County of Tuolumne

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

Vicki Helmar

Agricultural Commissioner
Director of Weights & Measures
Director of Animal Control
Air Pollution Control Officer

Agricultural Commissioner
Weights & Measures
Air Pollution Control
Located at:
22365 S Airport Rd.
Sonora, CA 95370
Phone: (209) 533-5691
Fax: (209) 533-5520
Email:
AgCommissioner@tuolumnecounty.ca.gov

Animal Control
Located at:
10040 Victoria Place
Jamestown, CA 95327
Phone: (209) 694-2730

All Mailing:
2 S. Green St.
Sonora, CA 95370

September 2, 2014

FILED
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Superior Court of California
County of Tuolumne
BY
Clerk

Honorable Judge Donald Segerstrom
Tuolumne County Superior Court
60 North Washington Street
Sonora, CA 95370

Subject: Response to the 2013-2014 Grand Jury Report

Dear Judge Segerstrom:

I have reviewed the 2013-2014 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. Animal control staff and administration demonstrate a high degree of dedication in fulfilling their duties despite the challenges posed by understaffing.

Response: I agree with this finding.

2. Animal Control maintains its shelter in a clean and sanitary condition; and the animals housed there are well cared for on a daily basis.

Response: I agree with this finding.

3. Animal Control staff responds to emergencies and disasters affecting animals, such as the Rim Fire.

Response: I agree with this finding

4. An Animal Control Officer position was cut in 2009.

Response: I agree with this finding.

5. Animal Control needs a generator to provide back-up power in the event of an outage.

Response: I agree with this finding.

6. The Animal Control Manager is performing the duties of two positions: managing the division and performing the duties of a Registered Veterinary Technician.

Response: I agree with this finding.

7. In recent years another Animal Control position cut was that of an Office Assistant. There was also a reduction in hours for the equivalent of one fulltime relief Animal Shelter Attendant. Animal Control staff is overburdened and tired. This resulted in Workers Compensation premiums increasing.

Response: I agree with this finding, but that last sentence should be clarified to say 'This resulted in an increase of on-the-job injuries which resulted in Workers Compensation premiums increasing for the department.'

8. Due to budget cuts, the Animal Control staff training budget was eliminated.

Response: I agree with this finding.

9. Budget constraints negatively impact Animal Control's ability to replace equipment and aging vehicles.

Response: I agree with this finding.

10. Because of understaffing, Animal Control reduced its hours of operation and eliminated its after hours, on-call emergency services, impacting animals, citizens and other agencies in the County.

Response: I agree with this finding.

11. Due to understaffing, Animal Control does not have time to carry out a focused licensing enforcement program, is only able to provide limited outreach and education to the public, and is unable to conduct routine patrols.

Response: I agree with this finding.

Recommendations

1. No recommendation.

Response: No response required.

2. No recommendation.

Response: No response required.

3. No recommendation.

Response: No response required.

4. The Agricultural Commissioner shall request that the County Administrative Officer immediately reinstate the Animal Control Officer position that was cut in 2009. The county Administrative Officer should allocate funding to do so, and this should be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. The Agricultural Commissioner did submit a request in the 2014-15 Budget to restore the Animal Control Officer position that was cut in 2009 and this request was placed on the Board of Supervisors' high priority restoration list. On September 2, 2014 the Board of Supervisors approved funding for the Animal Control Officer position effective November 1, 2014.

5. The Agricultural Commissioner shall request that the County Administrative Officer allocate funding to purchase a generator in 2014. The County Administrative Officer should allocate funding for the generator, and the purchase should be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. The Agricultural Commissioner has requested the purchase of a generator and the request has been included in the Recommended Capitol Budget list for 2014-15.

6. The Agricultural Commissioner shall request that the County Administrative Officer create and fill the position of Registered Veterinary Technician in 2014. The County Administrative Officer should allocate funding for the position, and this should be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented in 2014 and requires further analysis. This position was not included in the 2014-15 budget requests for Animal Control and therefore cannot be implemented in 2014 as recommended by the Grand Jury. However, the Agricultural Commissioner recognizes that a Registered Veterinary Technician position separate from the Animal Control Manager position is needed, has begun discussions regarding this position with the County Administrative Officer, and has included it in the Department's Succession Plan. An analysis to determine the scope of duties for this position will need to be completed and approved before any requests can be made. The priority of this position request will need to be evaluated along with requests for other needed positions within the department. The intention is to request a Registered Veterinary Technician in the 2015-16 budget.

7. The Agricultural Commissioner shall request that the County Administrative Office allocate funding in fiscal year 2015-16 to hire additional Animal Control Officers, reinstate the Animal Control Office Assistant position and hire additional relief Shelter Attendants. The County Administrative Officer should allocate funding in the 2015-16 budget for these positions, and this should be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. In time, it will be necessary to restore the Office Assistant position and to hire additional relief Shelter Attendants to restore the one fulltime equivalent Shelter Attendant hours that were lost in previous budget reductions. However, it is fiscally impractical and infeasible to request all the positions listed above in a single fiscal year. It will be necessary to evaluate these positions in relation to the department's workload and prioritize their restorations. Requesting additional Animal Control Officers that have never been allocated to the department, although justified, cannot occur before the restoration of needed eliminated positions. The Department will continue to request the restoration of lost positions until all are restored, but it is uncertain at this time which position will be requested for fiscal year 2015/16. Requesting additional Animal Control Officer positions will occur sometime in the future when funding is available to add additional staff.

8. The Agricultural Commissioner shall request that the County Administrative Officer allocate funding in fiscal year 2015-16 to reinstate a staff training program. The County Administrative Officer should allocate funding in the 2015-16 budget to do so, and this should be approved by the Board of supervisors.

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. If feasible to reinstate a staff training program in fiscal year 2015-16, the Agricultural Commissioner shall include a requested allocation in the 2015-16 budget for this purpose.

9. The Agricultural Commissioner shall request that the County Administrative Officer allocate funding in fiscal year 2015-16 to acquire an additional truck, and replace vehicles and equipment as needed. The County Administrative Officer should allocate funding in the 2015-16 budget for the vehicles and equipment, and this should be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. The Department recently completed a vehicle inventory and has identified the ideal vehicle replacement schedule. The first truck is scheduled to be replaced in 2015 with other vehicles scheduled for 2016, 2017, 2020 and 2025. Requests for funding of these vehicles will occur in the appropriate fiscal years.

10. Animal Control should extend its hours of operation and resume after hours, on-call emergency services when Animal Control has adequate staff to do so.

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. The Agricultural Commissioner requested funding to restore these services in conjunction with the request to restore the Animal Control Officer position in the fiscal year 2014-15 budget. On September 2, 2014 the Board of Supervisors approved funding for the Animal Control Officer position effective November 1, 2014. It will take approximately six months to train the new officer so that he/she could work independently in the field. It is anticipated that after-hour emergency services will resume in Spring 2015. The Agricultural Commissioner also

intends to increase the hours of operation to pre-budget cut levels when there is adequate staff to do so.

11. Animal control should carry out a focused licensing enforcement program, provide additional outreach and education to the public, and conduct routine patrols when Animal Control has adequate staff to do so.

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. Once all eliminated positions are restored Animal Control will be in a position to resume its focused licensing enforcement program and provide additional outreach and education to the public. With a fourth Animal Control Officer, routine patrols will be able to be conducted.

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

Vicki Helmar
Director of Animal Control
Tuolumne County

cc. Craig Pedro, County Administrator