NAPA COUNTY
RESPONSE TO THE GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT ON
NAPA COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER
August 9, 2022

Findings

Finding 1: The Napa County Animal Shelter cares for approximately 150 – 200 animals every month. The Shelter has the ability to quarantine animals, administer medications, isolate problem animals when necessary, and rehabilitate some animals demonstrating problematic behaviors.

The Director disagrees partially with the finding. While the Animal Shelter has the ability to quarantine animals, this type of space is limited, and the capacity to quarantine animals is situation-specific depending upon breed and reason for quarantine. The Animal Shelter does not have available facilities to quarantine a large number of animals.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the Director.

Finding 2: Impounded or surrendered animals with significant behavioral problems create an immediate barrier to adoption or foster care. The Napa County Code requires that a pro-bono Animal Behaviorist attend to these problematic situations; this can be difficult and time-consuming to manage. During the Grand Jury's visit to the Shelter, several dogs were observed to be agitated inside their enclosures and were generally unapproachable due to the potential for injury.

The Director disagrees partially with the finding as it pertains to the statement that a pro-bono Animal Behaviorist must attend to problematic situations. Napa County Code provides that qualified staff may conduct behavioral evaluations. Qualified staff can extend to qualified contracted services for the County who do conduct behavioral evaluations.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the Director.

Finding 3: A dog with a feral nature must be offered to a non-profit organization for possible adoption.

The Director disagrees partially with this finding. Prior to "destruction" (i.e., humane euthanasia) of any impounded or surrendered dog, cat, or rabbit, regardless of health, injury, feral nature, or age, non-profit 501(c)(3) animal welfare organizations who have requested to be notified must be provided no less than forty-eight hours notification and the Animal Shelter must permit release of such impounded or surrendered animal scheduled for humane euthanasia upon request from the 501(c)(3) non-profit animal welfare organization.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the Director.

Finding 4: Socialization, including a mitigation plan to deal with the behavior problems of aggressive animals, may not be achievable given the obstacle of obtaining a pro bono behaviorist. This path is

rarely viable since the time devoted to the animal is limited and may be insufficient to change the animal's behavior and make it suitable for adoption.

The Director disagrees partially with this finding. Napa County Code provides that qualified staff may conduct behavioral evaluations. Qualified staff can extend to qualified contracted services for the County. Please refer to response from Director of Public Works regarding Recommendation 1 from the Grand Jury.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the Director.

Finding 5: Shelter managers explained that the requirement for approval to euthanize animals must be obtained by a licensed veterinarian via a telephone consultation. This requirement can result in unintended consequences when a veterinarian's approval cannot be quickly obtained. There may be requests for vital signs, injury identification, or other specific information which take time to provide and are likely to lead to the same conclusions held by the Shelter personnel in the first case, i.e., the animal cannot be saved.

The Director agrees with this finding.

The Sheriff agrees with the above responses from the Director of Public Works to all the Findings.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the Director.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: In order to resolve animal behavior problems more rapidly, this Grand Jury recommends that the Shelter secure a contract with a Certified Animal Behaviorist. This specialist would be asked to commit to a defined period of time each week/month to develop a program for each such animal that may ultimately lead to adoptability. In the contrary situation the Behaviorist, with concurrence from a Shelter supervisory person, may determine that no amount of behavior modification training will guarantee that an animal will be able to thrive in a home environment without the possibility of future aggression or unpredictable impulsive actions.

Response, Director of Public Works: The recommendation has been implemented. Napa County entered into an Agreement with an animal behaviorist on January 12, 2022. The Contractor performs on-call services including but not limited to: conducting in-person behavior assessments and preparing written reports, behavior modification plans, and placement/adoption/euthanasia recommendations; assisting with placement of difficult dogs; and training for Animal Shelter staff and volunteers. Since the Agreement was executed, the behaviorist has provided trainings to staff and volunteers and volunteers are now effectively equipped to assist in behavior modification training. Because staff and volunteers work with the dogs daily, this training is critical to providing the on-going training that is needed to support behavior change.

Recommendation 2: The Ordinance currently states that two county personnel, neither of whom reports to the other, have the authority to euthanize animals after seven specific steps outlined in the

Ordinance have been completed regardless of health, injury, feral nature, or age. An exception to these conditions should be made when the suffering cannot be relieved, i.e., irremediable suffering. In this instance, this Grand Jury recommends that the two county personnel (a Shelter Attendant and the Shelter Manager) should have the authority to euthanize an animal without having completed these steps, if it has been determined that an animal is suffering needlessly. A ballot measure with voter approval would be required to expand this exception to include Animal Shelter staff. Shelter personnel are fully trained and competent to perform owner requested euthanasia; this Grand Jury recommends that they should have the authority to do so when necessary to relieve irremediable suffering.

Response, Board of Supervisors: The Board of Supervisors agrees with the response from the Director of Public Works.

Response, Director of Public Works: The Director agrees in part with this recommendation. The Director does agree that the Ordinance, adopted as Napa County Code 6.04.230, may create additional suffering for animals while Shelter staff obtain a determination of irremediable suffering from a licensed veterinarian. In addition, the Director is concerned that the Ordinance may unintentionally require the Shelter to release a dangerously reactive dog to a 501(c)(3) animal welfare organization even if a behaviorist has determined that the dog is not a good adoption candidate and may pose a threat to the community due to aggression or unpredictable impulsive actions. With the exception of a dog that has physically attacked a person, and then been determined to be dangerous by qualified staff or a pro-bono dog trainer/behaviorist provided by a 501(c)(3) animal welfare organization, all other dogs, regardless of feral or aggressive/dangerous behavior, must be released to a 501(c)(3) animal welfare organization upon the request (Napa County Code sections 6.04.230(A)(4)(b) and 6.04.230(A)(3)(d), respectively).

Given concerns for the welfare of animals and the safety of the community, the Director would support a change to Napa County Code. However, as the Grand Jury notes, these required practices and procedures are in place as a result of a 2016 ballot initiative that was passed by the people of Napa County. Because the voters of Napa County considered and passed these requirements, the Director is inclined to allow the voters of Napa County to suggest revisions if it is determined that the practices and procedures are no longer in the best interest of the community and the animals receiving care from the Shelter.

Response, Napa County Sheriff: The Napa County Sheriff agrees with the responses from the Board of Supervisors and the Director of Public Works for both Recommendations.