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MIKE MCFARLAND, COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

County ponders new facility as shelter problems mount

Animal Shelter 12-17-05
By BRIAN SEALS

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

✓ LIVE OAK — Stray dogs and cats could be lounging in a new facility on 7th Avenue in a couple of years.

Plans are under way to possibly raze existing shelter facilities the county bought for \$1.6 million in 2004 and replace them with a new facility. A barn and yellow house that serve as office space would be retained.

"There were some very serious code problems as far as plumbing and electrical (in the old buildings)," said Mike McFarland, director of the county's Animal Services Authority. "It was going to cost a lot to bring them up to speed."

The Board of Supervisors this week approved a \$442,000 contract for design of a new shelter to be operated by the Animal Services Authority.

Just what the design will be remains to be seen, but the facilities are expected to include kennels, offices, animal adoption areas, on-site laundry facilities and a veterinary clinic.

Whether the idea comes to fruition will hinge on more detailed cost estimates.

Once the design is complete, county officials say they will know better the scope and size of the project and how to fit it with the available funds.

"We're just beginning," said Susan Pearlman of the county Administrator's Office. "We have a goal and we have an architect. It's at that very exciting beginning state."

County staffers are scheduled to report back to the Board of Supervisors in April.

The idea is to have a modern facility that is as neighbor-friendly as it is animal-friendly.

"One of the issues is we want to



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel
A dog rescued from the Hurricane Katrina devastation area looks out from a kennel at the mostly vacant 7th Avenue animal shelter Friday. The county hopes to build a new facility there.

Shelter

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be good neighbors and take care of sound problems," McFarland said.

Aside from plumbing and electrical issues, there are leaky roofs and mold that developed during the time the buildings were unoccupied, said Jay Gunter, maintenance manager for Animal Services. Gunter said he was concerned that even if the buildings were renovated, their upkeep would be challenging.

"It would still be constant maintenance because these buildings are so old," Gunter said while walking through one of the old kennels.

Construction of new facilities would be paid with money from the county's Redevelopment Agency. Up to \$5 million has been budgeted for construction.

County Supervisor Jan Beutz, who represents that area, said that estimate seems high, but added that investing in a modern facility to be used for a years to come could be worthwhile.

"You could make it work for less money," Beutz said. "There's a general question about if that is the smartest use of money. This could give us a facility that could last for a long time."

If all goes smoothly, Animal Services would like to begin construction in late 2006 or early 2007 and move into the new digs by the spring of 2008, McFarland said.

If cost estimates come in too high, the project would have to be reconfigured or done in phases, Pearlman said.

In October, the county Board of Supervisors approved \$46 million in bonds for a string of projects in the Live Oak Redevelopment Area during the next three years.

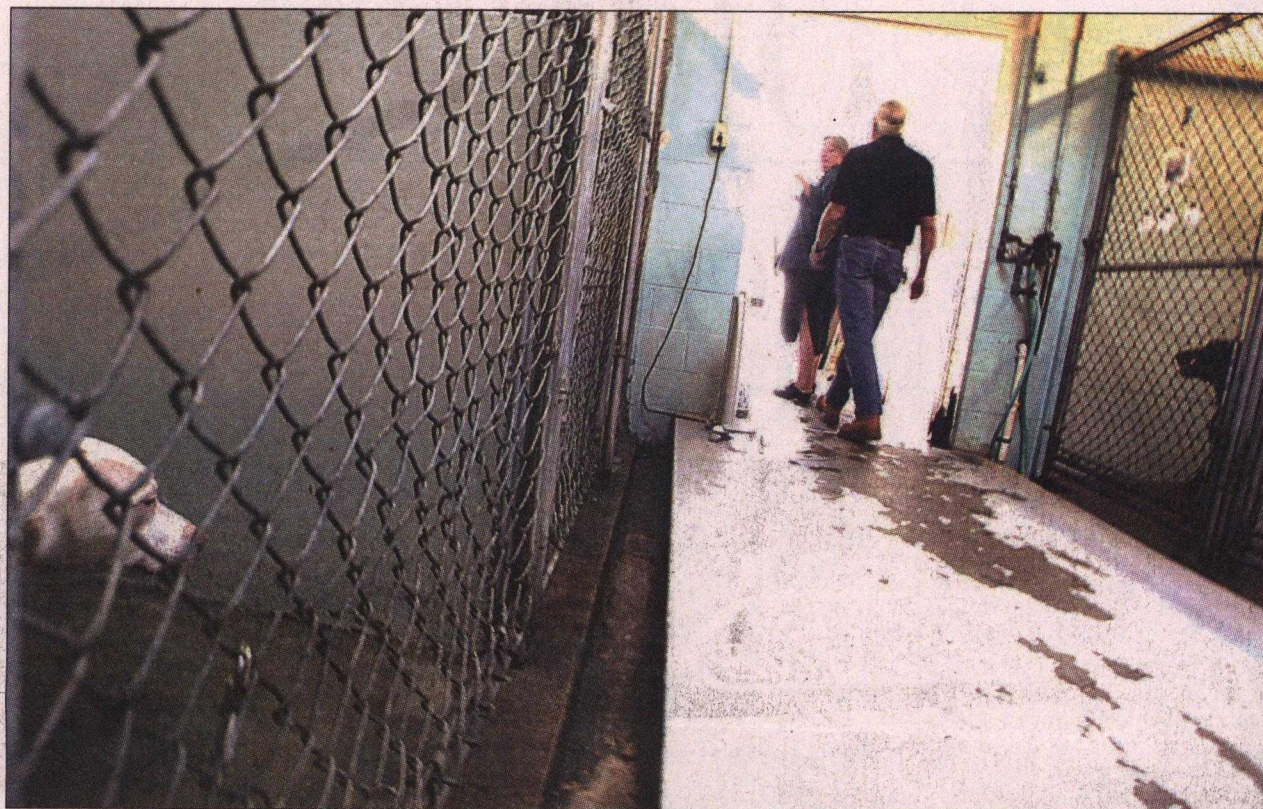
The county formed its own animal control service after details of financial mismanagement with the Santa Cruz SPCA emerged in 2002. The SPCA is now an advocacy and education group that doesn't handle shelter services, though it has been temporarily housing pets from Louisiana that were abandoned after Hurricane Katrina.

When it bought the shelter, the county allowed for about \$470,000 in renovations to the facility. But estimates on the actual repairs were about \$800,000, McFarland said.

That led to the decision to build from scratch.

Currently, the Animal Services Authority rents its shelter space in Scotts Valley. It stayed in those facilities after the county bought the 7th Avenue property to fulfill its lease.

That lease was originally set to expire in November, but has been extended by two years, McFarland said.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Bringing the animal shelter formerly owned and run by the Santa Cruz SPCA to acceptable condition would not be cost-effective, county officials say. Instead, they are investigating the cost of building a new facility at the 7th Avenue site.



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JAN BEUTZ,
COUNTY SUPERVISOR

A dog rescued from Hurricane Katrina, left, looks out a kennel at the mostly vacant 7th Avenue animal shelter Friday.