

**Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury**

**TEACHING AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS**  
**What the Animal Control Services Department Can Do Right Now**  
June 19, 2023



*Saving one animal may not change the world, but for that one animal, the world will be changed forever.*

## SUMMARY

The Calaveras County Grand Jury (CCGJ) decision to investigate the Calaveras County Animal Services Department was in accordance with California Penal Code §925 which states in part “...investigations may be conducted on some selective basis each year.” The Grand Jury was interested in assessing the overall operations of the facility as well as the operations and management of the Animal Shelter.

The Grand Jury concluded that the Animal Shelter, built in the 1950’s, remains inadequate. As reported in past Grand Jury reports dating back to 1987, the shelter is understaffed, unsanitary, underfunded, overcrowded, as well as unappealing and in need of replacement.

Until a new shelter is built, Animal Services would benefit from a makeover. The shelter is in need of more staffing, a user friendly website, and a more inviting marketing strategy to the Calaveras County residents.

## GLOSSARY

CCAS	Calaveras County Animal Services
BOS	Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
CAO	County Administrative Officer (role changed to CEO in January 2023)
CEO	County Executive Officer
CCGJ	Calaveras County Grand Jury
EMA	Environmental Management Agency
FOCAS	Friends of Calaveras County Animal Shelter

## METHODOLOGY

The CCGJ conducted a site visit of the Calaveras County Animal Services shelter. In addition, they reviewed past CCGJ reports and conducted the following interviews:

Animal Control Services staff  
Calaveras County Chief Executive Office staff  
Environmental Management Agency staff

## BACKGROUND

Calaveras County Animal Services (CCAS) has been under the direction of the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) since October 2012. Funding of the shelter is provided by Calaveras County through allocations from County taxes which are approved by Calaveras County Board of Supervisors (BOS). CCAS is responsible for animal related calls and concerns from the community. The CCAS is also responsible for animal shelter operations, dog licensing, rabies vaccinations, spay and neutering services, and ensuring that all animals within the county receive basic care.

For the past 20 years CCGJ has reported that the Calaveras County Animal Shelter has outgrown and outlived its effectiveness and needs to be replaced. The dire need of a new CCAS facility

was substantiated by the May 21, 2018 Calaveras County Animal Services Bickmore Shelter Hazard Report, as well as the November 3, 2022 University of California, Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program Report. Both of these reports were performed to better understand the needs of the shelter.

Until recently, despite multiple Grand Jury reports, citizen complaints, and third party studies, little had been done to replace the Animal Shelter. In their response to the 2018-2019 CCGJ report and other past Grand Jury Reports, the BOS agreed that a new shelter needed to be addressed. On September 10, 2019, the BOS directed the Calaveras County Administrative Officer (CAO) to conduct a study and report back to the Board. At the February 18, 2020 BOS meeting, the CAO presented a recommendation to build a new Animal Shelter on the available 6.9 acre parcel west of the courthouse. The BOS instructed the CAO to perform a formal study which had not been completed until 2023. At the April 11, 2023 meeting, the Board agreed to have the County Executive Officer (CEO) hire architectural and engineering services

While recent activities by the BOS have resulted in refocused attention on the new shelter construction, the 2022-2023 Grand Jury decided to focus on improvements that can be relatively quick, easy, and inexpensively implemented.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Staffing/Hours**

Shelter hours are limited due to lack of staffing. Currently, there is one CCAS manager, one office technician, two animal shelter assistants and three Animal Services officers. During an emergency they may employ extra hires to assist with care of the animals. The shelter receives many phone calls a day, especially during emergency conditions such as fire and flooding. Phone calls are often unanswered and voice mail messages are not returned unless it pertains to animal or public safety. Some of these phone calls are for information which could be addressed by an updated and informative website.

The many volunteers from the non profit organization, Friends of Calaveras Animal Shelter (FOCAS), also contribute to the operations of the shelter on a limited basis. These valuable volunteers perform behavior modification, walking the animals, cleaning, and socialization of the animals.

