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August 2, 2011

Councilmember Mitch Englander
Chair, Public Safety Committee
Los Angeles City Council

RE: CAO File No. 0590-00098-4044 – NORTHEAST ANIMAL CARE CENTER

According to the first sentence in the CAO's report, "The Northeast Valley Animal Care Center...was built to be a fully operational Animal Care Center." The service area of this shelter, which extends far beyond CD 7, is responsible for approximately 50% of the animals, especially dogs and cats that now overcrowd the East and West Valley shelters, including a high percentage of pit bulls. This will not be eased as a result of this contract with Best Friends. This community has one of the highest needs for a shelter in the city. Because of the burdensome distance to take an animal to one of the other Valley shelters, many are just dumped in the streets or found animals are not taken to the shelter, thus creating a problem with dog packs and feral cats. The Northeast Valley, and the entire City, is paying for full services at this shelter, as promised in the Prop. F bond measure.

Mission Animal Shelter was designed especially to serve the equestrian community, and no other shelter in the City has these facilities for large animals. There is no provision in the Best Friends proposal for equine/large animal care, especially during disasters or large confiscations.

The reason Los Angeles doesn't have the money to operate this shelter is because the past and current General Managers have not been held to their obligation to collect revenue from licensing and other services which would support this department and the shelters. The proposal for private contracts for shelters is merely an admission and acceptance of managerial incompetence at a high cost to the animals of Los Angeles.

With all due respect to CAO Miguel Santana, the projection that 10,000 more animals would be euthanized by distributing the LA Animal Services budget over all shelters does not seem plausible. If the three Valley shelters close one additional day on a rotating basis; e.g., East Valley closed Sun/Mon; West Valley closed Sun/Tues; and Northeast Valley closed Sun/Wed., that would still leave two fully operational shelters open to Valley residents each day—which is the same as existing access. However, NE Valley residents would have services within a reasonable distance and those at the outer or mid-areas of the shelter-service boundaries for the other shelters would have services within the same radius.

The additional benefit from the "shared-sacrifice" concept would be that the crowded conditions at the other two shelters would be decreased, more animals could remain in the shelter longer and have an opportunity to be adopted. The proposal that Best Friends taking 50 of the most adoptable animals from all shelters and offering them at the most remote location does not equate with increased adoptions—in fact, based upon Councilman Zine's recent experience, it may just leave the other shelters with only the less-desirable pets and discourage local residents from adopting.

Under equal-distribution budgeting, there would be additional savings in shortened response time and the ability of officers to work in an area in proximity to the shelter, rather than having to cover field calls and humane investigations from the East or West Valley shelters. As it is, this area is deprived of timely vital officer services for picking up strays and injured animals and any threats to public/animal safety.

Although a public low-cost spay/neuter clinic would be an advantage to the community and can be competently provided by an outside contractor, it does not have to be at the cost of losing other essential services. (In fact, the City should be negotiating for low-cost mobile spay/neuter services in this area.) It is unclear how the services proposed by Best Friends translate into a \$3 million benefit to the taxpayers who are paying for the bond for this facility and would be allowing rent-free use of a \$19-million facility, including maintenance, security and utilities. There must be assurance that this shelter will NOT be used as a "transport" center to ship unadopted animals to unknown destinations, including Canada, merely to increase Ms. Barnette's "live save" rates on her stats and disguise other deficiencies in LA Animal Services management.

This proposal to give away the use of this essential \$19 million facility is a huge disappointment to residents and property owners who agreed to the \$154 million in bond money to provide animal control services equally to each community of this City. We did not agree to pay this bond merely to provide a private organization with a place to hold adoptions, charge the public for spay/neuter and provide educational programs. These are laudable functions but should be additions to full core services, not in place of them. Failure to essential, basic animal-control services would not even be considered if this shelter were located in West Los Angeles where there is a more vocal constituency.

We urge the CAO to focus on the needs of the community and the animals, which will merely continue to escalate under the privatization proposal.


