



CITY OF HOLLISTER

375 Fifth Street • Hollister, CA 95023-3876

October 30, 2017

The Honorable Steven R. Sanders
Presiding Judge
San Benito County Superior Court
450 Fourth Street, Room 205
Hollister, CA 95023

Dear Judge Sanders:

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department have received the 2016-2017 San Benito County Grand Jury Final Report. I am writing in response to the findings and recommendations set forth in that report.

Hollister Police Animal Care and Services Department – 2016-2017 Grand Jury Investigation

Findings:

- 1. The Animal Shelters adoption figures are incredibly low. 274 animals were adopted by the public for the year 2016. The Animal Shelter is open to the public Monday thru Friday 12-5 pm. With such limited hours during the typical work days and being closed weekends it is difficult for everyone who wants to adopt an animal or reclaim their animal to be there in this time frame.**

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department agree In part and disagree in part with the finding.

The Animal Shelter would strive to adopt as many pets as possible. However to claim this number as incredibly low without comparing the adoption figures with other shelters that serve the same amount of population with the same amount of staff is not a fair characterization. This also does not take into consideration the 519 animals that went to a rescue organization during the same time period. Rescue organizations take a large amount of animals from the shelter that would otherwise be unadoptable, so they have more time to work on behavior and treat preexisting conditions the animals may have.

The Hollister Police Department agrees that the open hours for the shelter do limit the availability for the public. However, being open on a Saturday and later during a weekday have been tried in the past and it has proven unsuccessful. The shelter finds that people, who wish to adopt a pet, find a way through social media and by phone and make the time to adopt a new member of the family. Those that can't make the time usually are not the type to follow through and adopt a pet into their forever home.

- 2. There was a small amount of dogs up for adoption at the time of our visit and nowhere near full capacity.**

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department agree with the finding.

City Attorney
636-4306

City Clerk
636-4304

City Manager
636-4305

Finance
636-4301

Management Services
636-4324

Personnel
636-4308

Several Rescue Organizations had visited the Shelter just prior to the Grand Jury Visit and taken most of the dogs. This is not characteristic of the daily capacity of the shelter.

- 3. There are only 4-5 steady volunteers helping at the Animal Shelter leaving officers to perform duties that a volunteer is capable of.**

The city of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department agree with the finding.

The shelter finds there are many people who volunteer to work but are not committed as the 4-5 volunteers mentioned in this report. Some are only willing to work a few hours a month, go several months without volunteering or only choose to do certain aspects of the duties but not the unpleasant duties that are necessary (cleaning, etc.).

- 4. High turnover rate for officers employed at the Animal Shelter, largely in part to having to euthanize mass amounts of animals.**

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department disagrees with the finding.

This was brought up several times by Grand Jury members. It was pointed out to them a recent supervisor who retired was with the shelter for over 27 years, another employee was employed for over 15 years before transferring, just recently, to another city department, another is still working for over 3 1/2 years and a part time employee recently moved away after working for over 4 years and several other years prior to that as a volunteer.

Euthanasia is an unpleasant aspect of the work that needs to be done. However, there is no evidence that it has caused a high turnover rate at the shelter. Despite no evidence of that fact, the grand jury still decided to mention this in the report.

- 5. The figures for euthanasia are incredibly high, 1,411 animals were euthanized in 2016 (this figure does not include public requests) 48% of all animals coming in the shelter will be euthanized. The Animal Shelter does not hold adoption fairs. The adoption trailer has only been used a small amount at events in town. Although when used they have proven successful at getting animals adopted and increasing foot traffic in the shelter later.**

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department agrees in part and disagrees in part with the finding.

The Grand Jury once again uses a term like "Incredibly high" when mentioning the amount of animals euthanized in 2016. There is no comparison made with any other shelter that serves the same population with similar staff levels to be able to determine if this amount is high or low. It also does not mention that 1,132 of the euthanized animals were mostly feral cats that are captured or brought in by the public. The feral cats are a

huge problem in this community which is augmented by members of the public feeding the cats.

The Hollister Police Department does think it is important to use the adoption trailer more. That is why the police department secured grant money to purchase the trailer in the first place. However, the limited staffing at the shelter has not allowed the trailer to be used as much as we would like in 2016. Nevertheless, the trailer has been used several times in 2017 and there are plans to use it again within this year and to make it a regular part of community events.

- 6. The Grand Jury learned that the shelter does not weigh animals prior to euthanasia. There have been cases in the past where there has been an underestimate of weight resulting in having to administer 2 doses to complete euthanasia. This causes concern of whether the animal was granted a humane and peaceful death. It also is a concern of the additional stress this may cause the officer aside from the already stressful event that is euthanasia.**

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department agrees in part and disagrees in part with the finding.

