

Humane association report

Animal shelter lacks money, manpower

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The Santa Cruz Animal Shelter has problems, says the American Humane Association after a surprise inspection last month, problems that result from lack of money and bad management.

The problems outlined in a recently-released report on that inspection are not nearly as severe as the grand jury charged in a scathing report last June, when it called the shelter a failure.

However, without more money than it now gets, the shelter cannot provide "full service" animal control to the county and cities with which it contracts, says the report.

The county's 440 square miles and 46,500 domestic animals require another 10 to 15 animal control officers, says the report's author, Dennis White. Currently, there are five animal control officers.

White, the American Humane Association's director of animal welfare, suggests the county should renegotiate the contract with the Animal Welfare Association so the association only houses animals, and

that the cities and county do their own dog-catching.

"Quality service is impossible to provide because of a shortage of manpower," White writes. The non-profit Animal Welfare Association, which runs the shelter and animal control operation, "has no business providing full service animal control to the contracting agencies," and should contract for shelter services only on a cost-per-animal basis, he suggests.

The county grand jury report charged there were major problems, and said the county should run its own operation. This suggestion was rejected as impossible, but the Board of Supervisors insisted the shelter institute better management practices, and authorized the investigation and report by the American Humane Association.

In October, the supervisors said better management practices had begun at the shelter.

White's report on his Jan. 10 and 11 surprise inspection says: "There are many small discrepancies that can lead to big problems, if they haven't already."

The Seventh Avenue kennels are dirty and foul-smelling, partly because of poor management.

Disease control, a steady source of complaints from the shelter's critics, should be improved, writes White. He found diseased animals penned with healthy animals, and writes that isolation and separation of animals is inadequate and should be improved.

Only those animals brought in from "good homes" and which are likely candidates for adoption are now vaccinated, says shelter director Gail Willis. White says all or none of the animals should be vaccinated.

The room in which animals are killed by injection is "poorly lit, small, dirty and smells to the extreme," White writes. The room should be completely renovated, or animals should be killed somewhere else. He also recommends those giving the injections, who are now certified by a veterinarian, should be recertified every six months. No animals were killed while he was investigating, and charges of incompetence brought by shelter critics

go unanswered in the report.

Other sources of complaints, such as adoption fees, were found by White not to be a problem.

In fact, he says the \$20 adoption fees are too low, and should be increased to as high as \$45, with all animals being or spayed or neutered.

The Animal Welfare Association's board of Directors must take a large share of the responsibility for the lack of funds, says White. The non-profit organization must work on fund raising and public relations.

Shelter Director Willis says, "The report seems fair enough. I'm not happy with all of it, but at least it was done by an organization familiar with animal control."

He said putting the report's recommendations into effect will depend on funding and contract stipulations. Asked if he expected increased funding as a result of the report, he said, "Which would you like — prose or poetry? The answer's 'No'."

The supervisors will get the report Tuesday.