

**A REPORT BY
THE 2016-2017 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY GRAND JURY**
725 Court Street
Martinez, California 94553

Report 1708

**Animal Shelter Services in Antioch
and Contra Costa County**

APPROVED BY THE GRAND JURY:

Date: _____

6/13/17


JIM MELLANDER
GRAND JURY FOREPERSON

ACCEPTED FOR FILING:

Date: _____

6/16/17


JOHN T. LAETTNER
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 1708

Animal Shelter Services in Antioch and Contra Costa County

TO: The Antioch City Council and the County Board of Supervisors

SUMMARY

For years, the City of Antioch's (City) Animal Shelter (Shelter) has grappled with animal overpopulation and its ability to provide the animals with basic care. Some citizens have voiced concerns that the Shelter is providing substandard care for the animals.

The Citygate report in 2009, commissioned by the Antioch City Council (Council), and the UC Davis Veterinary Department report in 2014, commissioned by the Shelter, generated recommendations to improve Shelter operations and animal care.

In September 2016, the Council authorized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF). Pursuant to the MOU, ARF agreed to provide one year of free training to improve Shelter operations. On February 14, 2017, the Council confirmed its commitment to fund the changes initiated by ARF.

This Shelter has a history of animal overpopulation. People who are not Antioch residents often leave animals at the Antioch Shelter rather than driving them to a County shelter in Martinez or Pinole. Therefore, the Grand Jury recommends that the County and Shelter enter into an agreement for the County to pick up and transport those animals that are left by non-Antioch residents to a County shelter.

The Grand Jury also recommends that the City hire an Animal Services Director with a background in animal shelter management to continue oversight of the ARF changes and management of the Shelter. Finally, the Grand Jury recommends that the Council select a formal community-based Animal Advisory group to monitor animal welfare and Shelter conditions and to provide regular reports to the Council regarding same.

METHODOLOGY

In the course of its investigation, the Grand Jury:

- Conducted an unannounced site visit to the Shelter
- Toured the Contra Costa County animal shelter in Martinez
- Reviewed the 2009 Citygate report, the 2012 Grand Jury report, and the 2014 UC Davis Veterinary report
- Interviewed City and County officials, representatives from rescue organizations, concerned citizens, Shelter staff, the Shelter veterinarian, and representatives of the Antioch Police Department
- Reviewed Council meetings and related documents

BACKGROUND

In 1978, voters in Antioch approved ballot Measure A that established a city animal shelter. Antioch is the only city in Contra Costa County with its own Shelter. All other cities and unincorporated areas within the County receive animal services from Contra Costa County Animal Shelters in Martinez and Pinole.

The Shelter operates under the supervision of the Antioch Police Department and is located adjacent to it. The Shelter, which was built in 1991, has not been updated since it opened. It has limited space for animals and staff.

In 2009, the City paid for the Citygate report, which recommended numerous changes and improvements. A 2012 Grand Jury report and a 2014 UC Davis Veterinary report also made recommendations for Shelter improvements. The current Grand Jury determined that few, if any, of the recommendations from these three reports have been implemented.

In the spring of 2016, citizens, animal advocates, and rescue groups spoke at various City Council meetings. They cited sub-standard Shelter conditions and poor animal treatment. In June 2016, the Council approved funds to hire four part-time Animal Care Attendants (ACA) and one Office Assistant for the 2016-17 fiscal year. The Council also directed Shelter staff to explore opportunities to further improve the Shelter.

In September 2016, the Council and ARF executed an MOU to provide staff and volunteers with kennel maintenance and animal handling training at no cost to the Shelter. ARF also provided the Antioch Police Department with recommendations for Shelter improvements.