Phyllis M. Daugherty, Director

Attachments (2)

Daily News

Voice of the Valley for 100 years

Running Mission shelter is a city responsibility

By Phyllis M. Daugherty

THE Mission animal shelter in the northeast San Fernando Valley must be kept open — but not as a private adoption center. Property owners of Los Angeles are paying more than \$19 million in bonded indebtedness and deserve a city animal-care facility for their underserved area.

The wishes of the people are being ignored in proposing that all city services be abandoned and a nonprofit organization, Best Friends Animal Society of Utah, utilize a portion of the building to promote adoption of the most desirable impounds from other city shelters. That would reduce the selection options for many potential adopters and could decrease their willingness to visit other local shelters when seeking a family pet.

Proposition F was sold in 2001 as a \$154 million city bond that would end overcrowded shelters, reduce euthanasia and provide badly needed animal control and community care centers in underserved areas. City officials knew the Mission shelter would need staffing.

Los Angeles Animal Services is a core public health and safety responsibility, not an optional benefit that can be downsized merely for convenience. The need for vital animal control services resulted in establishing a successful licensing differential in 2000 and strong spay/neuter campaigns that subsequently decreased shelter impounds by approximately 50 percent.

However, the decision in 2003 to make Los Angeles a “no-kill” city in five years and the current mayor’s insistence upon perpetuating this mythical goal has worked against humane progress. The improvement L.A. was experiencing in attitudes of pet responsibility was mainly prompted by the honesty that not every unwanted pet will find a home. Euthanasia was discussed on TV and the front pages of

local newspapers in a bold campaign to make it clear that the decision to get a pet should not be taken lightly nor done on impulse.

Now, assured by publicity that every animal is adoptable if we just keep it long enough, the city’s shelters are packed.

The Mission shelter currently houses hundreds of evidence animals (those abused or used in criminal activities, such as, dog fighting) and mothers nursing their litters. These animals must be kept for long periods in separate kennels. Returning them to local shelters reduces space and hastens euthanasia of adoptable pets. Best Friends’ high-profile advertising for its events would also affect the adoption rate at other Valley shelters and compete with local rescuers. These are the smaller organizations that consistently take animals from local shelters.

Turning a \$19 million city facility over to one nonprofit organization for \$1 a year is a major decision that must undergo a formal bidding process, if it is to be done at all. This is especially true when we are considering this gift of use of public property to an organization that reports 2009 income at \$51 million. City shelters would still provide initial veterinary care and sterilization for impounded animals, and the city retains responsibility for the maintenance and security of its facility. Current shelter employees would merely transfer to other facilities that are already fully staffed. So, where is the cost benefit to the city?

By floating Proposition F, the City Council and mayor made an implied agreement that all these public facilities would be operative. The Mission shelter was a promise that the needs of Valley animals and communities would no longer be ignored. That promise must be kept.

Phyllis M. Daugherty is director of Animal Issues Movement.

Is Mayor Villaraigosa 'Sacrificing' an L.A. Animal Shelter?



By Phyllis M Daugherty on Jun 24, 2011

According to statements by various Los Angeles city officials, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa wants the Northeast Valley Animal Shelter in Mission Hills turned over to Best Friends Animal Society because of budget cuts. What happened to his “shared sacrifice” concept that allowed L.A. Police and Fire Departments to keep *all* stations open merely by slightly lowering staffing and equipment levels?

Dividing the L.A. Animal Services budget so that all six existing shelters are open a few less hours would provide the funding for the Valley’s “Mission” Animal Care Center--located in one of the most animal-dense and under-served areas of Los Angeles--so it can provide essential public services for local pets and their owners.

Under the Mayor’s current plan for the Mission shelter, the City would turn over this new \$19 million state-of-the-art animal shelter to Best Friends for \$1 a year. In return, Best Friends would reportedly conduct from that location adoptions of a small number of desirable pets brought from the other six City shelters.

