

**A REPORT BY  
THE 2011-2012 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY GRAND JURY**

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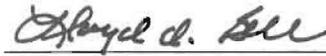
**Report 1205**

**ANIMAL SHELTERS IN CONTRA  
COSTA COUNTY**

**Tails of Two Shelters**

APPROVED BY THE GRAND JURY:

Date: April 5, 2012



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JOHN T. LAETTNER  
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 1205

**ANIMAL SHELTERS IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**  
**Tails of Two Shelters**

**TO: *ANTIOCH CITY COUNCIL***  
***CONTRA COSTA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS***

**SUMMARY**

There are three open-admission public animal shelters in Contra Costa County – two operated by the County that serve all areas of the county except for the City of Antioch, and one operated by the City of Antioch. The Grand Jury found that the shelters are managed by dedicated and hardworking employees who try to do the best they can for the animals charged to their care with the limited financial resources available to them.

Antioch Animal Shelter was created to provide local control over animal services in the City of Antioch, separate and independent of the County Shelter. The County opened a new shelter in 2005 in Martinez and provides many services on-site. The Antioch Shelter has not been upgraded since it was built in 1991, although the population of the city has increased by approximately 60% since 1991. The Antioch Shelter does not have enough volunteers to adequately care for the number of animals that are processed through it each year.

Antioch has not kept up with the County in the number of programs and services it provides to the residents and animals of Antioch.

Management for both the County and the Antioch shelters should consider creating advisory councils to prioritize cost effective programs that can lead to adoptable animals finding homes.

**BACKGROUND**

The Contra Costa County Animal Services Department is responsible for animal control for all unincorporated areas of the County and for 18 of the 19 cities located within Contra Costa County (County). The County Animal Shelter in Martinez (County Shelter) has been located in its new building since 2005. Included among the services provided are low-cost spay/neuter, education programs, on-site veterinary technicians and a full-time staff of 76. The County Shelter also has approximately 100 volunteers. A satellite shelter is located in Pinole and all information regarding this shelter is included in data regarding the Martinez shelter.

In 1978, the voters of the City of Antioch (Antioch) approved Measure A to create an animal shelter separate and independent of the County Shelter to provide better services to the residents and animals of Antioch.

The Antioch Animal Shelter (Antioch Shelter) was built in 1991 and has not been substantially

upgraded since then. The Antioch Shelter does not have either on-site spay/neuter services or on-site veterinary technicians. It has a paid staff of eight, with a volunteer pool of ten, with five more currently undergoing background checks and training.

**Table 1 - Comparison of the Two Shelters**

ITEM	ANTIOCH	COUNTY
Total Budget 2010-11	\$743,646	\$11,587,800
Population Served	102,372	946,653*
Annual Per Capita Cost	\$7.27	\$12.24
Total Annual Cost Per Animal	\$250.30	\$750.41

\*The total population of the county less the population served by Antioch.

As shown in Table 1, the annual per capita cost for each shelter is the budgeted amount divided by the population. Total annual cost per animal is based on the budgeted amount divided by the number of animals handled in each shelter (shown in Table 2). However, the costs and services are different.

Table 2, below, compares the two shelters on various measures of activity, showing both the numbers of animals affected and the percent of the total this count represents. In addition, Table 3 compares three measures of outcomes for the animals each year since 2007.

**Table 2 – Comparison of Activity Measures**

Description	Antioch	Percent	County	Percent
Beginning of Year Count 2010	190		313	
Total Intake (2010)	3,014		15,580	
End Of Year Count 2010	233		451	
Total Handled During 2010	2,971		15,442	
Adoption Count	581	19.56%	3,861	25.00%
Transfer Out	541	18.21%	2,949	19.10%
Returned to Owner	427	14.37%	2,065	13.37%
Died, Lost	122	4.11%	174	1.13%
Euthanized	1,300	43.76%	6,393	41.40%
Total	2,971		15,442	

**Table 3 – Four Years Comparisons of Outcomes (Percentages)**

Outcome	Shelter	2007	2008	2009	2010
Adoption	Antioch	26.82	20.09	18.50	19.56
	County	22.21	21.76	26.59	25.00
Transfer Out	Antioch	8.28	9.14	13.92	18.21
	County	18.84	0.22	18.70	19.10
Euthanasia	Antioch	44.00	43.55	46.70	43.76
	County	40.35	39.53	38.93	41.40

While it appears that the Antioch Shelter is doing better at controlling costs than the County Shelter, an examination of the two facilities shows substantial differences in space allotted per animal, services per animal, paid employees per animal, and care provided each animal. The percentages of animals adopted, transferred out, and euthanized in each shelter are similar.

In 2008, Antioch commissioned a study of its shelter by Citygate Associates (Citygate). Citygate made several suggestions for changes to processes and policies. Citygate also found that the current shelter was inadequate to keep up with current and future needs of Antioch’s residents.

Citygate recommended that Antioch take steps to create a Strategic Plan for improvement of the current animal care and control program, recognizing the future growth of the community and the ongoing fiscal constraints. The County has not undertaken this type of study.

