

Cost for animal shelter hits \$10 million

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Efforts to build a new animal shelter in Calaveras County took another step forward Tuesday but there are concerns there will not be enough money to fund construction.

The Board of Supervisors received a presentation from the firm that received a contract last year to do initial design work on the proposed facility.

Eric Wohle of LDA Partners, Inc. of Stockton made the presentation and shared two options – one for the new facility to be located at its present site off Jeff Tuttle Drive and the other where larger animals – such as horses – are kept west of the Superior Courthouse.

Cost to place the new facility where the larger animals are kept would be more expensive due to additional grading and extending infrastructure to the site, he added.

In both instances, the county is looking at a price tag of \$10 million or more for full build out of a 10,000-square-foot shelter.

Options to complete the project in phases were also outlined by Wohle.

The most immediate need, he said, was to complete new housing for the dogs because that part of the existing facility is in the most disrepair.

The cost to do that phase of the project would be nearly \$7 million.

The problem is the county has only \$4 million set aside for a new animal shelter.

A majority of the board was in favor of spending an estimated \$800,000 to begin the design phase of the project and look at how to fund the rest when budget talks begin later this year.

Board Chairman Jack Garamendi was in the minority and argued in favor of seeing what work the county could get done on the shelter for the \$4 million.

The state's budget woes were also a topic of the discussion. The state is looking at a \$38 billion deficit.

District 3 Supervisor Martin Huberty said it is unlikely the county will receive a \$200,000 state grant State Sen. Marie Alvarado-Gil, D-Jackson, had secured last year for shelter improvements.

It will not be until May or June when the county knows how much money it will get back in property tax revenue from the state, said District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli, and whether the county will have to dip into reserves to fund services.

He pushed for design work on the entire project. That would give supervisors a better idea of actual costs, which could go up or down, and also outline ways to reduce costs.

District 4 Supervisor Amanda Folendorf was also in favor of moving forward with the shelter and said some cuts may have to be made elsewhere in the county to complete the project.

"It's going to get very uncomfortable in the next couple of months," Folendorf said, in regards to the state's financial situation, how it will affect the county budget and future of the animal shelter.

District 5 Supervisor Benjamin Stopper said he was in favor of moving forward "as much as possible" given any budget constraints.

The design phase will break the project into different portions for bidding, Wohle said.

"That's what we are asking for," Stopper said.

The existing animal shelter has been under grand jury scrutiny for nearly two decades.

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

The county has set a timeline of 2025 to complete the new shelter.