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SPCA report becomes mired in Board budget controversy

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SANTA CRUZ — Even though it's one of the smallest budgets being considered by the Board of Supervisors in its eight days of budget hearings, the Santa Cruz SPCA fiscal report became mired in controversy Wednesday.

A long-standing dispute over public representation on the private, non-profit SPCA Board of Directors reared its head again, leaving recently-hired Director Douglas Fakkema in the awkward position of being the middle man.

In the end, supervisors approved a \$333,944 budget for the SPCA, but put off finalizing the contracts until the last day of hearings. Without those, the budget remains inactive.

The hearing got off to an amiable start when Supervisor E. Wayne Moore told Fakkema, "I don't know where to begin to praise you... As Hubert Humphrey used to say, 'I'm pleased as punch.'"

However, Moore then questioned why the county's share of the expenditures — roughly 70 percent of the SPCA's total budget — was so much greater than the three cities which share the contract. (Under an agreement with the county, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Capitola share the SPCA facility.)

County Administrator George Newell said the county's share is apportioned to the service it receives. And Fakkema said in the future, he hopes to reduce the county's expenditure by getting more people to buy dog licenses. Optimistically, he said he could raise about \$230,000 through a better licensing program.

However, Moore wondered why the county didn't have more members on the agency of a newly proposed Joint Powers Agreement, which would have members equally represented with the cities.

Supervisor Gary Patton took that one step further by saying he wanted to have a public member on the SPCA board of directors. Presently, the two agencies are separate.

Noting the SPCA is one of the most sensitive areas of county government, having come under continued attack from the grand jury and the public, Patton said he was putting himself on the spot politically and legally — all without any power to provide policy for animal control services.

In a veiled threat, Patton said if the SPCA doesn't agree to having a public member, he'd be obliged to vote against the budget.

Chairwoman Robley Levy said there are advantages to the public as well as the directors for having public representation. Among other things, it would give the sometimes wary public the chance to have a voice in the SPCA's direction.

Joe Cucchiara also supported the idea, describing the present situation as an "old Mexican standoff."

The only supervisor to be lukewarm about the idea was Dan Forbus, who commented it really didn't matter to him very much whether or not there was a public member on the board, just so long as the constituents were being served well.

Fakkema responded to the comments by saying he would bring the issue before the directors. However, he also said there was a feeling among the SPCA board that it is a private organization.

In other matters, the board adopted the budgets for:

- **Assessor** The final figure was \$1,247,695. Since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 and the more recent rolling lien date legislation, County Assessor Bob Petersen told the board his staff has seen a huge increase in the workload. Thus, the Assessor's office received a total of 3.75 new positions (several work part-time). These positions were already approved in mid-year, but will be made permanent by the board's action.

- **Auditor/controller** A total budget of \$1,243,901. The biggest discussion here was whether supervisors could institute a direct-banking approach to payroll. Some 500 county workers have their wages deposited directly into their banks, at a cost savings to the county, said Auditor/Controller Art Merrill. If automatic payroll could be instituted for all employees, Merrill said there would be a "huge savings." He suggested the various employee unions negotiate with the county for this plan, given the mistrust of some employees for computerized banking. Supervisors sliced \$6,000 off the auditor's budget, which had been proposed for temporary help.

- **County Administrative Officer** A total budget of approximately \$574,000, with adjustments for energy projects, bringing the final budget down somewhat.

One dispute arose over the funding for a coordinator for the seniors, women's, children's and physically handicapped commissions. Supervisors will decide on the final day of hearings whether to have one full-time staff person share the four commissions, or separate staff work part-time for each.

- **Board of Supervisors** \$499,247, with no new positions.

- **County Counsel** A budget of \$482,923, with five attorneys in addition to the County Counsel. A request for an additional secretary was turned down.

- **Agricultural commission** Outgoing commissioner Jack Simmen saw a \$340,759 budget approved, with an additional \$136,278 for the Medfly early detection program.

- **Monterey Bay Air Pollution Control District** This budget was cut in half, after the supervisors were told the district only wanted \$9,838.