There is even further bewildering incongruity in this proposal. Cash-strapped Los Angeles would reportedly pay for maintenance, security, and utilities for Best Friends, a non-profit corporation which received over \$51 million in income in 2009, according to its IRS report. This part of the “shared sacrifice” would come directly out of Los Angeles taxpayers’ pockets.

But, wait, there’s more. The Mission animal-care facility is part of the \$154-million, Prop. “F” bond funds approved by voters in 2001 for new animal shelters and renovations of existing shelters all over Los Angeles. This is still being paid by city property owners, many of whom are losing their own homes in a faltering economy.

Prop “F” promised that expanding existing animal shelters and building new facilities in pet-overpopulated, lower-income communities would reduce the danger and menace of stray and packing dog in the streets, lower euthanasia, and provide additional opportunities for adoptions of shelter animals in these areas.

On the surface, the Best Friends’ plan might sound like a warm-and-fuzzy (albeit inequitable) public-private “partnership, but would it really even benefit animal adoptions?

At a recent Best Friends “Super Adoption Event” at the La Brea Tar Pits, on May 21-22, reportedly 18 shelters and 50 rescue groups brought almost 1,300 animals needing homes. But Best Friends’ reports that only 284 animals were adopted to the public. That factors out at about four per shelter or organization. This is much lower than a usual weekend at a shelter, where 20+ dogs/cats are easily adopted from most facilities over two days.

<http://network.bestfriends.org/17218/news.asp>

There was no shortage of media attention for this event, and the Mayor’s girlfriend, Lu Parker, gave it a nice, long plug on KTLA-5 News. (Best Friends is, coincidentally, the only animal society on the Lu Parker Project website under “Helpful Links.”)

So, this very low pet-adoption rate could be an indication that people like to adopt at their local shelter--if the right pets are available--and that moving those pets to the remote Northeast Valley might not enhance their chances.

The animals and residents of Pacoima, Arleta, Lakeview Terrace, Sylmar and Mission Hills are among those who would be served by the Mission shelter. Pacoima and Sylmar were recently designated by the Heigl Foundation for \$50,000 in free spay/neuter of pit bulls and pit mixes, based on a survey of which areas should be primary targets to reduce the approximately 60% pit bull impound rate citywide.

Several senior officers estimate that at least 50 percent of the relinquished and stray pets in the overcrowded East Valley and West Valley shelters are from the area that would—and should—be served by the Mission shelter. So, not utilizing this shelter for its intended purpose has a negative impact on residents of the entire San Fernando Valley.

Since its completion in 2007, the Mission shelter has never been fully staffed and has been used to house evidence animals confiscated in cruelty and neglect cases and to isolate nursing animal-moms with litters. It also served as an animal-evacuation refuge during the fierce 2008 fires that engulfed much of the Valley and adjacent forest areas.

In a June 17, 2011, *Los Angeles Daily News* article entitled, "More blazes are expected this season", L. A. City Fire Department Deputy Chief Mario Rueda said, "The Valley has had its share of wildfires but remains at risk of experiencing more...In 2008, we had several significant fires across the north face of the San Fernando Valley but we still have quite a few areas that have not burned..."

Is the Valley agreeable to a "sacrifice" that removes all City staffing from a critical location and gives up a new public facility that can house up to 900 animals in any major disaster?

Councilman Richard Alarcon, who represents most of the Northeast Valley area, has objected to not fully opening, and now "giving away," the long-awaited animal shelter designed for the special needs of the rural area of the San Fernando Valley with a large equine population--in other words, a lot of horses!

The Councilman proposes that the budgetary problems can be resolved by applying the same "shared sacrifice" that the Mayor encouraged for other public-safety agencies; i.e., Los Angeles Police and Fire Departments, to apportion their budgets so that there are decreases in some services at each station but all are operating for the protection and convenience of surrounding communities.

Why wasn't this immediately embraced by the Mayor's office and City Council as the obvious and practical way for L.A. Animal Services to provide animal and public-safety in an area near the center of most of Los Angeles' recent, and anticipated, disasters?