

## ANIMAL SERVICES

### BACKGROUND:

Since 1978 the City of Bakersfield (City) had leased City owned land at 201 South Mount Vernon Avenue to the County of Kern (County). The City provided a rent free lease to the County for the sole purpose of having the County construct and operate an animal shelter. The original lease included a term of 30 years and was set to expire in 2008. In 2002 the City agreed to extend the term of the **rent free lease** for an additional 20 years through December of 2028.

Separately, the City had a contract with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) from June 1991 through June 2003. Under this agreement the SPCA handled both animal control field operations as well as sheltering stray and unwanted animals for the City. At the end of June 2002 the City's agreement with the SPCA expired and was not renewed. The City was going through a period of economic decline which was exacerbated by State capture of local government funds. As a result, the City needed to reduce spending across all City departments and the SPCA could not afford to do the same job for less.

From July 1, 2003, through September 30, 2013, the City contracted with the County for sheltering and caring for stray and unwanted City animals. During this time the Bakersfield Police Department established an Animal Control Division which handled the field services formerly handled by the SPCA.

In April 2012 the Kern County Board of Supervisors provided the City with a 180 day notice, as required by the lease, stating the County was terminating the rent free lease agreement for the Kern County Animal Shelter.

In August 2012 the City and County developed a short term agreement through June 30, 2013.

In March 2013 the City and County agreed to work together to implement a long term plan to renovate the existing shelter, construct new facilities and continue to provide sheltering services at one location. The talks broke down and communication between the two entities became very limited.

In August 2013 the City notified the County it would not be renewing the contract for sheltering services and the County must vacate the premises by October 1, 2013. After years of contentious relations, the City complained Kern County Animal Control was *"nonresponsive to the City's efforts."*

Kern County Animal Control moved out of the shelter built by the County on City owned land it had leased for 36 years. The City then initiated a robust and rather rapid renovation effort at the Mount Vernon location, including the construction of new facilities. The Bakersfield SPCA was again given the contract to oversee daily operations of the City's shelter, and the name was changed to City of Bakersfield Animal Care Center (City Shelter).



Meanwhile, the Kern County Animal Control relocated all of the animals and supplies to the new location at 3951 Fruitvale Avenue at considerable expense and changed its name to Kern County Animal Services (County Shelter). Both Shelters are now operating independently, providing services to Bakersfield and Kern County residents.

## **PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:**

After publicity regarding the lack of rapport between City and County Animal Services resurfaced in 2013, the 2013-2014 Kern County Grand Jury appointed an ad hoc committee to look into the matter. Pursuant to California Penal Code §925a, the Grand Jury Animal Services Ad Hoc Committee (Committee) has the authority to investigate and report on animal services in Kern County.

## **PROCESS:**

The Committee took extensive tours of both County and City facilities. The Committee completed phone and in-person interviews with several of the non-profit animal rescue organizations on the Friends of Kern County Animal Shelters Foundation (Friends) list, met with the Director of Kern County Animal Services, interviewed the Director of the City of Bakersfield Animal Care Center, conducted internet research, attended the County's monthly Animal Services meetings and the Board of Supervisors Animal Ad Hoc meetings, and fostered animals from both the County and City Shelters and several local non-profit animal rescue organizations.

## **FACTS:**

- A. Kern County is the third largest county in the State of California and covers 8,172 square miles. The incorporated areas of the county cover 400 square miles while the remaining 7,772 square miles are unincorporated.
- B. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2008-2012, individuals living below the poverty level comprised 22.5 % of the population, or one in four Kern County residents. When compared to all contiguous counties, Kern County ranks second after Tulare County for the most people living below the poverty level. (Appendix A)
- C. According to the County's website, "*Kern County Animal Services serves the unincorporated areas of the county, which includes the unincorporated municipalities of Frazier Park, Lamont, Mojave, Oildale and Rosamond. The County provides all or partial services and shelter services to the cities of Arvin and Tehachapi through contractual agreements. In order to meet the sheltering needs of the unincorporated area around the City of Ridgecrest and in the Kern River Valley, the County has contractual service agreements with the City of Ridgecrest and a private shelter in Lake Isabella.*" The County serves 82 unincorporated communities.



- D. According to the County website, *"The County manages two animal shelters. The largest shelter is located at 3951 Fruitvale Avenue in Bakersfield."* The Fruitvale shelter has 68 full time County employees, including a full time veterinarian and three Registered Vet Techs (RVT) positions. The other Shelter is at the Mojave Airport in Mojave. *"Both shelters are able to house and care for dogs and cats. In addition, both shelters can accommodate larger domestic animals such as horses, goats, sheep, and pigs. They also accept birds, lizards, and rabbits."* The website is maintained by the Kern County ITS team. Adoptable pets as well as stray and lost pets can be viewed at [co.kern.ca.us/acd](http://co.kern.ca.us/acd), and [petharbor.com](http://petharbor.com).
- E. According to a County Shelter Supervisor's estimate the breeds most often euthanized are 30% Pit-Bulls, 30% Chihuahuas, and the remaining 40% a mix of German Shepherds, Siberian Huskies, Boxers and small Terriers.
- F. The Board of Supervisors released \$20,000 for spay and neuter vouchers, giving \$50 per dog in zip codes 93306, 93307 and 93308 to help control the unwanted dog population. County animal statistics determined that the majority of stray dogs coming into County shelters were from these zip codes.
- G. The Board of Supervisors has set aside \$50,000 to provide mobile spay and neuter clinics in the outlying communities. Currently the County Mobile Vet Clinics scheduled to visit outlying areas are for shots, micro-chipping and licenses **only**.
- H. Owners retrieving any unaltered dog or cat brought to a City or County Shelter automatically incurs a fine of \$35 to the State of California and a \$40 fine to the U.S. Department of Food and Agriculture (USDA) - a total of \$75 in fines.
- I. Legally, the City and County must hold stray animals for 72 hours, not counting the day they were impounded or days when the shelter is closed (on average four business days). On day five, an unredeemed animal may be adopted by the public. After day six, it can be rescued by an animal rescue organization or euthanized. Both City and County Shelters try to hold animals they deem "more adoptable" much longer.
- J. The City Shelter on South Mount Vernon Avenue has 26 employees, four Animal Control Officers (ACO), one Senior ACO, one Animal Control Supervisor, and one clerk typist for the field operations side; two clerk typists, nine kennel workers from the Homeless Center and eight SPCA staff, including a veterinarian are on the shelter side.
- K. The City Shelter website is [bakersfieldcity.us](http://bakersfieldcity.us).



