State and County laws governing licensing laws in all areas of Solano County with the exception of Vallejo and Benicia. Those two cities have their own program for licensing enforcement, stray and surrendered animal management. County Animal Control Officers perform enforcement duties in all unincorporated areas. Humane Animal Services, a private company based in Vacaville, performs all enforcement duties in Dixon, Rio Vista, Vacaville, Fairfield and Suisun City.

Animal Care operates out of the facility located on Claybank Road in Fairfield. Staff includes 16 permanent and 4 part time employees. Three of the 16 permanent employees are Solano County Animal Control Officers and are POST Certified peace officers while on duty. They are responsible for enforcing all animal control laws in

unincorporated areas. They are also responsible for Rabies laws everywhere in the County with regard to animal bite reports.

The Animal Care budget for 2009-2010 is approximately \$2.4 million. At the time of this report, the proposed budget for 2010-2011 was \$2.5 million.

LICENSING

In 2002, the decision was made to outsource licensing. The objective was to improve the percentage of pets licensed without increasing costs. A contract was made with PetData, Inc., of Irving, Texas (www.petdata.com). Licensing revenue from the first year of the contract, 2003, was approximately \$240,000. Revenue has increased steadily, with revenue for 2009 at approximately \$601,000. PetData, Inc. earned approximately \$78,000 for their work in 2009. It was pointed out that it would require at least two full time employees plus assorted administrative and supply expenses to provide the same level of service. It is estimated that PetData, Inc.'s fee is well below half the cost of doing the job "in house."

Approximately 20,000 dogs are licensed in Solano County, an increase of 6,000 (40%) since 2003. There are several elements to the enforcement of the licensing law for the remaining approximately 50,000 dogs. Primary to the effort is the legal requirement for veterinarians to provide the name and address of every dog vaccinated for Rabies. Voluntary licensing by owners who vaccinate their pets themselves and mandatory vaccination for any stray "adopted" from any shelter add to the number. Some veterinarians volunteered the information that many pet owners object to the reporting process as a violation of privacy.

SHELTER FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

In addition to housing strays, surrendered and quarantined animals, Animal Services offers a variety of services including low cost spay/neuter clinics, behavior and obedience training at the shelter, adoption days at local merchant locations, i.e. pet stores, and training programs for schools and civic organizations.

The shelter facilities are stretched to the limit for the demand. Buildings are showing their age, but management and staff maintain them in a safe and sanitary state. A master plan for a new, state-of-the-art facility has been completed for presentation to the Board of Supervisors. The current economic condition will delay the development of a new shelter.

Not all animals surrendered, impounded or captured as stray are adopted. This means that the combination of space restrictions and the current unusual high rate of abandoned and surrendered pets due to the economy have resulted in a high number of animals being euthanized. The annual intake has reached into the 9,000 range in the recent past. In FY2008-2009 about 3,800 dogs were sheltered, and 1,800 were euthanized. About 5,700 cats were sheltered and 4,000 were euthanized. Solano County's euthanasia rate is about 20% higher than similar sized counties in California.

The act of performing euthanasia is so emotionally draining on shelter employees that there is a "quiet" facility for workers who have been personally involved in the process.

COMMENTS

Animal control issues are an ongoing concern to the citizens of Solano County. This inquiry by the Grand Jury finds that the current management and practices of Animal Care Services reveals no need for any action other than to compliment them for their valuable work.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding #1 – Since 2003, the contract obtained from PetData, Inc. has provided significant funds to Solano County through the capture of increased revenue. This is a prime example of the positive aspect of contracting for services.

Recommendation #1 – Solano County should continue its efforts in outsourcing contracted services.

RESPONDING AGENCIES

Solano County General Services Department
Animal Care Services Manager
Solano County Board of Supervisors

COURTESY COPY

Solano County Sheriff's Office

Prior to the finalization, publication and posting of this Grand Jury report, the agency(s) involved had an opportunity to review and comment on the content of the report.