There is no need to weigh the animals that are euthanized. The approximate dose for animals is 1ml per pound of body weight but staff tends to administer more. It is rare that an animal is not given enough, however every animal reacts differently. Maybe an animal with poor perfusion or low blood pressure may need another dose to help pass along. If an animal is not administered enough, we just administer again, the animals are usually completely unconscious after the first dose.

Staff members can accurately gage the weight of the animal without having to struggle with the animal to place them on a scale. There is no evidence to suggest that giving two doses changes any aspect of the humane aspect of this type of euthanasia since the animal is not conscious. Furthermore, there is no evidence to the concern that on the very rare occasion having to give an additional dose adds to the stress on the staff member.

- 7. The Jury learned that officers at the Animal Shelter are conducting behavioral tests on the animals with no certification in animal behavior.**

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department agree with the finding.

Some of the nearby shelters do have trainers or behaviorists that conduct these tests. However the only certified behaviorists require a PhD. It would be great in the future if funding of additional staff is possible. Becoming a behaviorist is an extensive process and being a trainer does not mean they are a behaviorist. However, no training is required to conduct a behavioral assessment on shelter animals.

8. Behavioral tests are not catered for age groups. Such as puppies vs. dogs, Kittens vs. cats.

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department agrees with the finding.

The Hollister Police Animal Shelter does not know of any shelter that conducts different tests for different age groups. The Hollister Animal shelter behavioral test is standard for dogs of any age. Obviously the age of the animal is always a consideration and a teething puppy is normal behavior and not deemed aggressive or as a biter.

9. No information can be found on behavioral tests because no records are kept about any tests conducted.

The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department agree with the finding.

Staff has since worked on creating a standard behavioral check list that is use and a copy is being kept. The only use for the record is to have proof that a behavioral test was conducted. However, It is unsure if keeping these records is required or worth the staff time.

Recommendations:

1. The shelter can change its operating hours. Close to the public on one of the operating days and open on Saturday for 4 hours. Also change the hours on one of the weekdays to 3pm-7pm. Thus catering to the public's differentiating work schedules.

This recommendation will not be implemented at this time. The City of Hollister and the Hollister Police Department has tried this modified schedule in the past. The staffing levels are too low at this time but once the open positions are staffed and trained, the shelter will be open more hours to the public between Mondays through Friday.

Being open later during the workweek and on a Saturday has not worked in the past and has created more work for staff. When open on a Saturday, the shelter found very few people visited the shelter on that day. Being closed on a Monday to compensate for the Saturday opening created more work on Tuesday morning; with reports coming in from the weekend stacking up.

Additionally, being open later during the work week also resulted in very few visits to the shelter during that time. The experiment ended with a waste of staff time during those hours and an increase of work upon the next open day.

Shelter staff has taken steps through social media and website pictures to share with the public the available animals at the shelter. Residents interested in the animals make arrangement to visit the animals and complete the adoption process. Those willing to

take time off work or schedule a time to take this very important step make the best caregivers to pets in their forever home.

2. Keep animals longer than the mandatory time of 5 days not counting impoundment. Do not euthanize animals until you are near full capacity.

This recommendation has been implemented at the shelter for several years already. Animal Shelter staff absolutely holds animals longer than 10 days or more if there is room, and the animals are friendly and healthy. Some animals have been kept for several weeks at times, while trying to find rescues and advertising adoptions.

3. Reach out on social media and adoption events for volunteers to apply. Changing the hours of the shelter (as in R1) may also be an easier schedule for volunteers. Keeping animals longer than the minimum (as in R2) may help the volunteers stay on longer. An increase in volunteers could lighten the work load for the officers at the shelter.

This recommendation has been implemented for several years. Animal Shelter staff routinely reaches out for volunteers through social media and community events.

The hours of operation will not be changed do the reasons listed in R1. There are volunteer duties available for hours outside of the open to the public hours. That has not been an issue with volunteers. There are positions open for volunteers willing to come in on a weekend to clean or do other duties. Animal Control Staff agrees that an increase in volunteers could lighten the work load for officers at the shelter. However, the statement; *keeping the animals longer than the minimum may help the volunteers stay on longer* reiterates an untrue statement (animals are already kept longer than the minimum) and there should be no connection in the time the animal is here toward having the number of volunteers *stay on longer*. A volunteer should be willing to work at the shelter regardless of how long the animals are here.

4. Hire a veterinarian to perform the euthanasia on-site when needed so that officers are not responsible for the task or under stress from this task.

This recommendation will not be implemented at this time. Euthanasia in a veterinary office, depending on the size of the animal since it typically done by weight, is usually \$100-\$150 dollars per animal. That would have increased the cost of the euthanasia for 2016 from the current minimum cost to a range of \$141,100 to \$211,650.

