

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury
Calaveras County Animal Services Department

Still Scratching the Surface

June 30, 2024



"It's a critter care conundrum." – Erin Dahlquist

SUMMARY

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury's decision to investigate Calaveras County Animal Services Department was in accordance with California Penal Code §925 which states in part "...investigations may be conducted on some selective basis each year." The Civil Grand Jury was interested in assessing the overall operations of the facility and management of the Animal Shelter.

The Grand Jury concluded that the Animal Shelter, built in the 1950s, remains inadequate. As reported in past Grand Jury reports dating back to 1987, the shelter is understaffed, unsanitary, underfunded, and in need of replacement. Although steps have been taken in recent months to build a new shelter, the funding available at the time of this report is grossly deficient.

It remains to be seen how the new shelter will be funded. However, there are immediate actions that may be taken by the department that could improve their service to the community.

GLOSSARY

The list below identifies the acronyms used in this report.

BOS	Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
CCAS	Calaveras County Animal Services
CCCGJ	Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury
FOCAS	Friends of Calaveras County Animal Shelter

METHODOLOGY

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury (CCCGJ) conducted a site visit to the Calaveras County Animal Services (CCAS) shelter, reviewed past CCCGJ reports, conducted a number of interviews with relevant county employees, and evaluated the department's website.

BACKGROUND

Calaveras County Animal Services (CCAS) has been under the direction of the Environmental Management Agency since October 2012. Funding for the shelter is provided by Calaveras County through allocations from County taxes which are approved by the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors (BOS). CCAS is responsible for animal-related calls and concerns from the community. CCAS is also responsible for animal shelter operations, dog licensing, rabies vaccinations, spay and neutering services, and adoptions.

For more than 20 years, CCCGJ has reported that the Calaveras County Animal Shelter has outgrown and outlived its effectiveness and needs to be replaced. The dire need for a new CCAS facility was substantiated by the May 21, 2018, Calaveras County Animal Services Bickmore Shelter Hazard Report, as well as the November 3, 2022, University of California, Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program Report. Both reports support the need for a new shelter. The following are excerpts from past CCCGJ reports:

- **1999-2000:** "The building conditions are in need of improvement."

- **2001-2002:** “The Calaveras County Animal Control facility (shelter) has been a long-recognized problem with past Grand Juries since 1986. Final reports of past Grand Juries have many times reflected the need for change in this outdated facility”
- **2005-2006:** CCGJ received a citizen complaint. “The complainant specified many issues pertaining to the condition of the facility...”
- **2006-2007:** “Finding 1: A facility upgrade recommended by a special audit in 2006, [*sic*] remains unresolved. The proposed plan submitted by Nacht & Lewis Architects to the County Administrator includes acquisition of space, construction of a new animal shelter, and repairs to the existing facility.”
- **2007-2008:** “Finding: The current animal shelter is too small and outdated for the housing of animals for Calaveras County.”
- **2008-2009:** “Recommendation: The Grand Jury continues to recommend the Sheriff’s update, and the Board of Supervisors approve, the plan for a new shelter with a specific timeline. The BOS needs to allocate the necessary funding.”
- **2009-2010:** “Recommendation: The Grand Jury continues to recommend that the Board of Supervisors implement the previously approved plan for a new shelter with a specific time line. The BOS should allocate the necessary funding to proceed with the project.”
- **2010-2011:** “Finding 1: Although a relatively new modular building serves as the office space for the shelter, most of the facility is old and inadequate.”
- **2011-2012:** “Finding 1: A relatively new modular building serves as the office space for the shelter; however, most of the facility is old and inadequate.”
- **2015-2016:** “ACS [*sic*] is working with the humane society and local community outreach programs to construct better housing for animals.”
- **2017-2018:** “The existing aging and obsolete animal shelter is small and outdated (built in the 1950’s) to adequately meet the daily services and operational needs for animal housing.”
- **2018-2019:** “After conducting interviews and inspections, the Grand Jury finds that the current Animal Control Services facility continues to be inadequate, unsafe, understaffed, and has outlived its utility. Replacement with a new facility or a refurbished existing building needs to occur.”
- **2019-2020:** “After reviewing past CCGJ reports from 1999 to 2019, it was found that each year’s recommendations were virtually the same and each report concluded that the shelter needed to be replaced.”
- **2022-2023:** “Until recently, despite multiple Grand Jury reports, citizen complaints, and third-party studies, little has been done to replace the Animal Shelter.”