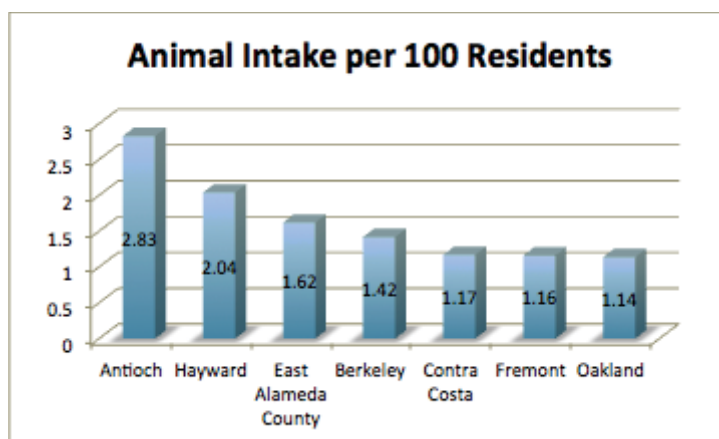
In February 2017, the Council approved the Antioch Animal Shelter Staff Report. This report recommended hiring a veterinarian to work 24 hours per week and a full-time Vet Technician. The Council agreed to provide permanent funding for the new hires and other recommended improvements by ARF.

DISCUSSION

Shelter Capacity and Staffing

The population of the City, as well as east Contra Costa County generally, has increased since 1991. During this time, there have been no corresponding improvements to increase animal accommodations at the Shelter.

The County does not operate an animal shelter in east County, which includes Antioch and the unincorporated areas and cities surrounding Antioch. As the following chart shows, the Antioch Shelter takes in twice as many animals per capita as other shelters in Contra Costa and Alameda counties.



Based on the "Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters" (Guidelines), authored by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, the Shelter has fewer staff that provide daily animal care than recommended. One part-time Animal Care Attendant (ACA), working four hours per day, can provide care for eight to nine animals per day. With ten part-time ACAs, the Shelter can care for approximately 85 animals per day. The Shelter can house 101 animals. Based on its capacity, the Shelter needs 12 part-time ACAs to care for its animals when the Shelter is full. Between September 2015 and September 2016, the Shelter housed from 120 to 270 animals a day. This means that the animals received ten or fewer minutes of care per day from the ten part-time ACAs, which is below the recommended standard of care.

Antioch Animal Shelter Capacity

Animals	Average Population 2016	Humane Capacity 2017
Cats	94	46
Dogs	102	55
Total	196	101

Photos and Shelter Hours Affect Shelter Costs

The Shelter keeps animals longer than other shelters. It could reduce the time that animals spend in the Shelter if it posted photos of found animals or animals available for adoption or rescue to its website. The comparatively long retention times impact the cost of feeding, treating, and housing the animals.

The Shelter has limited hours. It is closed evenings, Sundays and Mondays and Tuesdays following a holiday. This creates limited opportunities for animals to be claimed, adopted, or rescued. This also impacts the costs associated with running the Shelter.

Shelter Administration Challenges

Currently, the Shelter is overseen by a police lieutenant, with no animal shelter or management experience, who spends about twenty percent of the time in this role. A Shelter Supervisor spends most of the day providing animal care, handling adoptions, and rescues. This leaves little time to train or supervise staff.

The Shelter lacks written policies and procedures regarding animal care to help new hires or volunteers become familiar with Shelter operations. As a possible result, the Shelter experiences high staff turnover. Hiring replacement staff takes time because both paid and volunteer staff must undergo police background checks. Part-time ACAs are paid \$12.00 per hour and receive no benefits.

While the Shelter has a list of approximately 40 volunteers to help with routine tasks such as grooming, cleaning and dog walking, it has only 10 - 12 volunteers who can be counted on to work regularly. If more volunteers were available, the Shelter ACA's workload could be shared with some of the volunteers and, as a result, the animals would receive the amount of care and time recommended by the Guidelines.

The Shelter has not fully implemented Chameleon software, a frequently-used animal shelter management tool. Because Shelter staff has not been trained, the number of animals taken in, housed, adopted, rescued, euthanized, medicated and fed is not documented or tracked by this system.

