

A REPORT BY

THE 2020-2021 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

725 Court Street
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Report 2105

Improving Animal Services in Contra Costa County

APPROVED BY THE GRAND JURY

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Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 2105
Improving Animal Services in Contra Costa County

**TO: Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
City Council of Antioch**

SUMMARY

Currently, Contra Costa County (County) Animal Services are centralized in one facility located at the northern edge of this large County, which creates logistical barriers to providing efficient service. The County can improve animal services by sharing resources and geographically distributing animal services.

Public and private animal shelters are experiencing pressure from the explosive growth in the homeless animal and abandoned pet populations. Community outreach and education are high priorities for both Contra Costa and Antioch Animal Services, the two public animal shelters within the County.

Wildlife retrieval provided by the County Animal Services is one of its most valuable services, especially in those areas of the County that border large open spaces. Recent funding restrictions have severely undermined the ability of Animal Services to retrieve live, wounded, or dead animals.

The Grand Jury recommends that Contra Costa Animal Services (CCAS) engage a consulting firm for guidance on the possible redistribution of animal services that could be achieved by a gradual process of cost-sharing and shelter co-ordination. A comparable consolidation currently underway between Monterey County and the City of Salinas Animal Shelters provides a possible model for the integration of Contra Costa and Antioch Animal Shelter services (CCAS and AAS). An example of countywide cooperative agreement already exists. The County Sheriff's Office has a model for distributed services throughout the County. The Grand Jury recommends that CCAS consider specific, tailored regional service agreements between the cities and the County for animal services rather than a common countywide contract.

The Grand Jury further recommends that both public animal shelters enhance their emphasis on community outreach to confront homeless animal overpopulation. The full array of services available can be communicated to the public including the existing inexpensive spay and neuter and vaccination programs. Increased staffing is necessary to implement expanded educational programs.

The Grand Jury recommends that CCAS selectively enhance community outreach to the contracted cities. Responses from the contracted cities stated that their residents are unaware of the broad range of field services provided by CCAS. The Grand Jury also recommends that CCAS increase public awareness of the importance of proper pet medical attention such as vaccination and spay and neuter procedures.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury used the following investigative methods:

- Reviewed compliance with the two previous Grand Jury investigations of the Antioch Animal Shelter (GJ Reports 1205 and 1708).
- Received twenty-three Requests for Information.
- Conducted nine personal interviews.
- Visited AAS.
- Conducted an online search of available databases, news articles, and web sites of regional and national rescue organizations and shelters.
- Contacted personnel managing animal shelters in other jurisdictions.

BACKGROUND

Two facilities provide public animal services in Contra Costa County: the Contra Costa Animal Shelter (CCAS) located in Martinez and the Antioch Animal Shelter (AAS) managed by the Antioch Police Department. These facilities provide a broad range of services such as licensing, wildlife retrieval, live and dead animal pickup, and spay and neuter clinics. The facilities offer community education and outreach programs, which emphasize responsible pet care.

The County shelter is on the northern edge of the County removed from the main population centers. This imbalance results in logistical difficulties for residents and CCAS personnel. For example, traffic congestion sometimes delays response times for live animal retrieval and noisy animal complaints.

The City of Antioch voted in 1978 to establish its own shelter. In recent years, public concern about pet overpopulation at the Antioch Animal Shelter led to a 2017 Grand Jury investigation (Report 1708) that outlined deficiencies in shelter management, operations, and the physical facility. The current Grand Jury investigated the Shelter's compliance with those previous recommendations and concluded that improvements in the management, facility, and operating procedures have successfully addressed the earlier concerns. Notably, a private rescue facility assisted the City of Antioch in the implementation of the recommended changes.

However, the current Grand Jury noted that one difficulty, cited in the earlier Grand Jury report, remains. Based on Grand Jury interviews, the proximity of Antioch to the underserved eastern areas of the County leads to persistent problems with animal abandonment at the Antioch Shelter from residents outside the City of Antioch. Although there is an informal working relationship between CCAS and AAS personnel on this issue, a more formal agreement between AAS and CCAS would facilitate abandoned pet retrieval at both shelters.