- L. The City Shelter charges a \$50 impound/redemption fee for any animal picked up by City ACOs and taken to the City Shelter that is added to the amount needed to redeem an impounded animal plus the mandated State and USDA fines.
- M. State law allows immediate euthanasia for any animal brought to a shelter at less than eight weeks of age, and without a mother. Both City and County Shelters try to find foster homes in such cases to avoid euthanizing the very young.

## FINDINGS:

- F1. The County Shelter is clean, well run and staffed with friendly people who genuinely seem to care about the animals. The Shelter has a large, bright lobby with glass enclosures that cleverly show off available cats and kittens. Dog runs have a connecting doggy door that can be opened to the kennel directly behind when more room is needed.
- F2. Since October 2012, in the interest of helping pet owners reunite with lost animals, the County Shelter has been providing free micro-chipping services for dogs and cats regardless of whether the pet is licensed or altered.
- F3. The County Shelter needs an additional \$150,000 to finish a Spay and Neuter Surgical Suite. Currently the Shelter is using a "Mobile Vet Coach" for surgical procedures and must utilize other organizations such as North of the River Pet Hospital and Critters Without Litters to help with the overflow. The Veterinarian at the County Shelter can only do 10-15 small to medium size animal spay and neuter surgeries a day, three days a week, for a total of 40-45 surgeries per week. According to the County Director, the new surgical suite will be able to accommodate large animals and will cut the cost of altering both male and female animals down to less than half of what it is now.
- F4. The same Mobile Vet Coach used for surgeries is also used **once a month** for the County's Mobile Vet Clinics. Over a year's time it visits seven parks in Bakersfield, three in Oildale, and one each in McFarland, Buttonwillow, Taft, Frazier Park, Lamont, Lost Hills, Shafter, Tehachapi and Rosamond. The clinic offers shots, micro-chipping and licenses, but unfortunately can only service the few local animals seen in **one day** and cannot address the need for low cost spay and neuter services.
- F5. The County Shelter would like to obtain several vehicles customized to provide animal transportation to and from outlying areas of Kern County to Bakersfield. When the Surgical Suite at the County Shelter is finished, the County anticipates offering transportation to and from the facility to better provide low-cost spay and neuter options to more unincorporated areas.



- F6. The County has a good Trap, Neuter and Release (TNR) program for feral cats but does not have hiding boxes in the holding cages. So far this year the Shelter has altered and released 340 feral cats.
- F7. The County Shelter is eligible for grants but Kern County doesn't presently employ a grant writer.
- F8. The County website is sometimes difficult to navigate. Some photos are clear while others appear distorted. The County Shelter Facebook page is well done. [Facebook.com/KernCountyAnimalServices](https://www.facebook.com/KernCountyAnimalServices)
- F9. Currently the County has a large problem with unlicensed "backyard breeders." Unfortunately, there is no funding for staff to regulate, inspect, and fine those illegally breeding without a license, overbreeding and/or breeding irresponsibly with no care to the future genetic health of the breed.
- F10. The Committee learned some pet owners in poorer neighborhoods cannot afford pet food and are allowing pets to wander freely looking for food.
- F11. The areas of the County reporting the highest number of dog bites and loose dogs appear to be neighborhoods with the lowest economic levels.
- F12. The City and County need more Animal Control Officers (ACO).
- F13. Both the County and City need more help from the public to foster pregnant, very young and injured animals for the shelters. Both expressed particular difficulty in finding those willing to foster medium and large breeds.
- F14. County and City Shelter Directors currently appear to have a better working relationship.
- F15. The City Shelter is looking much improved and clean, has freshly painted walls, re-surfaced floors in the kennels and a bright and cheery cat habitat filled mostly with kittens. A much needed overhead shade cloth has been added to stop pigeons from roosting and contaminating dog runs with droppings. The Shelter has added a new parking lot on the south side, a beautiful new adoption/intake building with a quiet area for adoption introductions and a grass area outside for meeting family members. The Shelter has repurposed a break room into a grooming room and the old entrance area is being converted into a medical theatre. Two kennels have been renovated and a third is progressing, but more funds are needed to start the fourth. The staff is personable, helpful, hardworking and appears very committed to helping animals in the City's care.
- F16. The City does not have a TNR program for feral cats. Currently verified feral cats are euthanized.



