

Animal shelter needs immediate attention, can't wait for new facility, according to grand jury

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / June 23, 2023

Calaveras County's animal shelter remains inadequate, according to findings released this week by the 2022-2023 Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury, and although the county is in the planning stages to replace the facility, "Animal Service would benefit from a makeover."

The jury's report entitled "Teaching An Old Dog New Tricks" was released Tuesday and says, "the shelter is understaffed, unsanitary, underfunded, overcrowded, as well as unappealing and in need of replacement."

"The shelter is in need of more staffing, a user friendly website, and a more inviting marketing strategy to Calaveras County residents," the jury said in the summary of the report.

Animal Services and the animal shelter have been the subjects of past grand jury reports dating back to 1987, with the conclusion the county needed to devote more resources to the department and replace the existing facility dating back to the 1950s.

The county Board of Supervisors in April took a major step forward by authorizing approval of an agreement to begin initial design work on a new animal shelter.

County officials expect the project to be completed in 2025.

"While recent activities by the (Board of Supervisors) 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," the report said.

In its findings and recommendation, the jury said the shelter needs to find an alternative schedule to accommodate conventional working hours of the public by Jan 1, 2024.

The shelter is open to the public Tuesday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 to 3:30 p.m.

"These hours may not be ideal for the public and limits available time for pet adoptions," the report said. "For people with conventional working hours, many will not have access to the (shelter) at all on Tuesdays to Fridays. That leaves one day per week, with limited hours, on Saturday."

In addition, the Board of Supervisors needs to approve additional hours for the shelter staff by Jan. 12, 2024, the jury added.

The jury also recommended Animal Services needs to update its website with current information and improved user-friendly operations by March 1, 2024.

"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," the report said.

The final recommendation by the jury was for the board to approve the acquisition of walkie-talkies for Animal Shelter staff and volunteers by Jan. 12, 2024.

The jury found staff and volunteers currently use cell phones for daily onsite communications.

"In the event of an emergency, an employee or a volunteer would have to pull out their phone and find a number in their contacts to call for help," the report said. "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."

"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," the report concluded.

The complete report can be found at the grand jury's website - <http://grandjury.calaverasgov.us/> .