As noted above, information collected by the Grand Jury identified the importance of wildlife retrieval by both animal services, especially in those parts of the County that border open space. Indeed, this function is often cited by cities with CCAS contracts as the most significant role of County animal services since it is a general service and not necessarily linked to pet ownership.

CCAS receives funding from the County's General Fund and has the responsibility to provide animal services in the unincorporated communities in the County. CCAS also provides services to eighteen incorporated cities and towns through individual contracts. These contracts stipulate that the funding increase permitted to CCAS be based upon the Consumer Price Index percentage and the individual municipality's population growth. If this total funding is insufficient, then service restrictions might result and were indeed realized in September 2020. These countywide service changes were

- the number of officers allocated to Field Services decreased from sixteen to ten
- CCAS's Field Services reduced its operating hours
- On-call coverage was eliminated
- Deceased wild animal retrieval on private property was stopped
- All live wildlife calls were referred to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Animal shelters currently face conflicting demands. Public opinion increasingly opposes euthanasia, but abandoned pets lead to animal shelter overpopulation. Overpopulation is the primary reason cited for euthanasia at shelters nationwide.¹ According to the American Humane Society's position statement,² all cats and dogs adopted from public or private animal care should be spayed or neutered to reduce euthanasia rates most effectively. Furthermore, the statement emphasizes that public awareness and cooperation with this approach is crucial. Information gathered by the Grand Jury corroborated these statements for both public animal shelters.

The cost of spaying and neutering pets can be a contributing factor to pet abandonment. AAS charges a flat fee of \$90 for feline spay and neuter and \$150 for canine spay and neuter operations. CCAS fees range between \$50 and \$74 for felines and \$121 to \$172 for canines. Although these fees compare favorably to private veterinarian fees, they still present a financial obstacle for many pet owners. No quantitative survey data on the possible efficacy of subsidized spay and neuter clinics within the County exists. Data from subsidized pilot programs in several other states (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Texas) correlate with increased spay and neuter rates and declines in shelter populations.

DISCUSSION

Service Distribution

Geographic separation presents obstacles to efficient CCAS service. As the schematic map in Figure 1 highlights, the two public animal shelters are in the northern portion of the County. The County Board of Supervisors approved the closure of the Pinole facility, which was never designed for long-term animal housing, in September 2020.

¹ A. Kleinfeldt, "Overview of Animal Euthanasia", <https://www.animallaw.info/article/overview-animal-euthanasia>.

² <https://www.americanhumane.org/position-statement/animal-population-control>.

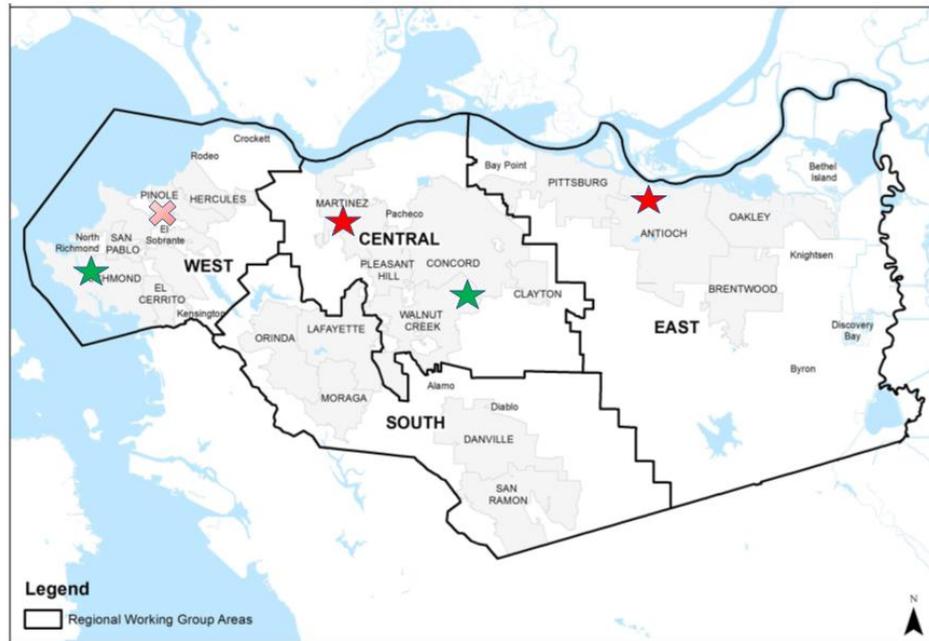


Figure 1 The two public animal shelters (★) and two private shelters (★) in Contra Costa County. The Pinole facility (✗) has recently closed.