CCAS is open to the public Tuesday – Saturday, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm, and 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm. These hours may not be ideal for the public and limits available time for pet adoptions. For people with conventional working hours, many will not have access to the CCAS at all on Tuesdays – Fridays. That leaves one day per week, with limited hours, on Saturday.

Because of these limited time frames, the ability to find homes for shelter animals may be severely limited as well. Ideally, adding more staff and extending/adjusting hours would help alleviate these constraints. Research could be done to determine what times and days are busiest, and hours could be adjusted accordingly. The UC Davis report recommends the following:

*~On one weekday per week, expand hours to stay open later to coincide with traditional working hours (Open until 6:30 pm, for example).*

*~Focus one day of the week on adoptions (ie – Saturdays)*

~Stagger lunch breaks so that the shelter can remain open between 1:00 pm and 2:00 pm

## **Website**

The Animal Services website (<https://animal.calaverasgov.us/>), as part of the Calaveras County website, was examined and evaluated. The Grand Jury recognizes that an improved website is achievable despite the lack of funding. With simple website improvements, the animal services website can become an improved go-to resource for the County, particularly in light of the short staffing, limited business hours, and budget issues. When calling the CCAS, consumers are often looking for basic information which could be found on an updated website.

Updates could include:

### **LOST & FOUND PETS PAGE**

- Add Lost & Found Pets to the drop down menu with Found a Kitten for Easier Navigation
- *State Law requires persons finding a lost pet call their local animal shelter and report that they have found an animal and leave their address or phone number as well as a description of the animal. And then what happens? Explain.*

### **FEES & LICENSING PAGE**

- Include information on fees associated with pregnant animals.
- Trap deposits – refundable?
- Include the county laws about licensing on this page.
- Add links to the forms associated with fees and licensing, ie adoption applications.
- On the License Your Dog page, the Map link does not work.  
On the License Your Dog page, include links to the relevant form downloads.

### **SERVICES PAGE**

- Include relevant page links:
  - Codes & ordinances
  - Adoptions page link
  - Fees & Licensing
  - Clinics
- Etc. – can add tons of links to this page
- On the License Your Dog page, are the only ways to apply in-person or by mail?

### **ADOPTIONS PAGE**

“Please visit the sites below to view adoptable pets” is linked to:  
<https://calaverashumane.org/animals/available-dogs/> and it opens in the same window.  
It’s not clear that “Please visit the sites below to view adoptable pets” is linked, and where it goes isn’t logical.

### **FORMS PAGE**

- Categorization of Forms, Documents, and Other Information:
  - Safety & Emergencies
  - Forms and Applications
  - Pet Programs

- Press Releases
- Resources

## RESOURCES

- Include the animal services website URL on the shelter answering machine phone message recording.
- Move time sensitive information (ie – rabies clinic) to the main banner at top o the website.
- Have the website proof-read for typos.
- Provide more specific info on clinics, ie – “after 11:45, if you aren’t in line, you will not get the rabies vaccine.”
- Make it easier to land on the Codes & Laws page. Our experience led us to a page about barking dogs.
- Put Codes & Laws in the drop-down menu under Codes & Laws.
- Add a link on the Barking Dogs page to the Codes & Laws page, and vice versa.
- List Title 6 codes to the webpage or direct the Title 6 URL link to the Title 6 section rather than the entire list of county codes  
[https://library.municode.com/ca/calaveras\\_county/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=CD\\_ORD\\_TIT6AN](https://library.municode.com/ca/calaveras_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CD_ORD_TIT6AN)
- Link the Calaveras Humane Society logo to this page:  
<https://calaverashumane.org/animals/> and have it open in a new tab.
- Calaveras Humane Society move to the bottom since they don’t appear to be very proactive with animal listings.
  - Pet Programs
  - Press Releases
  - Pet Programs
  - Press Releases
  - Fix the Get Directions link.



