

(no subject)

1 message

Milan R <milanr1@hotmail.com>

Sat, Aug 13, 2011 at 10:45 PM

To: patrice.lattimore@lacity.org, councilmember.reyes@lacity.org, councilmember.krekorian@lacity.org, councilmember.zine@lacity.org, councilmember.labonge@lacity.org, councilmember.koretz@lacity.org, councilmember.cardenas@lacity.org, councilmember.alarcon@lacity.org, councilmember.parks@lacity.org, councilmember.perry@lacity.org, councilmember.wesson@lacity.org, councilmember.rosendahl@lacity.org, councilmember.englander@lacity.org, councilmember.garcetti@lacity.org, councilmember.huizar@lacity.org, councildistrict15@lacity.org, saeed.ali@lacity.org

Dear Los Angeles City Councilmembers and Others,

I admire and respect Best Friends Animal Society and believe in its goals. However, I oppose its proposed use of the Northeast Valley animal shelter.

The Best Friends proposal for the Northeast Valley shelter, which was built with \$19-million in Proposition F funds, will not be used as voters were led to believe, and is not in the best interests of the city or its residents and animals. (Please see below for a far better solution.) Concerns are as follows:

One key area of benefits of Proposition F was reduction in "the number of stray and feral animals on the streets" and "decrease[d] likelihood of attacks by stray animals."^[1] The Best Friends proposal will not provide any field services or animal control, or public safety or animal safety services (in contrast to the six other LAAS shelters). Yet the Northeast Valley area suffers from stray animals and public safety issues more than many other areas of the city.

The proposal will make it harder for local pet owners to find and reclaim their lost pets, and thus keep their pets from being euthanized, especially given the recently increased rate of euthanasia. The Proposition F voter information pamphlet stated that approval will increase the number of lost animals found by their owners. Best Friends will not accept any stray (or owner relinquished) animals and will not hold area lost animals for owners to find them. This will decrease (not increase) the number of lost animals who are found (and thus not euthanized).

The proposal will not expand housing for shelter animals. Under the proposed contract, Best Friends will house only "an average of 50" animals. The Northeast Valley shelter has already been housing that many animals since construction was completed in 2008.^[2] Since Best Friends will house only an average of 50 animals, the same or fewer than LAAS already has been housing there, there will be no increase in animals housed.

The Best Friends' proposal for an average of 50 animals is only a small fraction of the Northeast Valley shelter capacity and Proposition F voter expectations. The Northeast Valley shelter was built to have 163 dog kennels, equivalent to the East Valley shelter which as of today, August 10, 2011, is housing 378 total animals.^[3] Under this measure, Best Friends' proposed housing of only "an average of 50" dogs and cats (combined total), is an 86% reduction from Northeast Valley shelter housing capacity, contrary to voters' expectations under proposition F.^[4]

With no increase, and probably a reduction, in animals housed at Northeast Valley under the proposal, the claimed decrease in overall LAAS euthanasia lacks a factual basis.

In fact, the proposal is very likely to increase euthanasia at the city's other already very overcrowded shelters. It appears that, in preparation for the Best Friends takeover, animals who were being housed at the Northeast Valley shelter have already been transferred to the East and West Valley shelters. Those shelters were already severely overcrowded and killing larger and larger numbers of animals for time and space. (LAAS euthanasia of dogs and cats since the new General Manager arrived has increased by 10.7% compared to the same 10 months the prior year.) The result is more and faster killing at the East Valley and West Valley shelters to make space for the Northeast Valley animals no longer being housed in Northeast.

How is it legal to receive voter approval of the \$19-million expenditure, make the expenditure, and subsequently change to uses which do not deliver what the voters expected for their money? The proposed contract provides for no field services or animal control services, and no public safety activities or responsibilities. The proposed contract is for housing of 50 animals, an approximate 86% reduction from

capacity of the shelter the voters approved. This proposal therefore delivers 0% of Proposition F voters' expectations on field services/public safety and 14% (50/378) of shelter housing.

I am quite concerned that privatization of an LAAS animal shelter will create union issues for LAAS and beyond.

Liability concerns: The city will remain owner of the property and the city has the Proposition F responsibility to operate the shelter. The city's employees have the skills to safely operate the shelter, while the contract requires no corresponding skill sets of Best Friends employees and volunteers who will work at the Northeast Valley shelter.

