



September 12, 2017

The Honorable John Laettner
Presiding Judge of the Contra Costa Superior Court
A.F. Bray Court House, Department 25
1020 Ward Street
Martinez, CA 94553

Re: Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report: "Animal Shelter Services in Antioch and Contra Costa County" (Report 1708)

Dear Judge Laettner:

On behalf of the Antioch City Council, this letter responds to Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report: "Animal Shelter Services in Antioch and Contra Costa County." The City Council authorized this response at its meeting on August 22, 2017. Pursuant to California Penal Code § 933.05, the City will respond to the applicable findings and recommendations.

Findings:

Finding # 1: "The Shelter has made improvements based on ARF recommendations."

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 2: "The Shelter requires additional funds to implement the changes recommended by ARF."

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 3: "The Shelter is not open to the public after 5:00 p.m."

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 4: "The Shelter lacks a Rescue and Volunteer Coordinator."

The City partially disagrees with this finding.

Antioch Animal Services does not have a paid Rescue or Volunteer Coordinator. However, recognizing the importance of these positions within Animal Services, two volunteers are currently assigned to these positions as a part of their work as volunteers. These volunteers routinely contribute 30-40 hours a week in these capacities.

Finding # 5: “Based on the ‘Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters,’ authored by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, the shelter lacks enough ACAs and volunteers to help with the current population of animals.”

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 6: “The Shelter does not have written policies and procedures regarding animal care.”

The City disagrees with this finding.

As a part of the Shelter’s partnership with ARF, ARF has assisted in the implementation of best practices and creating written protocols for Antioch Animal Services regarding the care of Shelter animals.

Finding # 7: “The Shelter lacks a Director of Animal Services.”

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 8: “The Shelter does not use the Chameleon software program to document the cost of running the Shelter.”

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 9: “The Shelter website does not feature photos of found animals or animals available for adoption or rescue.”

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 10: “The County does not operate an animal shelter in East County.”

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 11: “People from cities, other than Antioch, drop off animals at the Shelter rather than driving them to a County shelter.”

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 12: “The County and the Shelter do not have an agreement that the County will pick up and transport animals left by non-Antioch residents to a County shelter.”

The City agrees with this finding.

Finding # 13: “No formal community-based advisory group monitors animal welfare or Shelter conditions and provides reports to the Council regarding same.”

The City agrees with this finding.

Recommendations

Recommendation # 1: “The Council should consider finding sustainable funding for all of the changes recommended by ARF to the Shelter, including those that the Shelter has already implemented.”

This recommendation requires further analysis.

The City of Antioch is constantly looking for new ways to generate revenue so as to improve on and add to city services, including Animal Services. Given the current economic climate in the City of Antioch, there are no immediate plans for additional funding for the Shelter.

Recommendation # 2: “The Council should consider staggering the Shelter’s hours of operation to include evening hours one day per week to permit those with daytime commitments the opportunity to visit the Shelter.”

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Changing the Shelter hours to include evening hours (one day per week) would have a negative impact on a staff that is already stretched very thin. Changing existing hours would present gaps in current coverage. Essentially, the front counter staff and ACA’s would have to cover a larger period of time. To accomplish this, the Shelter would require additional personnel. Additional staff would require a long term funding source which has not yet been identified.

Recommendation # 3: “If no qualified Antioch Shelter volunteer is available for this position, the Council should consider identifying funds to create a new position for a Volunteer/Rescue Coordinator.”

This recommendation requires further analysis.

The Shelter currently has a volunteer whose dedicated job is as a Volunteer Coordinator and a second volunteer dedicated to the role of Rescue Coordinator. Additional staff would require a long term funding source which has not yet been identified.

Recommendation # 4: “The Council should consider directing the Shelter to develop and implement strategies to enlist more volunteers.”

This recommendation requires further analysis.