At the March 26, 2024 BOS meeting, LDA Partners Inc, an architectural firm based in Stockton, CA, presented an agreement for an amount not to exceed \$798,000 for design development and construction documents. Additionally, as of March 11, 2024, the county has paid LDA Partners Inc. \$177,650 (details on these payments were unknown at the time of this report). However, the BOS failed to approve the payment of \$798,000. This reluctance stemmed from the realization that the proposed expenditure significantly strained the budget, which stands at \$4.16 million. Moreover, with the projected total cost of the project ranging between \$7 million to \$13 million, the current financial allocation is insufficient. Consequently, the fate of the animal shelter project is now clouded in uncertainty, lacking a concrete plan and the necessary budget to progress or be finalized in the foreseeable future.

Until these budget matters are addressed and resolved by the BOS, CCCGJ decided to focus its report on other aspects of the current shelter's operations that may be improved now.

DISCUSSION

Website

The Animal Services website (<https://animal.calaverasgov.us/>), as part of the Calaveras County website, was examined and evaluated. After reviewing the 2022-2023 Grand Jury report, it was discovered that many of the suggestions had been implemented, resulting in a more user-friendly website. In a new 2024 website evaluation, the Grand Jury found more areas for improvement to make the animal services website a go-to resource for the County.

Updates could include:

CODES & LAWS PAGE

- Provide a course of action. Examples: What can one do when a barking dog can't be resolved between neighbors? What can one expect the course of action to be from the Animal Services Dept.?
- Provide a direct link to the specific part of the Calaveras County Code of Ordinances that addresses barking dogs to make it easier for citizens to navigate to this information.

LOST & FOUND PETS

- Provide links to some of the popular places where people post found/lost animals. For example: NextDoor.com and locally based Facebook Groups such as "Lost and Found Pets Calaveras County".

FEES & LICENSING

- Make it a priority to increase community awareness of the Fee Flexibility Program – the public should know that it exists:
 - Any animal that has been available for adoption for more than 15 days, the overall fee for the adoption will be 50% off. Please note that the stray/wait period does NOT count towards the 15 days.

- Overpopulation: We only have 21 dog kennels and 34 cat cages. When either of these get to 80% full or above, the overall adoption fee will be 50% off.
- The 55-5-5 program: Any adopter over 55 years old adopting any pet over 5 years old will pay a total adoption fee of \$5.00.

FORMS PAGE

- Categorization of Forms, Documents, and Other Information:
 - Safety & Emergencies
 - Forms and Applications
 - Pet Programs
 - Press Releases
 - Resources

SERVICES

- Add links to the bullet points that go to the relevant pages.

AMAZON WISH LIST

- Update the list regularly to reflect current needs.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, RESPONDENTS

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury requires responses within 60 days from elected county official(s), and within 90 days from governing bodies. In order to be included and published in the next Grand Jury report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

After conducting interviews, reviewing reference documents, and touring the facility, the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury findings and recommendations are as follows:

F1. The Animal Services website needs improvements for the public to use it as an information resource.

R1. Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends that Animal Services update its website with current information and improved user-friendly operations as suggested in the Discussion – Website portion of this report by November 1, 2024.

Required Responses

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

Director of the Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency
Manager of the Calaveras County Animal Services Department

COMMENDATIONS

C1. Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury commends the Environmental Management Agency Director, shelter staff, and FOCAS volunteers for their dedication to the impounded animals and their pursuit of a new Calaveras County Animal Shelter to better serve the citizens and animals of Calaveras County.

C2. Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury commends the Environmental Management Agency Director, shelter staff, and FOCAS volunteers for implementing the majority of recommendations from the 2022-2023 CCCGJ report, including adjusting business hours to better serve the public, additions to staff, an improved website, and improvements in staff and volunteer communications.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify the individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

REFERENCE SOURCES

Bickmore Shelter Hazard Report, Calaveras County Animal Services Tom Kline, ARM, CPSI, Terrie S. Norris, CSP, ARM, CPSI, September 2018

BOS minutes from meetings on September 10, 2019; February 18, 2020; December 13, 2022, April 11, 2023, and January 23, 2024 (www.calaveras.gov),.

Calaveras County Animal Shelter (<https://animal.calaverasgov.us/>)

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury Reports from 1999-2000, 2001-2002, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2015-2016, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2022-2023 (<https://grandjury.calaverasgov.us/Reports>)

County Ordinance, Title 6 – ANIMALS, Chapter 6. UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program; Calaveras Housing Capacity Report D. Wagner, B. Stunteback, November 3, 2022

[LDA Partners, Inc. presentation](#) to the BOS on January 23, 2024 <https://bit.ly/3PxHgYf>
2023-2024 Calaveras County Final Budget; page 68