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Charges Of Cruelty, Gun Use Levelled At County Pound

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An investigation of the County Pound was ordered by supervisors Tuesday night after charges of cruelty to animals, indiscriminate use of guns, and inconsistent leash law enforcement were made against the operation.

A group of about 25 persons, most of them young persons from the Live Oak area, were successful in having supervisors hold up action on a \$105,000 budget and new contract for the Santa Cruz County Animal Welfare Association and Animal Shelter.

The move could open up the pound operation to bidding procedures once again or lead to a county takeover of poundmaster duties.

Steve Stevens, who relinquished the Santa Cruz City poundmaster contract, asked supervisors by letter to be allowed to bid on the county job.

Stevens estimated he could perform the job for about the cost of the current pound budget — \$70,000.

Janet Kitahara of 570-36th Ave., and Geoffrey McCormack of 1231 El Dorado Ave. led the Live Oak group in complaints against the pound. They presented supervisors with a series of 13 letters to document their case.

The letters cited instances in September of 1969 and April of this year where animal control officers supposedly used guns to kill dogs and cats, endangering local residents without warning. Other letters cited cases where dogs were taken from private property, and one person claimed the dogs were "bribed" off private property with meat by an animal association officer.

Other persons said they were rudely treated by the pound personnel and some were threatened with arrest. Michael Reis said his complaints against

Poundmaster James Uding's wife for allowing her own dog to run without a leash were ignored by pound personnel.

"We are not in conflict with the idea of the leash law," McCormack said. "We only object to the administration of the law."

McCormack and other speakers claimed that pound officials are overzealous in administering the leash law. Adeline Davis claimed her auto was almost struck by a speeding pound vehicle which, she said, ran two red lights. "It impresses me they are playing cops and robbers and not looking for dogs," she declared.

Alice Earl Wilder of Ben Lomond received heavy applause for her suggestion the pound budget be cut, not increased, "so long as we don't know what we're getting."

Mrs. Wilder complained that the animal shelter has failed for years to live up to its county contract for picking up stray dogs off Ben Lomond park property and school property, and declared that "people in leash law areas are penalized (by higher pound fees) for getting the very things they are supposed to get as part of the county ordinance."

Lana Pagoda said the harassment of dog owners extends to the people where she lives in the 38th Avenue area. She said she has been chased with a broom and threatened with a shotgun for walking her dog.

Alva Engberg, representing the Animal Welfare Association, admitted that pound officials do wear handguns "when they go into an area with a lot of problem dogs and a lot of problem people."

She said the association always gets authorization from the sheriff's office before using guns to kill animals "when they are dangerous." She said of the 1969 shooting incident involving a backyard chase by pound of-

ficials that "the woman who owned the dogs could not catch them, and we could not catch them, so we shot them."

Reis asked if the poundmaster has a tranquilizer gun to use on dogs, rather than using bullets. He said during the 1969 incident the shooting took place near a woman carrying a child, and no one was notified beforehand of the use of guns.

Ms. Engerg replied that "the thing is with tranquilizer guns, if you hit the animal in the wrong place, you can cripple him for life." She also added guns are preferred because an animal in not immediately affected by tranquilizers, and might escape.

In answer to charges about cruelty at the pound itself, she invited supervisors "to come out and inspect our operation at any time."

Supervisor Henry Mello said the hearing was the first time he has ever heard of the use of firearms by pound officials and said he will recommend a prohibition on gun use in any new pound contract.

The contract with the association expires June 30.

Supervisor Ralph Sanson called the charges "very serious," and called for an investigation. He asked persons with information on the pound operation to contact Mike Hanford of the county administrative office, 425-2114.

Supervisor Russ McCallie suggested the administrative office bring back a recommendation in a week on a temporary continuance of the pound contract until an investigation and audit of the operation can be conducted, perhaps within 90 days. He said the question of going to bid on the contract may also be considered.

Supervisor George Cress also asked that the amount of the City of Santa Cruz contract with the Animal Welfare Association be calculated so it will not be included in the county costs.