The proposed contract lacks any commitment to volume and pricing. No volume of services are stated other than housing only an average of 50 dogs and cats. No prices are set forth for what Best Friends will charge the public for any of its services or products.

No details are given regarding the number of spay/neuter surgeries Best Friends will provide for the Los Angeles public's pets, or what price to the public.[5] The spay/neuter clinic built into the Northeast Valley shelter can and should be used to provide spay/neuter for the public's pets which service is desperately needed in the Northeast Valley area (and without which the many low income area residents cannot comply with the city's spay/neuter law). The contract is currently so ambiguous about spay/neuter services for the public as to be unenforceable. The number of spay/neuters for the public's animals (dogs, cats, rabbits) per year should be specified in the contract, as should be the prices to be charged to the public (low income and other than low income) for spay/neuter and related services and products.

The proposed contract is silent as to which animals will be sent to the Northeast Valley shelter. What will ensure that there is no cherry picking and cannibalization of other shelter adoptions? This is a known problem when shelters partner with adoption agencies and while I do not accuse any party of planning this, the contract should prevent it as a possibility.

The proposed contract lacks accountability standards. Best Friends should be required to provide operating and animal outcome statistics just as LAAS does. This is because it is operating a city animal shelter facility (albeit only as an adoption agency), and bringing in and adopting (or transporting) out city shelter animals. In order to have accountability, and to avoid skewing of LAAS statistics and public complaints, the outcomes of LAAS animals sent to Best Friends at Northeast Valley should be required to be reported in the same manner, timing and detail as the statistics provided by LAAS.

Also regarding accountability, the proposed contract has no provision requiring compliance with the California Public Records Act. Again, because Best Friends will be operating a city animal shelter facility (albeit only as an adoption agency), and bringing in and then adopting (or transporting) out city shelter animals, Best Friends must be required to meet the same CPRA standards to which the city is held.

The city's budget woes do not justify treating one segment of the city (Northeast Valley) differently than it treats the rest of the city. In fact the worsening economy makes operating the Northeast Valley shelter as the voters envisioned more important than ever, given the increased numbers of owner relinquished and stray animals, and concomitant public safety risks, in the Northeast Valley area. Denying expected and voter-approved use of the facility is simply unfair to Northeast Valley residents and to city taxpayers who fund Proposition F.

The contract would lock the city into these issues and inequities for three to seven years.

There is a far better alternative.

Better Alternative to the Best Friends Proposal

I fully support City Councilmember Alarcon's proposal to operate the Northeast Valley animal shelter as a city animal shelter providing all LAAS services no different than the six other city shelters. This would achieve fairness throughout the city, and would deliver on Proposition F voter expectations.

In order to achieve this, I fully agree with Councilmember Alarcon's suggestion that staff can be drawn down from the other shelters and redeployed at the Northeast Valley shelter. LAAS staff has already been utilized at the Northeast Valley shelter since it opened in 2008.

Thus, only an increment more would need to be transferred from each of the six other LAAS shelters to Northeast Valley in order to provide adequate staffing at the one Northeast Valley shelter and thereby provide like services throughout the city.

Again, I respect and admire Best Friends. However I do not believe that this proposal is in the best interests of the city or the animals, and there is a far better alternative.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Laura Beth Heisen, M.B.A., J.D.

Commissioner of the Board of L.A. Animal Services, 2002-2003

[1] Proposition F voter information pamphlet, statement by the city's CLA.

[2] Since completion in 2008, the Northeast Valley shelter has been housing many mothers with their litters, evidence animals, and hospital animals. The average number of animals which was already being housed by LAAS at Northeast Valley is about 50 (more when disaster housing and transports are included).

[3] LAAS dog kennels generally hold between 1 to 6 dogs each (depending on dog size and behavior). Even if they hold only 2 each, that, plus the Northeast Valley shelter's room of cat cages, gives the shelter a capacity of about 400 animals. Under this measure, Best Friends' proposal to house 50 is an 87.5% reduction from shelter capacity.

[4] In the Proposition F voter information pamphlet, the CLA stated that the city's animal shelters "are too small to keep the number of lost, abandoned and stray animals collected each year. Overcrowding in shelters results in a very high rate of euthanasia," and the pamphlet also stated that approval will, "provide a more humane environment for impounded animals, reduce injuries and illness."

