

# Santa Cruz may break with SPCA

By KAREN CLARK  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — City officials are working on a plan to break away from the local SPCA and use park rangers to perform animal-control duties.

"SPCA provides a wonderful service ... but one area they fall short for us is the enforcement," said Jim Lang, director of the city Parks and Recreation Department. "The city's getting really short-changed in terms of actual patrol time."

The problem, said Lang, is not that the SPCA does a poor job, but that its field officers must cover such a large area of the county that there isn't enough time to provide more enforcement services in Santa Cruz.

As a result, city officials field complaints from residents about the lack of response to such complaints as barking

dogs and other animal-control law violations.

Council members asked staff to figure out whether a city-operated animal-control office would provide more enforcement bang for the buck.

"I think the SPCA runs a great facility, and we don't want to break ties with them," said Councilman Mike Rotkin, a member of the city's Budget Committee, which discussed the issue this week. "(But) we've been interested for some time in bringing animal-patrol functions ... into the city because we could get a different level of services."

One issue is how much Santa Cruz will have to pay to maintain access to the SPCA's shelter, which would be a necessity because there are no plans to build a separate city-run facility.

*Please see SPCA — BACK PAGE*

A-12 — Friday, March 21, 1997 — Sentinel

## SPCA

*Continued from Page A1*

Santa Cruz currently pays \$252,869 for SPCA services, which is 27 percent of the \$954,790 contract between the SPCA and local jurisdictions (the county, Santa Cruz, Capitola and Scotts Valley).

Based on this year's budget formula, about \$168,000 of the city's contribution is earmarked for animal-enforcement services, with the rest going for use of the animal shelter.

With that breakdown in mind, city officials figured they could double the amount of enforcement time by using their own ranger crew, and spend about \$20,000 less per year.

But county officials recently alerted the city that this year's formula would be revised. The coming year's budget will put more of the SPCA contract's costs into the shelter category, reducing the price tag for enforcement services.

That, said city officials, could throw a monkey wrench into the plan by removing the financial incentive to branch off on their own.

"Obviously the city wants to make sure the formula is a fair one," said Rotkin.

Dinah Phillips, the analyst in the County Administration Office who is in charge of figuring out the SPCA contract, said the cost to individual agencies is based on population and a breakdown of the previous year's work load in each jurisdiction.

Phillips said it simply made sense to change the formula for next year and put more of the mis-

cellaneous administrative costs into the shelter side of the ledger. This year, those costs were tacked onto the patrol and enforcement portion of the budget.

"The formula used has been changed substantially," said Rick Gould, the city's safety officer, and one of the staff members who is negotiating the SPCA contract.

"We believe we can do a better job in the patrol department, not because they're not doing a good job, but because of economy of scale," said Gould. "When (the county) changed the formula, it drastically changed our target costs, so maybe our program won't pencil out."

Phillips said the formula simply is a device to figure out the fairest way to share the cost of running the SPCA, a notion that was the bedrock to fashioning the joint agreement in the first place.

"Last year we had allocated certain things to patrol costs," said Phillips. "But we found that's not the best way to do it because licensing and front-office costs should be part of the shelter (costs)."

Theoretically, said Phillips, it shouldn't matter if Santa Cruz pulls out of the enforcement part of the SPCA contract. Although the budget would shrink, there would be an accompanying reduction in the amount of service requests.

"I think it's unfortunate in some ways," added Phillips. "It's stepping back a little bit from what I think is the ... best policy for all residents. On the other hand, they

have an obligation to meet the needs of their residents."

Jody Paterniti, executive director of the SPCA, said she thinks city officials are being overly optimistic about being able to provide a higher level of field service for less money.

"We've worked very diligently at training our staff and improving the professionalism," said Paterniti. "With any government entity, taking over this work ... you just don't get to the same level overnight."

Paterniti also worried that having various animal-control services performed by different agencies would confuse residents, and lead to delays in responses to calls for help.

Capitola already performs its own patrol services, and, as a result, pays only for shelter costs. Watsonville is not part of the contract, preferring to run its own program.

At this week's Budget Committee meeting, Rotkin suggested that if city officials believe the county-figured formula is weighted unfairly on the side of shelter costs, then negotiations could begin with Watsonville to use its facility.

Staff members stressed that they believe negotiations should continue to find a way to solve the issue in a manner that best for all residents.

"We're trying to not hurt the SPCA by doing this," said Lang. "We don't want to pluck so much money away that it wilts on the vine. We're trying to do this so everybody wins."