

SANTA CRUZ SUPERVISORS CREATE JOINT AUTHORITY TO TAKE OVER FOR SPCA

# Board OKs animal shelter

*Animal Shelter*

**Many questions** remain unsolved, including who would run the operation and how much it is going to cost the strapped county.

By David L. Beck  
*Mercury News*

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors approved the creation of a new animal control and shelter operation Tuesday. Now if it only can figure out how the operation will work, when it can begin — and where to put the animals it captures.

The third face-off between the board and officials of the Society for

the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which owns and runs the animal shelter on 7th Avenue, left those issues unresolved. The SPCA wants far more money to continue handling those operations than the county is willing — or, apparently, able — to pay.

Even as the board was voting 5-0 to create a joint powers authority to take over from the SPCA, some of its mem-

bers were expressing doubts as to whether government can in fact do the job more cheaply, or whether it can do it at all at the proposed staffing levels.

With those kinds of questions being asked, said the SPCA's acting executive director, Doreen Lozano, after the vote, why doesn't the board just let her organization handle it?

Perhaps the reasons why will become clearer next Tuesday, when the supervisors meet to hear county Auditor Gary Knutson's final report on the SPCA's operations during the

three-year contract that is about to expire.

A preliminary report found hundreds of thousands of dollars in questionable expenses, as well as a large sum in fees collected by SPCA for the county but not turned over. Lozano said Tuesday the total is now down to \$227,000, but there were suggestions that it could go much higher.

Under the old contract, the SPCA has been paid approximately \$1.5 million a year for both animal control

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SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, 2002

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services in the field and animal care at its 68-year-old facility. The organization is willing to give up animal control as incompatible with its mission. But it has been claiming that it needs \$1.6 million next year just to do the other part of the job, a figure it recently reduced to \$1.3 million.

The county, in a lean year, without the utility tax revenue that died in the March election, and with its ax poised over every department, has offered \$750,000. The SPCA refuses to consider so minimal an operation.

The county has asked for more time to set up the services it will provide. It might be possible, officials say, to take over field services by July 1, though Sept. 1 would be better, but the county would still have to lease all or part of the shelter. The SPCA has offered it at a price of about \$135,000 a month. The county hopes to get it for less.

The shelter is in the First District, which board Chair Jan Beautz represents. Live Oak was countryside when the shelter opened in 1934, but it's heavily residential now, "and I don't want somebody from Scotts Valley or Capitola" making decisions that affect it, said Beautz, who wants elected offi-

cials on the joint powers board rather than the proposed city managers.

"Deciding whether a kitten lives or dies? That's not our business," responded Supervisor Tony Campos, who represents Watsonville, which has its own shelter.

Beautz responded that when the dogs begin barking at night, as they will if there are not enough staff members and volunteers to play with them, exercise them and generally keep them quiet, she's the one who gets the angry phone calls.

The system the county would like to set up is based on San Francisco's, where a city-county shelter undertakes to keep adoptable animals for a certain period of time and where the SPCA undertakes to keep them thereafter until they are adopted.

But the San Francisco chapter of the organization is old and comparatively wealthy, with a budget of about \$27 million, Lozano said. In contrast, the Santa Cruz SPCA has a small donor base that provides only about 30 percent of the budget.

The proposed joint powers authority would be made up of representatives from the county, the cities of Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, Capitola and the University of California-Santa Cruz.

The supervisors balked at a one-entity, one-vote plan, since the county's share of the budget would be three times that of the city's, which in turn would pay six times what Scotts Valley would pay, and so on down to UC-Santa Cruz, which would pay only \$4,000 of the \$1.6 million total. (The university does not allow pets on campus.) A new joint powers board of directors structure is one of the things that needs to be in place by next Tuesday.

The others:

■ A promise to work with the SPCA on purchasing, rather than condemning, the shelter.

■ More information on the San Francisco operation.

■ An explicit recognition of the need for volunteers.

The joint powers has to be made final next Tuesday because the Scotts Valley City Council is to vote on it next Wednesday. Santa Cruz would vote on it June 25, and Capitola two days later.

The fiscal year ends June 30, and at the moment, Lozano said, that's still the end of animal services in Santa Cruz County.

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