[5] The Proposition F voter information pamphlet arguments in favor stated that approval will "reduce pet overpopulation by building neighborhood spay and neuter clinics." State law requires all animals adopted from a shelter, rescue group or adoption agency such as Best Friends to be spayed or neutered before release to the new owner. This state law requirement is different from the important service of providing spay and neuter services for pets the public already owns.

Best Friends claim of 3000 lives saved, a closer look

2 messages

olivia barrymore <oliviabarrymore1@gmail.com>

Sun, Aug 14, 2011 at 10:38 AM

To: oliviabarrymore1@gmail.com

Bcc: patrice.lattimore@lacity.org

Best Friends repeatedly tells us that it plans to save 3,000 lives the first year. Again, no back up. But let's say that is accurate. Sounds great, right? Think again.

Best Friends does not deny that it will cherry pick. Best Friends says there are enough cherries to go around. I disagree, but let's continue with their theory. In reality, many of the cherry picked animals would get adopted anyway in LAAS. As such, how many of these 3,000 is Best Friends really "saving"? And at what impact on the other LAAS shelters? Let's be realistic, it is the highly adoptable animals that bring public into the shelters. As we have already discussed, emptying out too many highly adoptable animals from the other LAAS shelters will make public less likely to go, reducing those shelters' adoptions and increasing euthanasia. Simple math.

Best Friends says it is justified in taking the taxpayers' \$19 million Northeast Valley shelter because it was never operated as a shelter anyway. Wrong. Northeast Valley shelter has been operating since 2008, taking in evidence animals, hospital animals, and mamas with their pups and kittens. In the last year, the Northeast Valley shelter took in 1,115 animals.

You can see how many Northeast Valley shelter took in last year in the City Administrative Officer's report.

Scroll down to Attachment 1, Table 3, page 10 of the pdf at this link:

http://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2011/11-1345_RPT_CAO_08-02-11.pdf

Those 1,115 animals will now also be pushed out by the takeover. Where will they go?

The CAO report has some eye-opening information. It shows the tragic fact that East Valley shelter has had to absorb approximately 4,000 animals annually from Council District 7 that should have gone to Northeast Valley if it operated as a regular shelter. Council District 7 includes, Pacoima, Sylmar, Mission Hills, Lake View Terrace, Panorama City and North Hills, which are primarily low income areas with a very high relinquishment rate. On top of taking in those 4,000, the Best Friends takeover will force East Valley to absorb the additional 1,100 to 1,200 animals annually that Northeast Valley will no longer be able to take in. They will have to kill that many more to make space. This is the "collateral damage" of the Best Friends proposal.

To summarize, the already severely overcrowded shelter (or other overcrowded LAAS shelters) will have to absorb an extra 1,100 to 1,200 animals that cannot go to Northeast anymore. In addition, LAAS will not be able to continue the successful transport program (which had been saving about 600 more), and Best Friends will cherry-pick and adopt animals of which most would have been adopted at LAAS anyway. So think twice when you get excited about Best Friends "saving" 3,000.

There are alternatives which LAAS and city officials have been denied the opportunity to consider. LAAS can operate the shelter without straining the budget, and saving those 1,100 to 1,200 animals annually. More details on these alternatives in the next email.

Contact your City Councilmember and post it on your Facebook. Hurry, next meeting is Tuesday August 16th.

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Important: Alternative solutions for Northeast Valley shelter

2 messages

olivia barrymore <oliviabarrymore1@gmail.com>

Sun, Aug 14, 2011 at 12:35 PM

To: oliviabarrymore1@gmail.com

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Please CROSS POST to your distribution list

Because of the secret process of this takeover, the city has not had the opportunity to explore any alternatives. Others may have more but here are just some:

1. Operate the Northeast Valley shelter the same as the other LAAS shelters with LAAS staff:
The City Administrative Officer's (CAO) report seems to say that we could open the Northeast Valley shelter as the fully functioning shelter envisioned by Proposition F if we could cut 9 open-to-public hours from all the other shelters. It need not be confusing. And it need not require that any shelter close for any additional day. Instead, the needed hours can be conserved for example this way:

Instead of being open from 8am to 5pm Tuesday thru Saturday (and 11am thru 5 pm Sunday), have the shelters open on Tuesday and Thursday from 3pm to 7pm (all other hours as usual). This way we save not just the needed 9 hours of savings but a full 10 hours of open time, plus the public and rescues will gain evening hours two nights of the week which they want and which helps increase adoptions and rescues. This would give us 7 public operating shelters and equivalent services provided throughout the city, without any loss of any open shelter day.