- F17. The City has a goal of responding to non-emergency, lower priority animal service calls within 48 hours.
- F18. The City Shelter needs help getting and keeping paperwork organized. Several Friends organizations expressed frustration with the waiting time to depart with a rescue or foster animal because the paperwork could not be located.
- F19. Photos of the animals on the City website run by Pet-Tango are usually well composed and appealing. Adoptable and lost or stray animals on a 72 hour hold are shown on the website.
- F20. Individuals offering to foster animals for the City and County are provided free food and medical care. Rescue organizations offering to foster are sometimes not given the same benefits, but must provide and pay for food and medical care themselves.
- F21. Only the City Shelter charges Friends organizations \$80.00 per dog and \$40.00 per cat for rescuing pure bred appearing animals. Mixed breed animals, however, are free.
- F22. The Committee received many verbal complaints about a "floating" set of rules for Friends organizations regarding which dogs were released to which organization for fostering or rescuing at both County and City Shelters. At this time, it is supposed to be "first come, first served." When one Friends rescue organization seems to have an inside track and can allegedly place "holds" on upcoming animals, or cherry pick the best animal, other Friends organizations get frustrated which strains relations with both Shelters.
- F23. The reunification rate for lost pets from the County Shelter in 2014 was 5% in January and 4% in February, well below the 1997 annual level of 17.8% nationally.
- F24. The reunification rate for lost pets from the City Shelter in 2014 was 6% in January and 4% in February, well below the 1997 annual level of 17.8% nationally.
- F25. The 2014 euthanasia rate for the County Shelter of 34% in January and 41% in February, although better than the 2013 euthanasia rate of 52% in January and 58% in February, is lower than the 1997 annual level of 64% nationally.
- F26. The 2014 euthanasia rate for the City Shelter (taking into account the beginning shelter count as well as the monthly intake numbers) is 65% in January, 59% in February, and 53% in March.
- F27. The County has adopted a fee structure. (Appendix G)



- F28. The City has adopted a fee structure. (Appendix H)
- F29. City residents must show a driver's license or utility bill to prove residency before the City Shelter will accept an animal. Similarly, the County Shelter accepts animals from County residents. Exceptions are made for sick or injured animals.
- F30. The City Shelter offers owner requested euthanasia for \$65.00. Due to a court injunction, owner requested euthanasia cannot be offered by the County Shelter.

### **COMMENTS:**

The Committee would like to thank Kern County Animal Services, City of Bakersfield Animal Care Center and the non-profit animal rescue organizations on the Friends of Kern County Animal Shelters Foundation list, all employees and volunteers who so generously contributed their time, opinions and expertise to this report. Both the County and City have made huge improvements. Many statistics show animal services are moving in the right direction.

A special "well done" goes out to the Shafter Animal Shelter. Everyone the Committee spoke to about animal programs worthy of copying mentioned the Shafter Animal Shelter. Shafter's animal policies stand out as an example of a small town getting it right.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- R1. As funds become available, the County should form a task force to locate, inspect, regulate and fine illegally operating "backyard breeders." (Finding 9)
- R2. The Grand Jury recommends yearly fees for dog and cat breeders be updated. (Finding 9)
- R3. All breeders advertising animals for sale should be required to include a current license number and current County rating for easy verification. (Finding 9)
- R4. The reunification rates between lost animals and their owners in both Shelters need to be improved. Rates of 20% in Castaic, 7% in Lancaster and 23% in Agoura show that Kern County can improve. (Appendix D, E and F) (Findings 23 and 24)
- R5. The euthanasia rates in both Shelters need to be lowered. Rates of 35% in Castaic, 48% in Lancaster and 25% in Agoura show lower rates are possible. (Appendix D, E and F) (Findings 25 and 26)
- R6. The Grand Jury recommends posting on the County website an alphabetical list of all licensed animal facilities, including license number and earned rating of A, B, C, D or F, similar to the ones used in other counties. (Finding 9)



- R7. Both County and City websites could use a "This is my Lost Pet" link on the animal information page. Owners could send pertinent information, such as name, age, medical conditions and personality of the pet and when they intend to pick up the animal. An e-mail could then be sent to the owner with the amount of fees required to redeem the animal. (Findings 23 and 24)
- R8. City and County Shelters should monitor daily lost and found pet flyers posted at the Shelter and e-mail inquiries from each County or City website, Craig's List and Facebook to better coordinate reunifications between lost animals and searching owners. (Findings 8 and 19)
- R9. The County website needs to improve the quality of posted animal photos. Clear photos can make the difference between recognition, reunification, adoption, rescue or euthanasia. (Findings 8 and 19)
- R10. Both City and County website information pages for each individual animal should include whether the animal is on a 72 hour "stray" hold, available for adoption or in foster care. The date of availability for adoption and the date of reevaluation or euthanasia should also be displayed. (Findings 8 and 19)
- R11. The Grand Jury recommends as funds become available, the surgery suite at the County Shelter should be completed. While waiting for funds to complete the surgical suite, the County needs to partner with an organization that has a Mobile Veterinarian Coach that can perform spay and neuter procedures on animals over 60 pounds. (Findings 3, 4 and 5)
- R12. As funds become available, the Grand Jury recommends the last unimproved kennel at the City shelter be renovated. (Finding 15)
- R13. The first time a pet is impounded, an owner who can prove a low income level should have fees waived. Implementing a "low income scholarship fund" would help owners re-unite with their pets. If the same pet is impounded more than once, the regular fees should apply. (Findings 27 and 28)
- R14. To be more efficient, the City Shelter needs to upgrade software and organize the filing system. (Finding 18)
- R15. Kern County needs to hire a grant writer. (Finding 7)
- R16. Both County and City foster and rescue policies need to be clear and applied consistently to every foster/rescue individual and organization. (Findings 20 and 22)
- R17. The fees charged by the City to rescue a pure bred appearing dog or cat should include everything provided to the general public for the same fee, and should be



charged equally to all rescue organizations. The City should continue the policy of ensuring that price is not an obstacle to providing an animal with the opportunity to be rescued or adopted. (Findings 21 and 22)

- R18. Both the City and County need more ACOs. (Findings 11 and 12)
- R19. The City Shelter should implement a TNR program for City feral cats. The County Shelter should use hiding boxes in feral cat holding cages. Not only does this help keep the wild cats calm, it also makes it easier and safer for the staff to remove them for treatment. (Findings 6 and 16)
- R20. The City Shelter should consider partnering with a company that returns an owner-requested-euthanized-pet's ashes to the owner for an additional fee. The revenue generated could help fund subsidies for qualified low income pet owners. (Findings 26 and 30)
- R21. Both City and County Shelters should help publicize the Bakersfield Pet Food Pantry and what it offers to low income pet owners, expressly targeting the areas of greatest economic need. (Finding 10)
- R22. Both City and County Shelters need to accept animals **found in their jurisdiction** regardless of the residency of whoever brings in the animal. (Finding 29)

## **NOTES:**

The Kern County Animal Services and City of Bakersfield Animal Care Center should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.

Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: [www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury), click on: Sign up for early releases.

Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed through the Kern County Library system and the Kern County Grand Jury website: [www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury).

## **RESPONSE REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS TO:**

**PRESIDING JUDGE  
KERN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT  
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, 2ND FLOOR  
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**

**cc: FOREPERSON**



**KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY  
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600  
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**



## Appendix A

Percentage of County residents living below the poverty level

Kern	San Bernardino	Los Angeles	Ventura	Santa Barbara	San Luis Obispo	Monterey	Kings	Tulare	Inyo
22.5%	17.6%	17.1%	10.3%	15.3%	13.7%	16.1%	20.7%	24.8%	11.3%

## Appendix B

The County Shelter statistics for January and February 2014, compared to the same months in 2013:

### 2014 January

- Intake Total 1,221
- Adoption 270 (22%)
- Rescue 271 (22%)
- Returned to owner 60 ( 5%)
- Euthanized 412 (34%)
- Strays 979 (80%)
- Surrendered by owner 181 (15%)

### 2013 January

- Intake Total 2,418
- Adoption 274 (11%)
- Rescue 388 (16%)
- Returned to owner 98 ( 4%)
- Euthanized 1,263 (52%)
- Strays 2,168 (90%)
- Surrendered by owner 190 ( 8%)

### 2014 February

- Intake Total- 1,019
- Adoption- 237 (23%)
- Rescue- 184 (18%)
- Returned to owner- 45 ( 4%)
- Euthanized- 415 (41%)
- Strays- 848 (83%)
- Surrendered by owner-106 (10%)

### 2013 February

- Intake Total- 2,218
- Adoption- 323 (15%)
- Rescue- 272 (12%)
- Returned to owner- 93 ( 4%)
- Euthanized- 1,297 (58%)
- Strays- 1,921 (87%)
- Surrendered by owner- 211 (10%)

2014	Live outcome rates for January	49%
	Non-live outcomes for January	51%
	Live outcome rates for February	45%
	Non-live outcome rates for February	55%
2013	Live outcome rates for January	31%
	Non-live outcome rates for January	69%
	Live outcome rates for February	31%
	Non-live outcome rates for February	69%



## Appendix C

The City Shelter statistics for January and February 2014:

### 2014 January

• Capacity Total	140
• Intake Total	636
• Adoption	91 (14%)
• Transfers/Rescue	65 (10%)
• Return to owner	38 (6%)
• Owner request euthanasia	5
• Total euthanized	360 (57%)

### 2014 February

• Capacity Total	140
• Intake Total	347
• Adoption	120 (35%)
• Transfers/Rescue	67 (19%)
• Return to owner	13 (4%)
• Owner request euthanasia	8
• Total euthanized	285 (82%)

2014	Live outcome rates for the City shelter in January	35%,
	Non-live outcome rates for January	65%
	Live outcome rates for the City shelter in February	41%
	Non-live outcome rates for February	59%

## Appendix D

[file.lacounty.gov/dacc/Live%20and%20Non-Live%20Release\\_Active%20Report-Current%20Year-en-us.mht](file.lacounty.gov/dacc/Live%20and%20Non-Live%20Release_Active%20Report-Current%20Year-en-us.mht)

View pie chart for County of Los Angeles Animal Care and Control Animal Live Release and Euthanasia Rates Fiscal Year: 2013-2014-**Castaic**

## Appendix E

[file.lacounty.gov/dacc/Live%20and%20Non-Live%20Release\\_Active%20Report-Current%20Year-en-us.mht](file.lacounty.gov/dacc/Live%20and%20Non-Live%20Release_Active%20Report-Current%20Year-en-us.mht)

View pie chart for County of Los Angeles Animal Care and Control Live Release and Euthanasia Rates Fiscal Year: 2013-2014-**Lancaster**



## Appendix F

[file.lacounty.gov/dacc/Live%20and%20Non-Live%20Release\\_Active%20Report-Current%20Year-en-us.mht](http://file.lacounty.gov/dacc/Live%20and%20Non-Live%20Release_Active%20Report-Current%20Year-en-us.mht)

View pie chart for County of Los Angeles Animal Care and Control Live Release and Euthanasia Rates  
Fiscal Year: 2013-2014-Agoura

## Appendix G

Kern County has adopted the following fee structure:

### Kern County LICENSE, BOARDING AND OTHER Fees:

LICENSE Fees	One year	Three years	Senior citizen - one year	Senior citizen - three years
Dogs not fixed	\$ 60	\$120	No Discount	No Discount
Dogs fixed	\$ 15	\$ 30	\$ 5	\$ 15
OTHER Fees	DELINQUENT	DUPLICATE LICENSE TAG	SERVICE DOG	
	\$ 10	\$ 5	No Fee	
BOARDING Fee (while impounded)	Animals up to 100 lbs, per day per animal	Animals over 100 lbs, per day per animal		
	\$ 15	\$ 25		

### Kern County ADOPTION Fees:

	ADOPTION	SPAY/NEUTER	RABIES/FELINE VACCINATION	LICENSE	MICRO-CHIP	TOTAL Fees
Female Cat	\$ 5	\$ 25	\$ 5	0	\$ 15	\$ 50
Male Cat	\$ 5	\$ 15	\$ 5	0	\$ 15	\$ 40
Puppy- to 4 months old	\$ 10	\$ 40	\$ 10 voucher to use when puppy is old enough	0	\$ 15	\$ 75
Dog-fixed	\$ 10	0	\$ 5	\$5-15	\$ 15	\$35-45
Dog-not fixed	\$ 10	\$ 40	\$ 5	\$5-15	\$ 15	\$75-85



