



John White <john.white@lacity.org>

# CORRECTION: Council File 11-1345: Best Friends & Northeast Valley Animal Shelter

1 message

CatNose1@aol.com <CatNose1@aol.com>  
To: john.white@lacity.org

Thu, Aug 11, 2011 at 6:05 PM

Dear Mr. White,

I spoke with a city council office this morning and was told a fact which I incorporated into my email of earlier today. I then learned that the fact is incorrect.

Please substitute the below for the email I sent at 2:43 pm today.

Thank you very much,  
Laura Beth Heisen

=====

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, is not for use 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 capacity of 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  
 Chair, Los Angeles Spay/Neuter Advisory Committee, 2008-2009

---

[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.

---