2. Operate the Northeast Valley shelter as an adoption center keeping it an LAAS facility with LAAS employees, as well as using the LAAS employees to house at the Northeast Valley shelter the evidence animals, hospital animals, mamas with pups and kittens, and animals from disasters, as it had been doing since 2008.

For example, an LAAS Adoption Center could open to the public only during peak adoption hours such as 3pm to 7pm Thursday thru Sunday. The additional cost above how the shelter had been operating until August 1st would be for one clerk for those hours. This would require a far more modest modification to hours at the other shelters.

3. Either of the above two ideas could be done by LAAS alone. However, doing either with Best Friends' assistance would supercharge the program. Welcome Best Friends' assistance with much of what they offered but not the part that would create problems.

Best Friends offered LAAS three things:

- a) To operate a spay/neuter and low cost veterinary clinic for the Northeast Valley shelter and public animals. We would all embrace that enthusiastically!
- b) Public outreach including mobile adoptions, animal training, education and the amazing Best Friends publicity expertise. We would all embrace this enthusiastically too!
- c) An adoption center. As already discussed this is not a viable option in a Proposition F shelter, but it could be an excellent option if operated by LAAS employees with the above mentioned assistance of Best Friends.

Any of the above three options would allow LAAS to continue operating Northeast Valley the same way it has been operated since it opened in 2008, and enable LAAS to avoid having to compress an additional 1,100 to 1,200 animals into the other extremely overcrowded LAAS shelters.

By incorporating the best of Best Friends' offer with either of the first two options, Best Friends could still operate the spay/neuter and low cost veterinary clinic that is so desperately needed in that area, provide all of the public education and outreach that Best Friends has been wanting to do, and provide creative adoption publicity and strategies in a very unique format to help shelter animals.

Another important beauty of this meshing of Best Friends and LAAS as a publicly operated shelter with Best Friends assistance is that it stands true to Proposition F and public shelter operations, while providing a truly unique testing ground for all sorts of new ideas Best Friends has over time for enhancing community relations inside and outside of a public shelter. Successful new strategies developed and refined in this unique collaboration could resonate with shelters across the country and could conceivably benefit not just LAAS animals but animals throughout the country.

These ideas show that alternatives exist. No alternatives have been considered. It is impossible to know if any other ideas, which have not been requested or reviewed, would deliver more lives saved, more cost savings, additional benefits to the city, or fewer concerns than the one proposal received. This is why the consideration of the proposal should be delayed until alternatives can be sought out and evaluated, which has not yet been done.

Contact your City Councilmember and post it on your Facebook. Hurry, next meeting is Tuesday August 16th.

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Please Postpone Vote on Best Friends Proposal for 30 Days. Allow Time To Gather More Info.

1 message

Periel Stanfield <drivingmemutts@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 15, 2011 at 5:08 AM

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Dear Council Members:

I am writing to voice my strong concern about the apparent rush to approve proposal for the takeover of the Northeast Valley Shelter by The Best Friends organization. I strongly urge you to postpone taking a vote on this proposal for 30 days to allow time for all the facts to be brought to light.

I question the very legality of the proceedings and I do not understand how this takeover could happen so soon with so little advance notice to the public and virtually no public hearings or real debate on the issue.

It is also baffling to me why the Public Safety Committee waived consideration of this proposal when it is a matter of utmost importance to public safety.

I believe it was Council Member Wesson who aptly stated at Friday's city council meeting, that the way in which this proposal had been handled was a "debauch". I could not agree more. There is something suspect about the manner in which this entire matter has been handled. The lack of communication and the failure to disclose pertinent information to the stakeholders – especially Council Member Alarcon and his constituents, who will be directly impacted by your decision in this matter, is very troubling. I feel strongly that more time and further investigation of the issues at hand is essential before making any decisions to approve this proposal.