**Kern County COMMERCIAL ANIMAL FACILITIES/BREEDERS AND INSPECTIONS Fees:**

Animal Facility/Breeder	1-10 Animals	11-19 Animals	20-49 Animals	50-100 Animals	Over 100 Animals
Yearly Fee	\$ 75	\$100	\$125	\$150	\$150
Inspection Fee per hour	\$ 60	\$ 60	\$ 60	\$ 60	\$ 60
Additional animals over 100	0	0	0	0	\$ 10 each

**Kern County IMPOUND Fees:**

Licensed Dog	First impound	Second impound	Third + impound	Cats	First impound	Second impound	Third+ Impound
Fixed	\$ 15	\$ 30	\$ 60	Fixed	\$ 15	\$ 30	\$ 60
Not fixed	\$ 50	\$ 80	\$160	Not fixed	\$ 50	\$ 80	\$160
Un- licensed Dog				Female Dog in Season/ Heat			
Fixed	\$ 40	\$ 80	\$160	N/A	N/A		
Not fixed	\$ 75	\$130	\$260	Not fixed	\$ 20 plus boarding fees and State fines		

## Appendix H

Bakersfield City has adopted the following fee structure:

- Flat boarding fee per day \$20
- Adoption fee for a dog \$80
- Adoption fee for a cat \$40
- Redemption fee \$50



Kern County Board of Supervisors  
Response to Grand Jury Final Report

**KERN COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES**

Response to Findings:

The Board of Supervisors notes that the Grand Jury's findings are substantially correct.

Response to Recommendation:

*R1: As funds become available, the County should form a task force to locate, inspect, regulate and fine illegally operating "backyard breeders."*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation that, as funds become available, an enforcement task force should be formed to suppress illegally operating breeders.

*R2: The Grand Jury recommends yearly fees for dog and cat breeders be updated.*

The Board of Supervisors agrees that yearly fees should be updated as necessary. Annual fees are evaluated on a yearly basis to determine if the Department needs to revise the annual fee schedule. The annual fee schedule for breeders was last updated in January 2010.

*R3: All breeders advertising animals for sale should be required to include a current license number and current County rating for easy verification.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation to require all breeders advertising animals for sale include a license number. However, requiring advertising outlets to comply is not within the legal authority of the County. Currently, Kern County Animal Services Commercial Animal Facility Permit (CAF) inspections result in a pass or fail status. Exploring a more nuanced rating system is worthy of future examination.

*R4: The reunification rates between lost animals and their owners in both Shelters need to be improved. Rates of 20% in Castaic, 7% in Lancaster and 23% in Agoura show that Kern County can improve.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the recommendation that reunification rates should be improved. Kern County Animal Services is reviewing successful programs from comparable shelters in order to determine if any of the programs can be implemented in Kern County.

*R5: The euthanasia rates in the Shelter need to be lowered. Rates of 35% in Castaic, 48% in Lancaster and 25% in Agoura show lower rates are possible.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the recommendation that euthanasia rates need to be decreased. Kern County Animal Services has implemented several programs to increase live release rates such as the Trap-Neuter-Release program, holding longer and more frequent reduced adoption promotions and increasing rescue transports to other areas.



R6: *The Grand Jury recommends posting on the County website an alphabetical list of all licensed animal facilities, including license number and earned rating of A, B, C, D or F, similar to the ones used in other counties.*

The current County ordinance requires a pass/fail system as opposed to a letter grade. An alternative rating mechanism, such as a letter grade, merits future examination to determine if an ordinance change is warranted.

R7: *Both County and City websites could use a "This is my Lost Pet" link on the animal information page. Owners could send pertinent information, such as name, age, medical conditions and personality of the pet and when they intend to pick up the animal. An e-mail could then be sent to the owner with the amount of fees required to redeem the animal.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation and Kern County Animal Services is looking into options to develop a more user friend layout and website.

R8: *County Shelters should monitor daily lost and found pet flyers posted at the Shelter and e-mail inquiries from each County website, Craig's List and Facebook to better coordinate reunifications between lost animals and searching owners.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation. Kern County Animal Services presently provides the public an opportunity to share flyers at the shelter. The development of an expanded volunteer program is underway to allow volunteers the opportunity to search flyers and postings in assisting with reunification efforts.

R9: *The County website needs to improve the quality of posted animal photos. Clear photos can make the difference between recognition, reunification, adoption, rescue or euthanasia.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation. Kern County Animal Services' staff and volunteers have been assigned to and are assisting with taking clearer, updated photos.

R10: *County website information pages for each individual animal should include whether the animal is on a 72 hour "stray" hold, available for adoption or in foster care. The date of availability for adoption and the date of reevaluation or euthanasia should also be displayed.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation, and, Kern County Animal Services is exploring alternatives to develop a more adaptable layout.

R11: *The Grand Jury recommends as funds become available, the surgery suite at the County Shelter should be completed. While waiting for funds to complete the surgical suite, the County needs to partner with an organization that has a Mobile Veterinarian Coach that can perform spay and neuter procedures on animals over 60 pounds.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation. The surgery suite at the shelter should be completed as soon as funds become available and Kern County Animal Services has been contracting with local veterinarians for the past several years for surgeries on animals over 60 pounds.

R12: *As funds become available, the Grand Jury recommends the last unimproved kennel at the City shelter be renovated.*

This recommendation does not apply to Kern County Animal Services.



R13: *The first time a pet is impounded, an owner who can prove a low income level should have fees waived. Implementing a "low income scholarship fund" would help owners re-unite with their pets. If the same pet is impounded more than once, the regular fees should apply.*

Kern County Animal Services currently reviews owner redemption fees on a case-by-case basis to determine if certain fees can be waived. However, certain State and County fees are mandated and cannot be waived. Kern County Animal Services continues to examine programs that would allow pet owners to redeem their pets at reduced rates in a manner similar to the adoption fees.