- Include the animal services website URL on your phone message recording.
- Move time sensitive information (ie – rabies clinic) to the main banner at the top of the website.
- Have the website proof-read for typos. There are several.
- Provide more specific info on clinics, ie – “after 11:45, if you aren’t in line, you will not get the rabies vax”

- Make it easier to land on the Codes & Laws page. Our experience led us to a page about Barking Dogs.

### **Shelter Communications**

The staff of CCAS and volunteers currently use cell phones for daily onsite communications. In the event of an emergency, an employee or volunteer would have to pull out their phone and find a number in their contacts to call for help. Precious time could be lost in that process. Animals and humans could be put in further danger if assistance isn't summoned promptly. The safety of employees, visitors, and animals could be better served with a more efficient system of communication within the shelter.

Very basic radios, or "walkie-talkies", could be utilized to speed up communication between on-duty shelter employees and volunteers. The time difference between taking out a phone, finding a contact, and making a call, versus the time to reach for your radio and press one button, could be the difference between an escaped or injured animal and no incident happening at all.

### **FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REQUEST FOR RESPONSES**

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses within 60 days from elected county official(s), and within 90 days from governing bodies. In order to be included and published in the next Grand Jury report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

After conducting interviews, reviewing reference documents, and touring the facility, the Grand Jury findings and recommendations are as follows:

- F1.** Limited staffing and shelter hours inhibit Calaveras County Animal Service's ability to serve the public with adoptions, intake, licensing, etc.
  - R1a.** The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends the Animal Shelter find an alternative schedule to accommodate conventional working hours of the public by January 1, 2024
  - R1b.** The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors approve additional hours for Animal Shelter staff by January 12, 2024.

#### **Required Responses**

- Board of Supervisors

#### **Invited Responses**

- Environmental Management Agency Administrator
- Animal Services Manager

- F2.** The Animal Control Services website is an inadequate resource for the public due to missing information and many defective website functions.
- R2.** The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that the Animal Services update their website with current information and improved user-friendly operations by March 1, 2024.

**Required Responses**

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Responses**

- Environmental Management Agency Administrator

- F3.** The current system of using cellphones rather than walkie-talkies for communication among staff and volunteers is inefficient in the event of a sudden emergency.

- R3.** The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve the acquisition of walkie-talkies for the Animal Shelter staff and volunteers by January 12, 2024.

**Required Responses**

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Responses**

- Animal Services Manager
- Environmental Management Agency Administrator

**COMMENDATIONS**

- C1.** The Calaveras County Grand Jury commends the Environmental Management Agency Administrator, shelter staff, and FOCAS volunteers for their dedication to the impounded animals and their pursuit of a new Calaveras County Animal Shelter so as to better serve the citizens and animals of Calaveras County.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

**REFERENCE SOURCES**

- Bickmore Shelter Hazard Report, Calaveras County Animal Services Tom Kline, ARM, CPSI, Terrie S. Norris, CSP, ARM, CPSI, September 2018
- BOS minutes from meetings on September 10, 2019; February 18, 2020; December 13, 2022, and April 11, 2023 ([www.calaveras.gov.us](http://www.calaveras.gov.us))
- Calaveras County Animal Shelter (<https://animal.calaverasgov.us/>)
- Calaveras County Grand Jury Reports from 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 (<https://grandjury.calaverasgov.us/Reports>)

- Calaveras Enterprise, Danny Benson, CALAVERAS BOS:Animal volunteers make a stand for new shelter; board receives economic development presentation, August 2, 2022 ([www.calaverasenterprise.com](http://www.calaverasenterprise.com))
- Calaveras Enterprise, Nick Baptista, New Animal Shelter moves closer to reality April 7, 2023 ([www.calaverasenterprise.com](http://www.calaverasenterprise.com))
- County Ordinance, Title 6 – ANIMALS, Chapter 6.([www.animal.calaveras.gov.us](http://www.animal.calaveras.gov.us))
- UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program; Calaveras Housing Capacity Report D.Wagner, B.Stunteback, November 3, 2022