At the council meeting on Friday, the agenda item was at first (and rightly so) continued until September 13th. This was the appropriate action to take in order to allow both the city council and the public to gather more information about the proposal and to schedule a public hearing on the matter. However, apparently, upon Brenda Barnette's insistence, the agenda item was promptly put back on the agenda. When the item was finally heard, rather than having Ms. Barnette speak first

and hearing public comments afterward (as was done on the zoo proposal item), public comments were heard first and Ms. Barnette spoke afterward. This made it so that no one had the opportunity to dispute her erroneous, misleading statements.

When Council Member Alarcon, very wisely suggested a 30 day “waiting period” be taken, Ms. Barnette retorted with what almost sounded like a veiled threat: “For every month you delay approving this proposal 240 animals will die”. How was Ms. Barnette able to come up with this figure so quickly? This is a *hypothetical figure* based on the *hypothetical figure* of 3000 that Best Friends gave as a predicted number of adoptions that that they would do per year. Let’s do the math: 3000 predicted adoptions divided by 50 weeks of shelter operation = 60 predicted adoptions per operating week times 4 weeks per month = 240.

Her statement was a scare tactic to force your hand. This is the number of hypothetical adoptions that supposedly would not take place if the Best Friends proposal was not fast-tracked through.

Here are some *non-hypothetical* facts and figures: The Northeast Valley Shelter has 160 cages and can hold up to 260 dogs and 200 cats. Since 2008, the Northeast Valley Shelter has been used to hold evidence animals, mother dogs with their pups and animals awaiting transport. Last year there were approximately 1100 to 1200 combined evidence animals and moms and pups taken in to Northeast Valley and approximately 600 animals held for transport. Since the Northeast Valley Shelter will no longer be available to house such animals under the current Best Friends takeover proposal, these evidence animals as well as moms and pups will have to be absorbed by the East Valley (mostly) and other shelters. Because evidence animals must be held for long periods of time (sometimes up to a year), there will be less space and less time available for the general population. Consequently, there will be more killing at a faster rate. An equal number of animals from the general population that will have to be put down (killed) because the evidence animals legally must be held and cannot be put down and will be taking up space. For example: If 30 evidence animals come in, 30 additional animals will have to be put down. When the shelter fills beyond capacity. Something’s got to give. What gives are the animals from the general population- with their lives. Even IF Best Friends is able to adopt out their predicted 3000 per year, deaths will still far out number adoptions due to the lack of space because of evidence animals taking up space at East Valley and other shelters while more than half the cages sit empty at Northeast Valley.

I strongly urge you to speak with those on the front lines of this battle—the shelter employees- and ask their opinion of this proposal. You will find few, if any, in favor of it and I daresay they are far more familiar with the everyday realities of the shelter than Ms. Barnette. They, not Ms. Barnette, are the ones that have to deal with the heartbreaking decision of which animals live and which must die. And they are the ones who must “do the deed”. Ms. Barnette is out of touch and out of line. I sincerely hope that she will soon be out of a job.

One more piece of food for thought: Ms. Barnette sent out an email yesterday “calling the kettle black” by suggesting that those opposed to the Best Friends proposal “have an agenda” and that their opposition was “preventing Best Friends from saving lives”. Best Friends is a very well funded organization. There is nothing stopping Best Friends from rescuing as many city shelter animals as they want and spending as much money as they want to help the animals of the city of LA. Or are they only willing to help if they are handed over a \$19,000,000 facility for \$1 a year while at the same time overburdening the East Valley Shelter and putting more animals at risk of being killed for lack of space?

I have seen a suggestion by the head of a well respected local rescue group mention the possibility of avoiding a legal battle over this issue by virtue of Best Friends buying out the City of L.A. for the \$19,000,000 spent by taxpayers on Northeast Valley and doing whatever they want with the building.

If Best Friends paid a fraction of that amount - \$2 -3 million - to the City of L.A. for the use of a portion of the Northeast Valley Shelter, it would pay the salaries of the extra employees needed to run the Northeast Valley Shelter as fully operational and allow the evidence animals, moms and pups and animals awaiting transport to be housed there as well as relinquished and stray animals from Council Member Alarcon’s district. Best Friends could still run the (already built) spay/neuter clinic and do outreach and adoptions and the East Valley Shelter would have some of the overcrowding issues relieved. This would be a true partnership and a win/win for all involved.

In closing, urge you to take 30 days to consider a compromise plan such as the one outlined above.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter and to consider my input.

Respectfully,
Periel Stanfield
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