R14: *To be more efficient, the City Shelter needs to upgrade software and organize the filing system.*

This recommendation does not apply to Kern County Animal Services.

R15: *Kern County needs to hire a grant writer.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation, but due to budgetary constraints, it is not possible at this time to add a position dedicated to grant writing. When additional resources become available, the department will explore establishing this position.

R16: *County foster and rescue policies need to be clear and applied consistently to every foster/rescue individual and organization.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation. Kern County Animal Services currently observes a set agreement for foster individuals and rescue organizations. The continued goal is to provide clear and concise information to outside organizations.

R17: *The fees charged by the City to rescue a pure bred appearing dog or cat should include everything provided to the general public for the same fee, and should be charged equally to all rescue organizations. The City should continue the policy of ensuring that price is not an obstacle to providing an animal with the opportunity to be rescued or adopted.*

This recommendation does not apply to Kern County Animal Services.

R18: *Both the City and County need more Animal Control Officers (ACO's).*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation, but due to budgetary constraints, it is not possible at this time to add new positions. When additional resources become available, the department will explore adding more Animal Control Officer positions.

R19: *The County Shelter should use hiding boxes in feral cat holding cages. Not only does this help keep the wild cats calm, it also makes it easier and safer for the staff to remove them for treatment.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation. Kern County Animal Services has been employing feral cat holding cages to safeguard the well-being of both the animals and staff.

R20: *The City Shelter should consider partnering with a company that returns an owner-requested-euthanized-pet's ashes to the owner for an additional fee. The revenue generated could help fund subsidies for qualified low income pet owners.*

This recommendation does not apply to Kern County Animal Services.



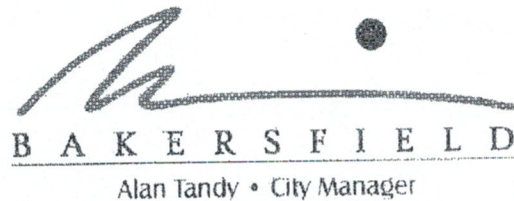
*R21: The County shelter should help publicize the Bakersfield Pet Food Pantry and what it offers to low income pet owners, expressly targeting the areas of greatest economic need.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation. Kern County Animal Services is exploring a pet retention program that would provide numerous resources including the Bakersfield Pet Food Pantry.

*R22: Both City and County Shelters need to accept animals found in their jurisdiction regardless of the residency of whoever brings in the animal.*

The Board of Supervisors concurs with the Grand Jury recommendation. To ensure the success of this recommendation, both agencies will need to adopt consistent policies to avoid confusion and eliminate the small percentage of individuals and pets that might not be served under inconsistent policies.





October 14, 2014

Honorable Colette M. Humphrey  
1415 Truxtun Avenue, Second Floor  
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Foreperson Dennis Mike Elliott  
2014-2015 Kern County Grand Jury  
1415 Truxtun Avenue, Suite 600  
Bakersfield, CA 93301

**RE: Response to September 24, 2014 Grand Jury Letter**

Dear Ms. Humphrey and Mr. Elliott:

Please find below the City's specific responses to the relevant findings and recommendations included in the 2013-2014 Kern County Grand Jury's report on Animal Services.

***City Response to Grand Jury Findings:***

***F10. The Committee learned some pet owners in poorer neighborhoods cannot afford pet food and are allowing pets to wander freely looking for food.***

This finding appears to represent a generalization of circumstances which may or may not be true in some "poorer neighborhoods." To combat the potential of this situation, the City promotes responsible pet owner principles and attempts to educate pet owners when enforcing animal control related City ordinances. In addition, when it comes to our attention, either through the Animal Care Center or through contact with an animal control officer, that a resident is struggling with providing food to a pet, we attempt to direct them to available resources such as the "Pet Food Pantry."

***F12. The City and County need more Animal Control Officers (ACO).***

The City is not in a position to comment on the staffing needs of the County. However, the City is continually analyzing service demands across all City operations to ensure efficient and cost effective service delivery. The City has added additional staffing to bolster the Animal Control Division in recent years. As the City begins to develop a budget for the 2015-16 Fiscal Year, we will evaluate potentially augmenting the current number of ACOs in our Animal Control Division.



- F13 Both the County and City need more help from the public to foster pregnant, very young and injured animals for the shelters. Both expressed particular difficulty in finding those willing to foster medium and large breeds.**

Public support in fostering animals that come through the Animal Care Center is a valuable tool when attempting to provide animals with the best opportunity at finding a future home. Additional support is always needed and welcomed.

- F14 County and City Shelter Directors currently appear to have a better working relationship.**

We agree with this finding. One of the several positive aspects of the separation of the City and County sheltering functions has been the establishment of improved communications between the two shelter directors. With fiscal and operational issues now separated, the two directors can focus on collaborative efforts towards promoting responsible pet ownership and finding homes for our homeless animal population.

- F15 The City Shelter is looking much improved and clean, has freshly painted walls, re-surfaced floors in the kennels and a bright and cheery cat habitat filled mostly with kittens. A much needed overhead shade cloth has been added to stop pigeons from roosting and contaminating dog runs with droppings. The Shelter has added a new parking lot on the south side, a beautiful new adoption/intake building with a quiet area for adoption introductions and a grass area outside for meeting family members. The Shelter has repurposed a break room into a grooming room and the old entrance area is being converted into a medical theatre. Two kennels have been renovated and a third is progressing, but more funds are needed to start the fourth. The staff is personable, helpful, hardworking and appears very committed to helping animals in the City's care.**

We agree with this finding. In addition, the City continues to actively upgrade and maintain the facility so it is representative of a City of Bakersfield facility. The third kennel renovation mentioned above has been completed as has the medical suite that was discussed. Also, the City is currently finishing the installation of a new kenneling system in Kennel D (this was required due to the fact the County removed all kenneling from this building when they left the facility).

