



County of Tuolumne

Vicki Helmar

Agricultural Commissioner • Weights & Measures
Animal Control • Air Pollution Control

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Director of Animal Control
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August 9, 2010

Honorable Eric L. DuTemple, Presiding Judge
Department 1
41 West Yaney Avenue
Sonora, CA 95370

Subject: Animal Control Department Response to the 2009-2010 Grand Jury Report

Dear Judge DuTemple:

I have reviewed the 2009-2010 Grand Jury Report as it pertains to the Animal Control Department. Below are my responses to the findings and recommendations included in the report.

Findings

1. *There are ten (10) employees and two (2) relief officers.
a. The full time employees consist of a Department Head, a Department Manager, a Supervisor, three (3) Shelter Attendants, a Senior Office Assistant and three (3) Full Time Officers.*

Response: Disagree in part. The two relief employees are relief shelter attendants not relief officers. As clarification, the Department Head is not solely dedicated to Animal Control. The Director of Animal Control also serves as the Department Head for the Agricultural Commissioner's Office and Air Pollution Control.

2. *There are five (5) vehicles to service all of Tuolumne County. These are a Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV), two (2) standard animal control trucks with cages and two (2) open bed trucks. The larger of the open bed trucks is used to pick up larger animals. At the time of the first visit just (2) vehicles were in working order.*

Response: Disagree. The fleet for Animal Control consists of five vehicles: three (3) standard animal control trucks with cages and two (2) open bed trucks, the larger of which is used to pick up dead animals. The department has no SUV. Vehicle records indicated that at the time of the first visit only one of the diesel trucks was in the shop for repairs; all other vehicles were in working order.

3. *Animal Control is located at 1000 Victoria Way in Jamestown. Animal Control has been at this location for 12 years. The building is owned by the Humane Society. Animal Control rents half of the building.*

Response: Agree with clarifications. The actual address is 10040 Victoria Way in Jamestown and Animal Control rents one third of the building.

4. *There are 24 dog runs; the runs usually have a minimum of 12 dogs at any given time. Animal control has a very good ventilation system for this area.*
- a. *A rough estimate of how the dogs are disposed of is: 15% - Humane Society, 30% - Adopted, 30% - Reclaimed, 10% - Animal Control Adoption Program and 15% - Euthanized.*
 - b. *All the employees appear to be caring and enjoy working with the animals. All cages are cleaned twice daily.*

Response: Disagree in part. The correct breakdown of the disposition of dogs is 39% - Returned to Owner (Reclaimed), 11% - Adopted, 23% - Humane Society/Friends of Animal Control/other rescues, and 27% - Euthanized. Cages are cleaned once daily.

5. *Cats have two areas. One is for mature cats and the other for kittens. Puppies are also kept in the kitten area. Both areas are well maintained. Before entering the area visitors must wipe their shoes on bleached towels for the purpose of disease control.*
- a. *Because of the large volume of cat, 70% of them are euthanized.*

Response: Disagree. The cats are kept in four areas: Ward 1 for mature cats, Ward 2 for stray cats, Ward 3 for kittens, and the Isolation Ward for quarantined, medical cases and overflow. Puppies are also kept in the Isolation Ward. Before entering the Isolation Ward visitors must wipe their shoes on bleached towels for the purposes of disease control. Because of the large volume of cats, up to 85% of them in any given year may be euthanized.

6. *When a feral cat is taken in there is a four (4) day waiting period before the feral cat is euthanized. No feral cat is ever put up for adoption.*

Response: Agree. No further explanation is required.

7. *There is an area for after hours drop off.*
- a. *Any and all animals received are checked for health problems, a radio frequency chip (for possible owner's information) and a determination is made if the animal will be available for adoption or be euthanized.*

Response: Agree. In addition, all animals received are weighed and photographed and are also checked against the lost and found list and for licensing. The determination of whether the animal will be available for adoption or will be euthanized is made after the appropriate holding period.

8. *Animal Control does not accept any pets that cannot be cared for by the owner. The owners are referred to the Humane Society for help.*

Response: Agree. It is Animal control's policy not to accept owner relinquished animals. Owners are referred to the Humane Society and animal rescue groups.

9. *Animal Control also works with the District Attorney's Office when any citations warrant a criminal charge.*

Response: Agree. In addition to criminal charges filed via citations, Animal Control also submits investigative reports to the District Attorney's Office for filing of criminal charges.

10. Funding for Animal Control is provided through the County General Fund based on a fiscal year that spans from July through June.

a. Additional funds are presently provided via Proposition 172.

b. The major portion of the budget goes to personnel costs.

Response: Agree. In addition to the County General Fund and Proposition 172, Animal Control is supported through dog license and kennel fees.

11. Local radio stations and the Union Democrat help to inform the public on the needs of Animal Control.

Response: Agree with clarification. Local radio stations and the Union Democrat help inform the public on the needs of Animal Control in emergency situations only.

12. Animal Control employees made special mention of the Tuolumne County Chief Administrative Officer, Mr. Craig Pedro, for the constant and effective support his office has provided.

Response: Agree. Mr. Pedro has been extremely supportive of Animal Control, especially in these times of tight budget constraints. He and his staff have worked with the department to minimize and mitigate the impacts of the budget and staff reductions.

13. Animal Control also helps farm animals, utilizing an existing support program in case of neglect or natural disasters.

Response: Agree. Our existing support program for cases of neglect or natural disasters is not only for farm animals, but Animal Control helps all domestic animals-companion and livestock.

14. Monetary donations are accepted at Animal Control. Supplies such as food or other items may be procured directly by the contributor then delivered to Animal Control.

a. Hurst Ranch, in Jamestown, has an open account for people to make monetary donations. Animal Control can then pick up supplies as needed.

Response: Agree. No further explanation is required.

Recommendations

1. Check with the city of Palo Alto or other cities/counties that may have surplus Animal Control vehicles. Network with other areas with much larger Animal Control budgets.

Response: At this time all Animal Control vehicles are in good working order and none are scheduled for replacement. When the time comes to purchase a vehicle(s) for Animal Control, other city and county animal control jurisdictions will be contacted for the availability of any surplus animal control vehicles that would fit the needs of the department.

2. Expand their visibility to the community about the need for donations. For example, the county's citizens may not know of the arrangement between Hurst Ranch and Animal Control for monetary donations.

Response: I agree that our donation program would benefit with increased visibility to the public. Many times people have asked how they can donate to animal control and what kinds of donations we accept. We graciously accept donations, both monetary and material, when offered by the public. Although a specific donation campaign would not be appropriate for a county department, we will take the opportunity to include information regarding our donation program and our arrangement with Hurst Ranch as a secondary message in our license renewal notices, Animal Control brochures and flyers; at licensing clinics and meetings with animal control organizations such as the Humane Society and Friends of the Animal Community; and through media interviews.

3. The Grand Jury recommends the hiring of additional Animal Control Officers and Shelter Attendants to better serve the citizens of Tuolumne County when budget constraints permit.

Response: The Animal Control Department experienced staff reductions with the adoption of the 2009/2010 budget. The Department lost one fulltime Animal Control Officer and two relief Animal Shelter Attendants. These reductions have impacted our ability to provide services to the citizens of Tuolumne County and care to the animals. As soon as the County's fiscal situation permits, I will be requesting additional Animal Control Officers and Animal Shelter Attendants.

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury Report for Animal Control and hope I have addressed the findings and recommendations satisfactorily. If any clarifications or additional information is required, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Vicki Helmar
Director of Animal Control
Tuolumne County

cc. Craig Pedro, County Administrator