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September 14, 2012

Council File: 11-1345  
Council Districts: CD 7  
Contact person and phone:  
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The Honorable Antonio R. Villaraigosa  
Mayor, City of Los Angeles  
Room 303, City Hall

Los Angeles City Council  
c/o City Clerk  
Room 395, City Hall

Attention: Mandy Morales, Legislative Coordinator

**TRANSMITTAL: REPORT ON BEST FRIENDS OPERATION OF NORTH EAST  
VALLEY SHELTER**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

On behalf of the Department of Animal Services (DAS), I respectfully request that the Mayor and City Council:

NOTE AND FILE this report.

**SUMMARY**

In January 2012, Best Friends Animal Sanctuary officially became the operator of the North East Valley Shelter (NEV) in a unique public-private partnership. This is an update on the first seven months of this contractual relationship.

**BACKGROUND**

With the passage of the November 2000 Proposition F bond program, voters approved an ambitious building program for fire stations and animal shelters. For Animal Services, this meant 17 projects to replace, renovate, or build new shelters totaling nearly \$190 million. However, over the span of 12 years, the City's finances changed drastically. Shelters - like the new North East Valley (NEV) site - that were planned to

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be staffed by City employees now faced the prospect of being shuttered because of staffing shortages. During this time, Animal Services employee levels dropped from a high of 357 in 2008-90 to 318 this year, a drop of 11%. This economic downturn made it impossible for the City to fund the operation of all its shelters. Yet, residents expected Animal Services to save more animals' lives and lead Los Angeles to becoming a "no-kill" city.<sup>1</sup>

The City's finances have changed dramatically since 2000. Rising health and pension costs, and salaries, along with revenue reductions attributable to a poor economy have affected staffing levels significantly. While voter-approved bond financing provided Animal Services with opportunities to build, improve and increase its shelter capacity, fewer employees meant not being able to staff a brand new facility: the North East Valley (hereafter referred to as NEV) animal shelter. The consequences of mothballing a new shelter posed many challenges: 1) Reduction in services; 2) Reduction in services to a Council District; and 3) the public perception that taxpayers' dollars were not being maximized. Because staffing the new shelter with Animal Services employees was out of the question, finding a private contractor to provide adoption and sterilization services was a smart alternative. The Department, working with the Office of the City Administrative Officer, released a Request For Information (RFI) for these services, which culminated in a contract with the Best Friends Animal Society in January 2012.

Current budgetary conditions forced the City to review short- and long-term changes to address the City's structural deficit. On January 29, 2010 the CAO released a three-year plan to achieve fiscal sustainability. In this report, the option of a public-private partnership to operate an animal shelter was recommended. Other alternatives were to 1) Close North East Valley (NEV) animal shelter; 2) Use NEV as a special operations center; 3) Open NEV as a fully operational animal shelter; 4) Spread departmental staff evenly across seven shelters (six existing and the new NEV); 5) Contract out existing services; and 6) Authorize a contract for the operations of NEV. Option 6 was recommended because it was cost neutral and the City gained \$3.3 million in services. (According to Council File 11-0600-S135, it would cost the City \$2.8 million in salary and \$500,000 in expenses to run NEV.) The other alternatives were less desirable because they either saved money and reduced services, cost more, or violated union Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs). For example, if Option 5 was selected and a contractor provided medical services that resulted in lay-offs, DAS would violate the MOU passage that forbids contracting union work that would result in unemployment.

The NEV was proposed for a private-public partnership in the 2011-12 budget and Council approved the release of a Request For Information (RFI) to determine if a non-profit animal welfare organization would be willing to operate an animal shelter at the

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<sup>1</sup> No kill is commonly defined in the industry as an 85% or better live save rate of companion animals entering the shelters—a "noses in and noses out" calculation. The 10-15% not saved will be comprised of animals that have irreparable suffering and must be humanely euthanized, along with some who may be too dangerous to release in the community.

NEV location. The RFI's release was delayed until the selection of a new General Manager, which occurred in July 2010 with the appointment of Brenda Barnette.

On January 10, 2011 the CAO released the RFI; responses were due on February 26, 2011. The City received one response: Best Friends Animal Society. After reviewing the proposal, Animal Services and the CAO determined that Best Friends was capable of providing services at the NEV shelter and a partnership would provide services to the benefit of City residents and at a limited cost to the City.