This additional cost although considerably less if there was a veterinarian willing to do it part time and for a reduced fee, would be an added cost from the current budget. The Hollister Police Department Animal Care and Services is already pressured by the county to reduce costs and adding this unnecessary expense to add a certified veterinarian to the budget would not be well received by the city and the county.

If money was not an option, the Hollister Police Department and Animal Care and Services would rather have a veterinarian on staff to diagnose and treat injured or sick animals instead of paying a high fee to just euthanize. However, The Hollister Police Department Animal Care and Services is open to the idea of partnering with a veterinarian in the future as budget increases and governing boards allow.

- 5. Seek out ways to hold adoption events at local businesses or pet stores. Utilize the trailer more often to seek potential adopters at these events.**

This recommendation has already been implemented. The trailer has been used several times at local pet stores, city events and other events in 2017.

- 6. Weigh animals prior to euthanasia to ensure a humane death. If this isn't possible, use a very (sic) overestimated dose of Fatal Plus Solution. We recommend that the shelter have a veterinarian perform euthanasia on-site since they are medially more qualified and so that the officers would not have to perform this duty or at the very least not as often. (as in R4).**

This recommendation will not be implemented. Weighing the animals is not necessary and there is no evidence the animals are suffering an inhumane death. Staff is already overestimating the amount of Fatal Plus Solution and a Veterinarian will not perform the euthanasia on-site for the reasons expressed in R4.

- 7. The shelter needs to employ an animal behaviorist or have officers in training for animal behavior.**

This recommendation will not be implemented at this time. There is no requirement at this time for a Behaviorist at an animal shelter. However, the Hollister Police Department Animal Shelter is open to the idea of hiring an animal behaviorist or have an officer in training to be an animal behaviorist as the staffing levels at the shelter come up to a more reasonable level and the expense of hiring the behaviorist or training an officer to do that is approved by City Council and the County Board of Supervisors.

- 8. Acquiring a Behavioral Checklist with specific age groups. A puppy can nip and bite because it is a normal stage in puppy behavior on the other hand a full grown dog can nip and bite and would be signs of aggression thus providing the need for a behavioral checklist that is catered to the specific age groups of animals.**

This recommendation will not be implemented. Creating a checklist for specific age groups is unnecessary. The statement of a puppy nipping and biting versus an adult dog doing the same thing is already taken into consideration when determining if the dog is adoptable. Every staff member at the shelter knows the elementary fact that a puppy that is teething will bite and nip for natural reasons.

9. The shelter needs to have, use and record the records from the behavioral tests conducted on all animals.

This recommendation has already been implemented. Staff has been keeping these records now for a few months. One copy stays with the kennel card (on the cage) and typically gets passed on to rescues when they take the animal, and one stays in an assessment file. This system is inefficient, however, because staff has to store so many of these pieces of paper and there is really no good way to keep track of them. When the animal is adopted or sent to a rescue, there really is no reason to keep the record.

Staff has already spoken to IT of the record software company and, in the near future when the system is upgraded, there will be a behavioral assessment portion of the record that can be utilized to keep track of this information.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William B. Avera', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

William B. Avera, City Manager

RESOLUTION NO. 2017-298

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF HOLLISTER
AUTHORIZING THE CITY MANAGER TO SIGN AND SUBMIT ON BEHALF OF THE
CITY COUNCIL A RESPONSE LETTER TO THE 2016-2017 SAN BENITO COUNTY
CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT**

WHEREAS, the 2016-2017 San Benito County Civil Grand Jury has completed an inspection of the Hollister Police Department Animal Care and Services; and

WHEREAS, the grand jury report was submitted to the City of Hollister; and

WHEREAS, state law requires a response by the governing body of the public agency that has been reviewed; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of Hollister approves the letter and authorizes the City Manager to sign and submit it on behalf of the City Council.

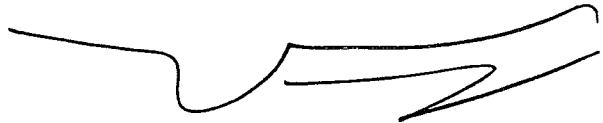
PASSED AND ADOPTED, by the City Council of the City of Hollister at a regular meeting held this 20th day of November, 2017, by the following vote:

AYES: Council Members Klauer, Friend, Luna, and Mayor Velazquez.

NOES: None.

ABSTAINED: None.

ABSENT: Council Member Gillio.



Ignacio Velazquez, Mayor

ATTEST:



Christine Black, CMC, Interim City Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:



E. Soren Diaz, City Attorney