Since the City has taken over the Animal Care Center, and in conjunction with the Bakersfield SPCA and Bakersfield Homeless Center, it has transformed into a positive environment for both the public and animals which are served by it. While we continue to improve and maintain what has been created, all who have participated in this transformation are very proud of the results.

- F16 The City does not have a TNR program for feral cats. Currently verified feral cats are euthanized.**

The City Animal Care Center does not currently have a TNR program in place. However, not all verified feral cats are euthanized. Feral cats (particularly younger



ones) that demonstrate the potential of being socialized are provided an opportunity to be adopted.

**F17 The City has a goal of responding to non-emergency, lower priority animal service calls within 48 hours.**

The City attempts to respond to all calls in a timely manner and as soon as possible. This does require a prioritization of calls where non-emergency calls may take up to 48 hours for a response. We make every effort to not allow this to be the norm, but rather a potential timeframe for non-emergency response.

**F18 The City Shelter needs help getting and keeping paperwork organized. Several Friends organizations expressed frustration with waiting time to depart with a rescue or foster animal because paperwork could not be located.**

Transitioning shelter operations from one agency to another overnight can be challenging to say the least. As the operations of the City's Animal Care Center have matured, so has the organization and efficiency of the facility. As any good organization does, CBACC staff continues to look for ways to improve operations to help support the underlying mission of the facility, which is to provide the best possible care for the animals in our custody while at the same time providing every opportunity for those animals to find a forever home.

**F19 Photos of the animals on the City website run by Pet-Tango are usually well composed and appealing. Adoptable and lost or stray animals on a 72 hour hold are shown on the website.**

We agree with this finding. Allowing residents to view adoptable and stray animals via their computer is an efficient way for animals to be reunited with their owners or potentially adopted.

**F20 Individuals offering to foster animals for the City and County are provided free food and medical care. Rescue organizations offering to foster are sometimes not given the same benefits, but most provide and pay for food and medical care themselves.**

Both the public and rescue organizations offering to foster animals are given the option of food and medication. Incidental items, such as; toys, pet clothing, pet beds are typically provided by the private party or the rescues.

**F21 Only the City Shelter charges Friends organizations \$80.00 per dog and \$40.00 per cat for rescuing pure bred appearing animals. Mixed breed animals, however, are free.**

The City Shelter ONLY charges the above fees (regardless of breed) if the animal is spayed or neutered at CBACC. This covers the medical staff cost and medical supplies, such as; anesthesia and other medications.



- F22** *The Committee received many verbal complaints about a "floating" set of rules for Friends organizations regarding which dogs were released to which organization for fostering or rescuing at both County and City Shelters. At this time, it is supposed to be "first come, first served." When one Friends rescue organization seems to have an inside track and can allegedly place "holds" on upcoming animals, or cherry pick the best animal, other Friends organizations get frustrated which strains relations with both Shelters.*

With respect to the City Shelter unless chosen immediately prior to a large future transport (such as a "Wings of Rescue" transport) all available animals at the shelter are available on a "first come, first served" basis. However, if there is an adoption interest by the public noted about a specific animal-the private party adoption interest is always given the option prior to a rescue.

- F24** *The reunification rate for lost pets from the City Shelter in 2014 was 6% in January and 4% in February, well below the 1997 annual level of 17.8% nationally.*

The City places an emphasis on making every effort to reunite a lost or stray pet with their owners. This is done in the field and also through CBACC. Staff regularly researches outside media sources, such as; Craigslist, FB and the newspaper lost ads for possible owner/animal matches.

- F26** *The 2014 euthanasia rate for the City Shelter (taking into account the beginning shelter count as well as the monthly intake numbers) is 65% in January, 59% in February, and 53% in March.*

The City agrees with this finding.

- F28** *The City has adopted a fee structure.*

The City has adopted a fee structure which is similar to the County's fee structure; however, the fee structure provides flexibility to allow for periodic discounts for special adoption events and other promotional activities.

- F29** *City residents must show a driver's license or utility bill to prove residency before the City Shelter will accept an animal. Similarly, the County Shelter accepts animals from County residents. Exceptions are made for sick or injured animals.*

The City agrees with this finding. Individuals desiring to drop off a stray or owner surrendered animals are asked to verify residency to ensure the City is providing services to City residents. There are exceptions to this rule when the condition of the animal dictates alternate action.

- F30** *The City Shelter offers owner requested euthanasia for \$65.00. Due to a court injunction, owner requested euthanasia cannot be offered by the County Shelter.*

With respect to the City Shelter, this is correct.



**City Response to Grand Jury Recommendations:**

- R4** *The reunification rates between lost animals and their owners in both Shelters need to be improved. Rates of 20% in Castaic, 7% in Lancaster and 23% in Agoura show that Kern County can improve. (Appendix D, E and F) (Findings 23 and 24).*

The City agrees with this Recommendation and is proactively working on a number of activities to promote increased reunification of animals with their owners. City Animal Control Officers proactively work to identify owners of stray animals utilizing a number of resources such as microchips, and review of lost animal posting (craigslist others). Many times animals are taken by ACO's back to their owners and never end up in the shelter system. This may not be taken into account when looking at the numbers provided in the Grand Jury report. The City also was the first to initiate a free microchip program for owners of licensed animals which promotes reunification efforts. To date we have micro chipped over 3,000 animals through this program.

- R5** *The euthanasia rates in both Shelters need to be lowered. Rates of 35% in Castaic, 48% in Lancaster and 25% in Agoura show lower rates are possible. (Appendix D, E and F) (Findings 25 and 26).*

The City agrees with this Recommendation and is proactively working on a number of activities towards this end. There are a number of factors which contribute to lowering euthanasia rates at a shelter which include the activities mentioned above, designed to keep animals out of the shelter. In addition, the City has partnered with Critters without Litters to provide \$20,000 in spay/neuter vouchers for FY 14-15. This effort is focused on encouraging more pet owners to fix their animals. It should be noted that Critters without Litters recently celebrated their 15,000 procedure. In time, these efforts will have an impact on shelter numbers which will help reduce euthanasia rates.