A single large facility, CCAS, is located far from the eastern and southern portions of the County increasing the commute time for resident’s access to public services. The recent closure of the Pinole facility reduces ready access to CCAS in-person services for the western part of the County. By comparison, Alameda County has seven public shelters serving an area nearly comparable (739 square miles) to Contra Costa County (716 square miles). These public shelters are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Bay Area government shelters in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties. The Pinole facility closed in September 2020.

Public Shelter Name	City	Owner pet surrenders?
Contra Costa County		
Antioch Animal Shelter	Antioch	Y
Contra Costa County Animal Services	Martinez	Y
Contra Costa County Animal Services	Pinole (closed)	NA
Alameda County		
Alameda Animal Shelter	Alameda	Y
Berkeley City Animal Shelter	Berkeley	Y
East County Animal Shelter	Dublin	Y
Fairmont Animal Shelter	San Leandro	Y
Hayward Animal Control	Hayward	Y
Oakland Animal Shelter	Oakland	Y
Tri-City Animal Shelter	Fremont	Y

Table 2

Bay Area nonprofit animal shelters in Contra Costa and Alameda and Alameda Counties.

Organization Name	City	Owner pet surrenders?
Contra Costa County		
Animal Rescue Foundation	Walnut Creek	N
Milo Foundation	Point Richmond	Call
Contra Costa Humane Society	Pleasant Hill	N
Contra Costa SPCA	Concord	Call
Alameda County		
Berkeley Humane Society	Berkeley	Y
East Bay SPCA - Tri-Valley	Dublin	Y
Oakland East Bay SPCA	Oakland	Y
Ohlone Humane Society	Fremont	N

The nonprofit animal shelters in both counties are listed in Table 2. Although Alameda County's population of 1.67 million is approximately 45% larger than Contra Costa's, the per capita access to public animal services in Alameda County is more evenly distributed than in Contra Costa County.

Both Tables include a column indicating whether the shelter accepts owner-surrendered pets -- that is, pets whose owners are relinquishing ownership of an animal to the shelter. The centrally located Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF) nonprofit, animal shelter in Contra Costa County, does not accept owner-surrendered animals. In the western part of the County, the Milo Foundation nonprofit animal shelter will accept and hold selected owner-surrendered pets. The Point Richmond Adoption Center, operated by the Milo Foundation, has existing physical resources for animal sheltering including a small 5,000 square foot physical space in Point Richmond. The Milo Foundation also manages a large, 283-acre, animal sanctuary in Mendocino County.

Resource Sharing

There is an existing instance of a decentralized countywide resource. The County Sheriff's Office maintains a Patrol Division that operates from five station houses throughout the County to patrol unincorporated areas and a Special Operations Division which leverages County assets to support several incorporated municipalities (Danville, Lafayette, and Orinda). Each station house has its own Lieutenant with a variable number of deputies and staff support. The incorporated municipalities contract with the Sheriff's Office but retain local control over police operation. This contractual arrangement leads to standardized training and the sharing of staff resources.

The decentralized structure of the County Sheriff's services suggests that a similar redistribution of CCAS services might be possible and result in more efficient service. Such an approach need not require construction of additional facilities. Animal service personnel could be stationed at suitable existing County and city buildings to improve response times. The cities in the County have different needs so the additional flexibility in requested animal services might be beneficial and cost-effective. CCAS currently has an identical contract agreement with each of the municipalities. This contract structure might be modified to maintain universal basic services to all contracted cities but offer enhanced services for those cities with differing needs ranging from noise complaints to roaming feral pigs. Increased communication between CCAS management and the individual city managers is necessary to explore these possibilities.

