

CITY OF SHAFTER – ANIMAL CONTROL SHELTER

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

On November 27, 2007, members of the Cities and Joint Powers Committee (Committee) of the 2007-2008 Kern County Grand Jury visited the City of Shafter Animal Control Shelter (Shelter) to inquire into the operation of the Shelter, pursuant to Penal Code Section 925a.

PROCESS:

Members of the Committee met with the Police Department Captain (Captain) who has oversight responsibility for the Shelter, as well as the Animal Control Manager (Manager) who has direct responsibility for the operation of the Shelter. In preparation for the meeting, the Committee reviewed the past five years of Kern County Grand Jury final reports, internet information, and newspaper articles relating to the City. In reviewing the previous final reports, it was determined that no Grand Jury report had been made on the Shelter in at least the past five years.

BACKGROUND:

The Shelter, located at 18825 South Shafter Avenue, Shafter, CA 93263, is under the control of the Police Department. The City has had its own animal control services for a long, undetermined period of time, however it did not come under the control of the Police Department until 2002. In 2003, the Shelter was remodeled. The area covered by animal control is approximately 21 square miles, the area within the boundaries of the City. The normal business hours for the public are by appointment, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, and 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday. During non-business hours, the Manager is on call to respond to emergency calls for animal control services, and, if not available, the Public Works Department responds using the animal control impound vehicle if necessary. The Police Department will respond if an animal is aggressive.

FINDINGS:

1. The staff of the Shelter consists of the Manager and two part time Kennel Attendants who each work four hours per day five days per week. Trustee inmates from the Shafter Community Correctional Facility, which is managed by the Police Department, assist in outside maintenance but not in direct animal contact. There are no volunteers assisting at the Shelter.

2. There is no policy and procedures manual available for reference by Shelter staff, although both the Captain and the Manager are familiar with the provisions of the Hayden Bill (SB 1785) relative to treatment of impounded animals. This Bill addresses issues of veterinary care, nutrition, shelter, exercise, water, and humane treatment of impounded animals, as well as required minimum length of impoundment, among other things. These are items which could be included in a policy and procedures manual.
3. Veterinary services, as necessary, are provided at a clinic in Wasco during regular business hours or at an emergency clinic in Bakersfield during non-business hours.
4. The Manager carries no firearms while patrolling or responding to calls in the animal control impound vehicle. Restraint equipment available to the Manager consists of pepper spray, a baton, and a snare. The Manager is P.C. 832 trained relative to firearms usage, however she has no firearms. She has a tranquilizer pistol available. Calls for service are dispatched by the police dispatcher. Assistance is available through the Police Department, if necessary. The most common citations are for leash law and licensing violations, as well as occasional tether law violations (no more than three hours within a 24-hour period).
5. The kennels are of adequate size for up to two compatible dogs. They are covered, however there are no misters or fans for cooling. Cats are maintained in cages in an inside room separate from dogs. The concrete floors and walls of the kennels were sealed when the facility was remodeled. Kennels are cleaned at least once daily with Kennalsol and bleach. Animals are fed once daily, in the morning. Food is donated by the Target Distribution Center from damaged pallets of bags and cans.
6. Approximately 125 animals are impounded per month, consisting of approximately 50 dogs and 75 cats. The shelter has a capacity of 20 to 25 dogs in its 13 kennels and nine cats. There was a history of only two cases of “kennel cough” within the past several years.
7. Upon being impounded, animals are checked for licenses, and they are scanned for microchips with a universal scanner. If an impounded animal’s owner can be identified, contact is attempted by telephone and then by registered letter. Notices are also published on the following web site: www.petfinder.com and notices are also placed on the City’s web site (www.shafter.com), under “shaftercritters.” It is noted, however, that to locate animal control on the City’s web site, it is necessary to go through the Police Department. There is no Quick Link to animal control on the web site.
8. Impound logs are maintained on “ARK” brand software, with records on file for the past three years that the software has been in use. The software does not link

to any regional or national database. Impounded animals are kept for at least five business days, or longer if space permits.

9. Prior to adoption, all animals are spayed or neutered by a private veterinarian. Dogs are given “hands on” temperament safety testing. Rabies inoculation is required prior to adoption, as well as City licensing if the animal is being adopted locally. No microchip services are offered. The Manager stated that she works with breed-specific and general rescue organizations, the SPCA, and “Best Friends” in Utah to attempt to place animals. The shelter does not guarantee the health of adopted animals, and adopted animals may be returned to the Shelter for any reason at any time.
10. Animals which are not considered adoptable, or which are not adopted or accepted by a rescue organization, are euthanized onsite at the Shelter by the Manager or by one of the two Kennel Attendants, all of whom are certified to do so. Euthanasia drugs are maintained in a locked safe in the Shelter office, under the control of the Manager. The Captain stated that while approximately 48% of dogs are “saved,” the “saved” rate for cats is only 16%.
11. No other government agencies utilize the services of the Shelter.
12. The Captain provided a blueprint drawing of a new Shelter which is planned to be constructed in 2008. He stated that funding has already been allocated for the construction. He noted that the site was uncertain at this time, although if it was not at the same location, the plan was to keep the existing Shelter for emergency usage. He also stated that a new impound vehicle was on order, due to arrive within two weeks.
13. The Captain also provided statistics for impounded animals and their disposition for 2002 through 2007 year-to-date. These statistics revealed that since 2002, euthanasia has decreased from 56+% to approximately 30%, while adoptions have increased from 0% to nearly 20%. During this same period, based on 2002 statistics, the number of impounded animals had increased by over 58%, from 935 to 1,481. He stated that he hoped that an animal control officer could be added to the staff in 2008, due to the increased workload and to provide full time assistance in the office for animal placement.

COMMENTS:

While the size of the Shelter is adequate for the present needs of the City, the increasing number of animals impounded over the past several years warrants that the construction of the new shelter should be expedited.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Shafter Police Department should take immediate steps to develop a policy and procedures manual to encompass the appropriate provisions of the Hayden Bill. (Refer to Finding 2.)
2. Misters and/or fans for cooling should be installed before the heat returns in 2008, assuming that the planned new Shelter is not completed by that time. (Refer to Finding 5.)
3. The City web site home page should be modified to include a Quick Link to animal control to assist individuals searching for a lost animal or seeking to adopt an animal. (Refer to Finding 7.)
4. An animal control officer should be added to the Shelter staff as soon as possible, to provide assistance within the office. (Refer to finding 13.)

The City of Shafter Police Department should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.

Note: Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed through the Kern County Library system and on the Kern County Grand Jury website: 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: FOREMAN
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**