Another component of reducing euthanasia numbers is the appropriate care of sheltered animals. The City and the Bakersfield SPCA take this very seriously and are focusing significant resources towards ensuring the best possible care of animals while in the shelter setting. This is evidenced by the renovation and maintenance work that has been done to CBACC as well as the development of onsite medical facilities to support the CBACC medical staff.

- R7** *Both City and County websites could use a "This is my lost Pet" link on the animal information page. Owners could send pertinent information, such as name, age, medical conditions and personality of the pet and when they intend to pick up the animal. An e-mail could then be sent to the owner with the amount of fees required to redeem the animal (Findings 23 and 24).*

The City is currently looking at several potential additional features to the animal control/CBACC website which would enhance the end users options. We will include a review of this recommendation as we move forward with this project.



- R8** *City and County Shelters should monitor daily lost and found pet flyers posted at the Shelter and e-mail inquiries from each County or City website, Craig's List and Facebook to better coordinate reunifications between lost animals and searching owners. (Findings 8 and 19).*

To a large extent, both CBACC staff and Animal Control Officers are already implementing this recommendation.

- R10** *Both City and County website information pages for each individual animal should include whether the animal is on a 72 hour "stray" hold, available for adoption or in foster care. The date of availability for adoption and the date of reevaluation or euthanasia should also be displayed. (Findings 8 and 19).*

The City will research the ability of providing this additional information via the website. As we transition to a more robust shelter software system, this feature may be available.

- R12** *As funds become available, the Grand Jury recommends the last unimproved kennel at the City shelter be renovated.*

The City agrees with this Recommendation and as noted above, the City is currently in the process of completing the installation of a new kenneling system in kennel D.

- R13** *The first time a pet is impounded, and owner who can prove a low income level should have fees waived. Implementing a "low income scholarship fund" would help owners re-unite with their pets. If the same pet is impounded more than once, the regular fees should apply. (Findings 27 and 28).*

It is the intent of the City to work with every pet owner who desires to redeem their lost pet at CBACC. To this end, the City works with individuals to ensure that inability to pay the fees is never a reason for a pet owner and a lost pet not to be reunited. This can take many forms, but the overall goal of our efforts is consistent with the Recommendation by the Grand Jury.

- R14** *To be more efficient, the City Shelter needs to upgrade software and organize the filing system. (Finding 18).*

See response to Finding 18 above. In addition, the City is currently going through a thorough evaluation of the current shelter software program to tailor it to the specific users and functions of the City Shelter. Due to the rapid nature of the transition of the shelter from the County to the City, the current software being utilized at the shelter was designed for the Bakersfield SPCA. While the use of the Petpoint software designed for the Bakersfield SPCA is sufficient, the completion of the project previously mentioned will further enhance operations at CBACC.



- R16 Both County and City foster and rescue policies need to be clear and applied consistently to every foster/rescue individual and organization. (Findings 20 and 22).**

The City agrees with this Recommendation and is already developing/reviewing these policies and protocols to ensure clarity and consistent application.

- R17 The fees charged by the City to rescue a pure bred appearing dog or cat should include everything provided to the general public for the same fee, and should be charged to all rescue organizations. The City should continue the policy of ensuring that price is not an obstacle to providing an animal with the opportunity to be rescued or adopted. (Findings 21 and 22).**

Currently, a rescue organization is charged LESS than the public because a license is not sold to a rescue organization, regardless of breed or whether or not the animal has been altered by the shelter. Rescues ONLY pay an adoption fee if the animal is spayed or neutered at CBACC.

- R18 Both the City and County need more ACO's. (Findings 11 and 12).**

Please see response to Finding 12 above.

- R19 The City Shelter should implement a TNR program for City feral cats. The County Shelter should use hiding boxes in feral cat holding cages. Not only does this help keep the wild cats calm, it also makes it easier and safer for the staff to remove them for treatment. (Findings 6 and 16).**

The City has plans to work with the Bakersfield SPCA to develop additional programs to supplement those already in existence. One of the programs that will be evaluated for potential implementation is a version of a TNR program.

- R20 The City Shelter should consider partnering with a company that returns an owner-requested-euthanized-pet's ashes to the owner for an additional fee. The revenue generated could help fund subsidies for qualified low income pet owners. (Findings 26 and 30).**

The City is interested in this concept as a future option, however, currently we are unaware of any local vendors that would be able to provide this service in a cost effective manner. We will continue to research ways to provide this additional level of service.

- R21 Both City and County Shelters should help publicize the Bakersfield Pet Food Pantry and what it offers to low income pet owners, expressly targeting the areas of greatest economic need. (Finding 10).**

See response to Finding 10 above. In addition, the City provides a link to this resource on the City's website under Resources. Information regarding the Pet Food Pantry is regularly provided in the field and through CBACC and clinics.




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**R22 Both City and County Shelters need to accept animals found in their jurisdiction regardless of the residency of whoever brings in the animal (Finding 29).**

The City respectfully disagrees with this Recommendation. The current process by which the City accepts an animal from a City resident, regardless of where the animal was found, has been successfully implemented. Furthermore, the City has an obligation to provide services to City residents, which this policy ensures. Animals do not know jurisdictional boundaries and our policy is simple and straightforward allowing a City resident to be serviced by CBACC regardless of where an animal is found. It can be difficult for a resident to know if a lost animal was found in the City or County and we do not burden them with trying to figure this out.

Thank you for providing an opportunity for the City to provide the above responses. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Alan Tandy  
City Manager

cc: Virginia Gennaro, City Attorney  
Greg Williamson, Police Chief  
Tammy Davis, Animal Control Supervisor  
Julie Johnson, Bakersfield SPCA  
Louis Gill, Bakersfield Homeless Center