In the special case of the City of Antioch, information gathered by the Grand Jury also suggests that resource sharing between CCAS and AAS could be beneficial. Establishing a partnership between AAS and CCAS for a low-cost spay and neuter clinic was cited as an example. This service would help control the pet and community cat population in the eastern part of the County. More extensive cooperation between the two public shelters, such as operating both shelters as one program, was

recommended but would require agreement from the management of both shelters to fund a comprehensive feasibility study.

A similar precedent for merging county and city animal services is the ongoing consolidation of animal services between the City of Salinas and Monterey County who contracted an independent consulting firm, Management Partners, in 2015, to provide options for the consolidation of services. The resulting comprehensive report outlined four options, one of which recommended the formation of a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) between the County of Monterey and the City of Salinas. The selection of the JPA option facilitated the gradual merging of the two shelters in April 2020. Similarly, CCAS could engage a consulting firm to assist in determining how to proceed.

In Contra Costa County, the Antioch Animal Shelter has a proportionally larger animal intake than CCAS. See Table 3.

Table 3

Total live animal intake population by AAS and CCAS per year.

Year	AAS	CCAS
2018	2,786	8,454
2019	2,577	8,673
2020	1,366	5,015

Although CCAS handles about three times the total number of animals as AAS, the Antioch shelter has a disproportionately large live animal intake given its much smaller resident population.

This additional animal intake burden on AAS is reflected in the higher cost per capita, \$15.44, for animal services for the residents of Antioch. As noted in Table 4, the overall per capita cost, \$12.02, for CCAS services is comparable to other selected public animal shelters, but the individual fee rate for those cities that contract with CCAS is \$6.54, less than half of the City of Antioch rate. The lower CCAS rate for the contracted cities is possible due to distributed base funding through the County's General Fund and User Fee Revenue. Interviews conducted by the Grand Jury suggested that CCAS and AAS could share personnel and facility space to provide more access to low-cost rabies vaccination and spay and neutering services for East County residents.

Table 4
Per capita cost for selected public animal shelters.

Public Shelter	FY 20/21 Per Capita Rate
Solano County	\$11.11
Sacramento County	\$13.10
City of Oakland	\$12.09
City of Antioch	\$15.44
Contra Costa County (total)	\$12.02
Contra Costa County (Cities)	\$6.54

Partnership with nonprofit animal rescue organizations might also be an effective means of distributing resources. As noted in Table 2, there are two nonprofit shelters in Contra Costa County, ARF in Walnut Creek and the Milo Foundation in Point Richmond. ARF was historically instrumental in providing oversight in the reorganization of AAS and, according to information supplied to the Grand Jury, it has maintained a favorable working relationship with both AAS and CCAS. Further coordination and expansion of mutual animal services can be beneficial.

Another nonprofit animal shelter located in Dublin is operated by East Bay SPCA (Table 2). Although this facility is within Alameda County, its stated mission is to provide services to both Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. Its proximity to the southern and eastern parts of Contra Costa County suggests that CCAS management could promote an enhanced working relationship between CCAS and East Bay SPCA. Similarly, CCAS management should consider resource sharing with the Milo Foundation, which maintains a 5,000 square foot facility in Point Richmond.

Funding

A possible new funding source available to CCAS is Measure X. County voters approved this measure in November 2020, increasing the sales tax in Contra Costa County by 0.5% for twenty years, which will generate an estimated \$81 million per year for essential services. Allocation of these funds is overseen by an Advisory Board, which creates a detailed priority list of the top ten service gaps and submits a recommended list to the Board of Supervisors.

Current cost increases are placing a greater burden on some of the contracted cities given CCAS's per capita cost structure. Effective July 1, 2022, the CCAS service fee will increase from \$6.79 to \$9.11 per capita. Measure X funding could supply funding to

offset this rate increase. Additional CCAS funding might also restore sick and wildlife animal retrieval and support distributed low-cost veterinarian services.

Community Outreach

Based on information gathered from Requests for Information and interviews, both AAS and CCAS struggle with community outreach and education. Outreach programs are essential to address the underlying cause of stress on animal services due to the increasing homeless pet population. Personnel at both facilities are aware of this deficiency but are hampered by lack of adequate staffing. Beyond staffing concerns, low-cost options for pet medical treatment would lead to a decrease in abandoned pets for those owners unable to afford proper pet care. Community awareness of the importance of spaying and neutering pets is also a key component of outreach programs.