With the Shelter’s current situation of utilizing a part-time Volunteer Coordinator, enlisting more volunteers is impractical at this point in time. Additional volunteers would require additional staff resources to supervise, schedule and train. If the Shelter had a full-time Volunteer Coordinator, more emphasis could be placed on adequately utilizing the volunteers that we currently have and possibly adding to our current numbers.

Recommendation # 5: “The Council should consider directing the Shelter to establish written policies and procedures consistent with those used by ARF regarding animal care.”

This recommendation has been implemented.

With the assistance of ARF’s veterinary staff, protocols regarding the care of animals in the Shelter have been written and implemented.

Recommendation # 6: “The Council should consider authorizing the Shelter to hire an experienced full-time Director of Animal Services and identify the funds to do so.”

This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The Council approved the recruitment and hiring of a full-time Animal Services Manager on August 8, 2017. Staff is in the process of creating a job description so the position can be recruited and filled. It is anticipated that the position should be filled within the next six-months.

Recommendation # 7: “The Council should consider requiring all permanent staff be fully trained on Chameleon software as soon as reasonably possible.”

This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

All full-time Shelter staff is fully trained in the use of the Chameleon software. Updates have recently been made to the system so it can be used to more accurately track the Shelter population. Along with these updates, the Shelter is currently implementing a barcode tracking system of the animals within the Shelter. An additional computer is being added to the kennel area of the Shelter to be used by ACA’s to access Chameleon. From this computer, ACA’s will be able to track the Shelter population as well as monitor medical care being provided to the animals. These changes should be fully implemented by January 1, 2018.

Recommendation # 8: “The Shelter should consider posting photos of all animals on its website within 24 hours of intake.”

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

The Shelter does not feature animals on its website but has utilized a website, *Shelter Me*, for this purpose. In addition to this, the Shelter has recently updated its Chameleon software to use an additional site, *Pet Finder*, to post photos of incoming animals as well as animals that are currently available for adoption. *Pet Finder* is a central repository for shelters and rescues to post photos of incoming animals and animals available for adoption. This website allows people who are looking for animals to do so on one site instead of having to access multiple websites. This website is used industry wide and is the most effective way to get information regarding the Shelter’s population to the public.

Recommendation # 10: “The County Board of Supervisors and the Antioch City Council should consider negotiating an MOU whereby the Shelter agrees to accept all animals. Those that are identified as non-city of Antioch animals should be regularly picked up and transported to a County Shelter by County Animal Control Officers.”

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

The Shelter is currently at capacity on a daily basis with animals from the City of Antioch. If the Shelter were to openly accept animals from cities other than Antioch, it would be required to intake them; providing them with vaccinations and basic medical care, and then house them until County staff could pick them up. Unfortunately, with limited shelter space and available staff, this is not a plausible solution.

Recommendation # 11: “The Council should consider directing the Shelter to collaborate with all accredited rescue groups to maximize rescues and adoptions.”

This recommendation has been implemented.

ARF hosted two “Rescue Summits” on April 20th and April 27, 2017. These summits were opened up to all existing and prospective rescue partners. With the assistance of a professional, third-party facilitator, personnel from the Shelter and ARF met with members of the rescue groups to have an open discussion about how to strengthen relationships between the groups and how all parties could collaborate to maximize positive outcomes for the shelter animals.

Recommendation # 12: “The Council should consider authorizing the selection of an independent community-based animal advisory group to routinely visit the Shelter to monitor welfare and Shelter conditions.

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

It is clear there are many community members who are passionate about the animals in our community as well as in the Shelter. However, there are as many opinions about the pathway to best serve and care for these animals as there are groups dedicated to this cause. It is not clear that Antioch Animal Services would benefit from the confluence of the wide ranging opinions as would be expressed in such a forum. Furthermore, the addition of the Shelter Manager position will help ensure that the positive changes occurring in the Shelter under the MOU with ARF will continue after the collaborative has ended.

Sincerely,


Sean Wright
Mayor