Citygate also recommended that Antioch Shelter create an advisory council of concerned stakeholders (such as volunteers, local animal welfare groups, citizens, employees, etc.) to advise the Antioch Shelter on various issues relating to providing care to the animals and improving services. Neither the Antioch nor the County shelter has established such an advisory council to oversee the costs related to animal care and the potential for finding revenue-neutral services that could lead to lower costs and to reduced euthanasia rates.

In 1998, SB 1785 (Hayden’s Law) became the first legislation in the country designed to reduce euthanasia rates in shelters. It defines when an animal is considered adoptable and mandates holding periods, rescue group cooperation, and other shelter requirements. Citygate recommends that one of the tasks of an advisory council would be to provide guidance to the shelter on how to comply in a cost-effective manner with the mandates of Hayden’s law.

Two programs recommended by Citygate that can lead to lower costs in the short-term and long-term are low cost spay/neuter and increased use of volunteers.

**Spay/Neuter**

**Table 4 – Spay/Neuter Fees Comparison**

Description	Berkeley	Solano County	County Shelter	ARF	Antioch Shelter
Small dog spay	\$25	\$75	\$75	\$85	\$140
Small dog neuter	\$25	\$45	\$45	\$55	\$141
Cat spay	\$15	\$45	\$45	\$55	\$114
Cat neuter	\$15	\$25	\$25	\$35	\$92

As can be seen in Table 4, the Antioch Shelter’s spay/neuter fees for animals adopted from the shelter are much higher than comparable fees charged by the County Shelter and nearby facilities.

There are other ways, not included in the Citygate report, to obtain a lower spay/neuter cost for adopters, such as:

1. Request quotes for low cost spay/neuter services from other veterinarians in Antioch.
2. Allow adopters to ask their own veterinarian to spay/neuter their new pet.

The County Shelter spays or neuters animals on-site before they are allowed to go home. In Antioch, the newly adopted pet is taken to the contract veterinarian and the new owner picks the animal up from the veterinarian. Since the animal has to be taken to the contract veterinarian by a shelter employee, taking the animal to another veterinarian in the city may entail some small amount of additional driving.

## Volunteers

At the Antioch Shelter, the ratio of volunteers to animals is 1 volunteer to 23.6 animals, based on the average number of animals in the shelter, holding period and number of volunteers. At the County Shelter, the ratio is 1 to 3.13.

Volunteers can be the lifeblood of an organization concerned with the cost effectiveness of their operation. Organizations that have been successful in recruiting volunteers suggest that to revitalize a volunteer program, shelters should ... “offer a variety of volunteer opportunities from easy to more involved.... Volunteers need real jobs that make a real difference.”

In 2010, the Antioch Shelter laid off its volunteer coordinator, losing a resource to recruit, train, and supervise volunteers. Instead, new volunteers are trained by the Animal Shelter Supervisor who is responsible for most of the day-to-day operations of the facility, as well as recruitment of volunteers, and supervision of volunteers and paid staff. In some other facilities, a volunteer has functioned as the volunteer coordinator.

The need for volunteers can be shown by considering the animal count, the average holding period provided by each shelter, and the humane treatment of animals.

**Table 5 – Average Impound at Each Shelter**

Shelter	Impounds per year	Average impounds per day	Avg. Holding Period	Daily total in shelter
Antioch	3,014	8.25	19	156
County	15,582	42.69	7	298

A minimum of 20 minutes per day per animal out of their kennels for training, socialization, playtime, or exercise can be considered part of the humane treatment of the animal. Cats do not need to be walked, but need playtime with cat toys, grooming and a calming, comforting presence.

**Table 6 – Volunteers Needed Per Day**

Number of animals served per day	Number of volunteers per day
12	1
156	13
300	25

Both shelters use volunteer blocks or shifts of four hours and ask for a commitment of one shift per week. Assuming the minimum of 20 minutes per day per animal as stated above, each volunteer should be able to accommodate 12 animals in their four-hour shift. Assuming the average daily totals in each shelter as stated above, the Antioch Shelter could use 13 volunteer shifts per day while the County Shelter could use 25 volunteer shifts per day.

## **FINDINGS**

1. The Antioch Shelter currently has an insufficient number of volunteers to provide adequate time out of the kennels for training, socialization, playtime or exercise for the animals each day, which is part of the humane treatment of the animals.
2. The Antioch Shelter's spay/neuter fees are higher than fees charged for comparable services by nearby shelters and, for this reason, may discourage adoption from this shelter.
3. The cost differences between the two shelters (as shown in Table 1) are great enough to merit closer examination for cost effectiveness.
4. Neither shelter has an advisory council to work with management to develop plans to meet space, population, and fiscal issues.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Antioch Shelter should explore ways to increase the number of volunteers to ensure the humane treatment of the animals and that each animal receives adequate personal attention (walking, socialization) each day.
2. The Antioch Shelter should explore options to provide lower cost spay/neuter fees for newly adopted animals.
3. Each shelter should examine its cost per animal to ensure that the amount being spent provides for efficient, effective, and humane treatment for the animals.
4. The County Shelter and the Antioch Shelter should consider establishing advisory councils to provide direction and suggest priorities for each shelter.

## **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

### **Findings**

Antioch City Council	1, 2, 3, 4
Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	3, 4

### **Recommendations**

Antioch City Council	1, 2, 3, 4
Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	3, 4