Animal Advocate Concerns

There is no formal community-based oversight committee that regularly visits and monitors animal welfare and Shelter conditions and provides regular reports regarding same to the Council. Some animal advocates and rescue groups have had difficulty establishing collaborative relationships with the Shelter.

ARF Assistance

The Council and ARF entered into a one-year agreement to bring the Shelter up to the standards set forth in the Guidelines. ARF is providing: staff, a mobile animal clinic, and funds to improve Shelter staffing, medical treatment, intake management, pet retention strategies, volunteer and foster programs, housing, animal management, sanitation, spaying and neutering, outcome tracking, record keeping, and adoption processes.

To make these improvements, ARF is providing veterinary care in the Shelter with a part-time (24 hours a week) veterinarian and a full-time Vet Tech. Additionally, ARF is paying for all capital improvements necessary to bring the Shelter clinic and surgery suite up to Guideline standards.

Lack of County Animal Shelter in East County

The Shelter only takes animals from residents of Antioch. All surrendered animals are documented, with proof of residency. Therefore, people from other cities and unincorporated areas who are aware of this requirement often abandon animals when the Shelter is closed. Animals are thrown over the fence or found tied to trees and the fence surrounding the Shelter. Treating and feeding these animals adds to the cost of running the Shelter. There is no agreement between the Shelter and the County that requires County Animal Control Officers to pick up and transport animals from other cities and unincorporated areas to a County shelter.

FINDINGS

- F1. The Shelter has made improvements based on ARF recommendations.
- F2. The Shelter requires additional funds to implement the changes recommended by ARF.
- F3. The Shelter is not open to the public after 5:00 p.m.
- F4. The Shelter currently lacks a Rescue and Volunteer Coordinator.
- F5. 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.
- F6. The Shelter does not have written policies and procedures regarding animal care.
- F7. The Shelter lacks a Director of Animal Services.
- F8. The Shelter does not use the Chameleon software program to document the cost of running the Shelter.

- F9. The Shelter website does not feature photos of found animals or animals available for adoption or rescue.
- F10. The County does not operate an animal shelter in east County.
- F11. People from cities, other than Antioch, drop off animals at the Shelter rather than driving them to a County shelter.
- F12. 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.
- F13. No formal community-based advisory group monitors animal welfare or Shelter conditions and provides reports to the Council regarding same.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. 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.
- R2. 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.
- R3. 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.
- R4. The Council should consider directing the Shelter to develop and implement strategies to enlist more volunteers.
- R5. The Council should consider directing the Shelter to establish written policies and procedures consistent with those used by ARF regarding animal care.
- R6. The Council should consider authorizing the Shelter to hire an experienced full-time Director of Animal Services and identify the funds to do so.
- R7. The Council should consider requiring all permanent staff be fully trained on Chameleon software as soon as reasonably possible.
- R8. The Shelter should consider posting photos of all animals on its website within 24 hours of intake.
- R9. The County Board of Supervisors should consider funding a study to examine the feasibility of establishing a County animal shelter in east County.

- R10. 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.
- R11. The Council should consider directing the Shelter to collaborate with all accredited rescue groups to maximize rescues and adoptions.
- R12. The Council should consider authorizing the selection of an independent community-based animal advisory group to routinely visit the Shelter to monitor animal welfare and Shelter conditions.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

	Findings	Recommendations
Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	F10 to F12	R9 and R10
Antioch City Council	F1 to F13	R1 to R8 and R10 to R12

These responses must be provided in the format and by the date set forth in the cover letter that accompanies this report. An electronic copy of these responses in the form of a Word document should be sent by e-mail to ctadmin@contracosta.courts.ca.gov and a hard (paper) copy should be sent to:

Civil Grand Jury – Foreperson
725 Court Street
P.O. Box 431
Martinez, CA 94553-0091