Best Friends, headquartered in Utah, had a long history working with the City, beginning in the early 1990s and began collaborating directly with Animal Services in 1998. In 1999, Best Friends held its first "Super Adoption" event aimed at placing Los Angeles shelter animals, amongst others, in new homes and with rescue organizations. Best Friends has hosted over 25 Super Adoptions since then as well as shelter adoption events that have placed an estimated 8,000 homeless pets in new homes. Under the contract that was signed in January 2012, Best Friends is obligated to take approximately 3,000 animals annually from the Department for adoptions and is aiming to perform approximately 6,000 spay/neuter surgeries.

## **STATUS OF BEST FRIENDS OPERATION OF North East VALLEY SHELTER**

### **North East Valley Shelter Operation**

Best Friends has taken 1,861 animals in from DAS facilities (North Central 34%, East Valley 32%, South LA 17%, West Valley 11%, Harbor 5%, and West LA 1%).

"Good Samaritan" Intakes: 153. This means that community members have surrendered animals at the NE Valley Shelter and Best Friends has helped with those animals and made sure that they were correctly processed and accounted for through DAS' database. (This is a service Best Friends had initially not anticipated offering, but which parallels that provided at DAS run shelters.)

Clinic at NEV: 1769 spay/neuter procedures, plus 382 other veterinary services to primarily District 7 residents.

Best Friends' help desk handled 198 cases of people calling to ask for assistance (82 Mission Hills, 59 Pacoima, and 59 Sylmar) with 89 confirmed positive outcomes resulting in animals not going into shelters.

Best Friends provided temporary care and quarantine for 150 dogs that LAAS transferred to other shelter partners.

### **NKLA (No-Kill Los Angeles)**

On Tuesday, April 17, 2012, Best Friends kicked off the "No-Kill Los Angeles" (NKLA) initiative. This is a coalition of animal welfare organizations, city shelters and

individuals. It is dedicated to ending the killing of healthy and treatable pets in shelters. The plan is to provide spay/neuter services where they are needed most so fewer animals go into shelters, and increase adoptions through the combined efforts of the NKLA coalition so more animals come out of the shelters and go into new homes. The NKLA coalition of local rescues has grown to 50 groups.

Best Friends is providing grants to coalition partners for every pet they place in a home over the number they adopted last year, as well as finding spay/neuter projects for pet owners who can't afford to have their pets fixed.

Best Friends gave \$191,150 in adoption subsidies to local rescues (New Hope Partners) to increase LAAS adoptions, including \$32,300 to DAS' Animal Welfare Trust Fund<sup>2</sup>. (The program provides \$150 for each adopted animal above the qualified organization's previous year baseline number.)

Best Friends gave \$428,000 in Spay/Neuter Grants for City of LA animals for 5875 spay/neuter surgeries. (The target for a full year is \$502,000 for over 7000 surgeries.)

## **OTHER BENEFITS OF THE BEST FRIENDS PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP**

Other Best Friends projects managed directly from their Utah headquarters:

- Pacoima Free Fix program for stray cats: \$350,000 (3500 cats fixed)
- Funding for FixNation, a nonprofit cat spay/neuter clinic in Sun Valley: \$275,000

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

Best Friends has a \$2,278,462 operational budget for operating NEV in 2012. It will cost the City approximately \$200,000 to allow Best Friends to operate the NEV; however, to run a full-service animal shelter would cost \$3.3 million (salaries and expenses). Therefore, there is a net gain of \$3.1 million dollars for the City.

In addition to the very positive economic impact, there is other good news citywide from January 1, 2012 –July 30, 2012:

### **Fewer Dogs and Cats Die**

2015 fewer dogs and cats were put to death than during the same months last year

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<sup>2</sup> The Animal Welfare Trust Fund is used to augment established Animal Services programs and activities, other than those involving animal sterilization. Funds could be used for acquisition, construction, and maintenance of land and capital improvements, and the purchase of equipments, services or furnishings in support of those programs and activities.

**More Happy Outcomes**

491 more dogs and cats had happy outcomes through adoption, being reunited with their family or going to a private rescues or shelters than during the same months last year.

**Fewer Enter Shelters**

843 fewer dogs and cats entered our shelters than during the same months last year,

**More Licenses Sold**

2,599 more dog and horse licenses were sold to generate critical funding for additional spay/neuter (dog licenses) and equestrian trail maintenance than during the same months last year.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

*Brenda F. Barnette*

BRENDA F. BARNETTE  
General Manager

cc. Miguel Santana  
Gaye Williams  
Jim Bickhart