

LOCAL NEWS

Marc DesJardins, city editor, 429-2411
mdesjardins@santa-cruz.com

SPCA sets price for shelter: \$2.5M

By **CATHY REDFERN**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Animal Shelter
Months of wrangling between the county and the SPCA took another twist Wednesday, when the SPCA set the asking price on a sale of most of the Live Oak shelter facility — \$2.5 million.

The offer comes one week after the county voted to sign a lease for a temporary shelter in Scotts Valley, and it is contingent on the county forgiving hundreds of thousands in disputed SPCA expenditures.

The county refused to comment on the sale price, pending an appraisal due any day, said county spokesperson Dinah Phillips, adding that they won't publicize the appraisal amount.

The Board of Supervisors created a new animal control agency in June after the SPCA asked for a sharp increase in funding and after an audit turned up questionable expenditures by past shelter managers.

Lease negotiations went badly and workers with the new Animal Services Authority have been working out of a county basement since August with animals spread in temporary locations throughout the county.

When asked whether the sides could reach agreement on a purchase, County Supervisor Ellen Pirie said "hope springs eternal."

"Nearly everybody thinks there are real advantages to colcoating with the SPCA," Pirie said. "But the county can't pay more than fair market value."

The county bowed out of interim lease negotiations in an Oct. 16 letter to the SPCA, calling them unfruitful and suggesting moving on

to purchase talks.

Meanwhile, the county is poised to sign the lease on a bigger Scotts Valley building in an industrial park at 27 Janus Way.

The county serves as lead negotiator for Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Capitola.

In lease negotiations, they offered \$12,795 monthly and the SPCA requested \$25,000, with several provisos, including one tying a lease to euthanasia rates.

Rent in Scotts Valley will run \$13,250, and an estimate on move-in costs will be available next week, Phillips said, adding that the facility should be ready by mid-December.

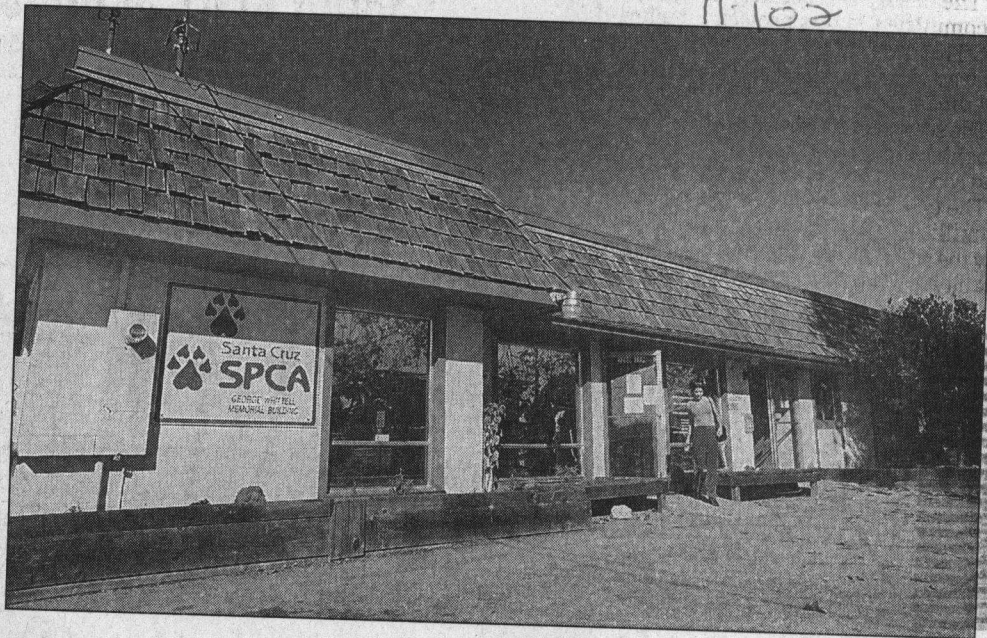
"I think the timing will work out," Phillips said. "It will give us time to get everything ready and get financing. We need to get the animals in a central place."

A complete audit is due in mid-November on the past SPCA expenditures, and the Board of Supervisors plan to discuss it at the Nov. 19 meeting, Phillips said.

The amount the SPCA owes for those expenses remains a sore point. The SPCA agrees it owes \$230,000 in fines it should have handed over and has paid back "at least \$5,000" of that, a spokesperson said.

But the auditor in June found \$715,000 in questionable purchases, an issue the SPCA says stems partially from varying contract interpretations.

Both groups aim for a public/private partnership such as the one in San Francisco, where no animals are killed because of lack of space, said Will Anzenberger, an SPCA spokesman who worked for the San Francisco shelter.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The Santa Cruz SPCA is considering putting the Seventh Avenue facility in Live Oak up for sale, with an asking price of \$2.5 million.

The SPCA has space for 60 dogs while the Scotts Valley building will hold 49 dogs.

The SPCA plans an appraisal as well and made this week's offer after informal appraisals and because they want to move forward, Anzenberger said.

They plan to keep a small portion of the property to conduct education and other programs,

and will open the sale to the public Dec. 1 if they don't get a response from the county, Anzenberger said.

"If they can get a better deal, we wish them the best," he said. "We think this is a fair deal. This is about moving forward."

Contact Cathy Redfern at credfern@santa-cruz.com.