Information collated from a Grand Jury survey indicated that most cities were “satisfied” (40%) or “somewhat satisfied” (40%) with existing CCAS services. However, there were common complaints from the cities responding as “unsatisfied” (20%). For example, existing CCAS services to some of the contracted cities are not adequately communicated to residents. Therefore, increased communication with the community would be beneficial especially concerning wildlife management and the availability of veterinary services.

The CCAS response to reports of dangerous, deceased, or distressed animals is considered by some of the contracted cities to be inadequate despite the recent (January 7, 2020) fee increase to the city contracts approved by the Board of Supervisors. Many municipality respondents noted that deceased and diseased animal retrieval is of special importance throughout the County due to public health and traffic safety concerns.

Volunteers

Based on interviews and site visits, assistance from volunteers is essential to animal care at CCAS and AAS due to the limited funding received by each facility. At CCAS, volunteers receive formal and practical training from experienced volunteers and staff. Although AAS has created a Volunteer Coordinator / Community Outreach position, it is unfilled due to lack of funding. In many instances, volunteers are not assigned specific tasks and are left to establish their own work schedules. A redistribution of animal shelter services throughout the County would also increase the pool of potential volunteers in the County. The need to travel to Martinez could be an impediment to volunteering at the CCAS for people residing in the eastern, western, or southern parts of the county.

FINDINGS

- F1. There is a need for improved animal services throughout the County.
- F2. CCAS facilities are concentrated in the northern part of the County.
- F3. AAS volunteers are often not assigned specific tasks and lack direction.
- F4. AAS does not have funding for a Volunteer Coordinator / Community Outreach staff position.
- F5. In some of the contracted municipalities, residents are not aware of CCAS-provided services, especially wildlife retrieval.
- F6. Funding reductions to the CCAS budget have hindered live wildlife retrieval and rescue.
- F7. A satisfaction survey of the 18 CCAS-contracted cities revealed 40% satisfied, 40% somewhat satisfied, and 20% unsatisfied with the quality of overall CCAS services supplied.
- F8. All CCAS contracts with municipalities provide identical services at the same cost per capita.
- F9. Additional vaccination and spay and neuter clinics would reduce the number of homeless and surrendered animals in the shelters.
- F10. There are private animal shelter facilities, The Milo Foundation and ARF, in the western and central parts of the County, respectively.
- F11. A private animal shelter in Alameda County, East Bay SPCA, is located near the southern part of Contra Costa County.
- F12. Measure X funding has not been allocated for CCAS operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury recommends that the following be implemented by June 2022:

- R1. The Antioch City Council allocate funding to fill the staff position of Volunteer Coordinator / Community Outreach at AAS.
- R2. AAS improve volunteer training.
- R3. The County Board of Supervisors allocate additional funding to provide outreach to educate residents about available CCAS services.

- R4. CCAS explore embedding Animal Control Officers at selected police stations to expand services, such as wildlife retrieval, throughout the county.
- R5. CCAS engage a consulting firm to obtain guidance on the possible redistribution of animal services within the County.
- R6. CCAS pursue a Memorandum of Understanding with ARF to coordinate resource sharing.
- R7. CCAS pursue a Memorandum of Understanding with the Milo Foundation to coordinate resource sharing.
- R8. CCAS pursue a Memorandum of Understanding with East Bay SPCA to coordinate resource sharing.
- R9. CCAS management and City Managers pursue customization of the Animal Services contracts to include basic service plus extended services for an additional fee.
- R10. AAS and CCAS explore sharing of resources for low-cost animal care clinics in the eastern part of the County.
- R11. The County Board of Supervisors request that CCAS apply for Measure X funding to lower the projected increased financial cost to CCAS-contracted cities and to support additional low-cost spay and neuter services.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

	Findings	Recommendations
City Council of Antioch	F1, F3, F4, F9	R1, R2, and R10
Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	F1, F5-F12	R3-R11

These responses must be provided in the format and by the date set forth in the cover letter that accompanies this report. An electronic copy of these responses in the form of a Word document should be sent by e-mail and a hard (paper) copy should be sent to:

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