

Grand Jury criticizes county pound

By CANDACE ATKINS
The Grand Jury has determined that Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter is a "failure as a 'shelter,' animal adoption agency or licensing bureau."

A report, based on a one-year investigation, was released this morning by the Grand Jury. Virtually all aspects of the Santa Cruz County Animal Welfare Assn., a non-profit, charitable corporation, were criticized, including animal control, isolation and care of sick animals, euthanasia, edu-

cation, humane treatment, fiscal management and plant maintenance.

Further, Grand Jurors report "that the shelter fails to engender and maintain public confidence and presents an antagonistic attitude toward citizens who are, or wish to become, involved in animal welfare."

Although no criminal charges were suggested in the report, jurors, in one of 31 recommendations regarding the agency, called for the county "to investigate

methods of taking over control, operation, and maintenance of the shelter instead of renewing its contract with the association." Licensing of dogs should be transferred to the county tax collector "immediately," said the report, and "more humane methods of impounding" should be considered.

Shelter director Gail Willis was criticized for being "remiss in direct supervision of employees and involvement in shelter operations...He fails to require the maintenance

of the Shelter in an efficient manner, to develop and maintain an education program, to give employees training in animal handling, and in county and state laws which they work under, to establish an office and fiscal system that will properly serve the public."

The report also maintains that animals who are put to death at the shelter are often killed by untrained staff who have to repeatedly inject the animal with barbituates, causing "a prolonged and

painful death for the animal and a traumatic experience for the technician."

Family pets who are picked up by Shelter are subject to what jurors called "excessive impound fees (that) serve only to assure the loss of pets to families who can least afford the fines. Fewer pets are reclaimed and less money is taken in."

Animal patrols by the Shelter were "marginally effective," according to the report, but officers' conduct with animals and

their owners owners was denounced.

Jurors recommended "that animal control officers and kennel personnel be screened in their ability to get along with the public, their concern for animal welfare, their moral and emotional background." A related recommendation called for "an official effort be made to improve courtesy, helpfulness to the public, and to improve relations with the courts and law enforcement officers."

The report found that the board of directors for the shelter "has been largely composed of people who receive financial benefit in the program, constituting a conflict of interest."

Funding for the shelter is from the county and the cities of Capitola, Scotts Valley and Watsonville. This year, the agency received \$257,000 in local funding.

The Grand Jury report has been sent to county supervisors, who will review the document and make decisions on the future of the shelter.

Shelter director Willis could not be reached for comment.

VARIETY AND VALUE