

**Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter
Board of Directors Meeting
MINUTES
April 8, 2024 10:30 am
In-Person Meeting – Watsonville City Council Chambers**

VOTING KEY: A=Ainsworth, B=Bush, Co=Coburn, Ch=Chung, D=Dally, S=Schmidt, T=Thul V=Vides W=Walpole

First initial indicates maker of motion, second initial indicates the “second”; upper case letter=“yes” vote; lower case letter=“no” (=)abstain; //absent

Abbreviations: Board Member (BM), General Manager (GM), Field Services Manager (FSM)

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- 1.0 Called to Order and Roll Call: Chairperson Jon Bush called the meeting to order at 10:32 am.
 - 2.0 Introductions: Captain Donny Thul was announced as replacing Captain Anthony Figueroa as one of the two Watsonville board members.
 - 3.0 Consideration of Late Additions or Changes to the Agenda: None.
 - 4.0 Oral Communications:

Todd Stosuy, SCCAS Employee: advocated for the inclusion of the two middle management animal shelter-specific positions- Animal Services Field Manager and Animal Services Shelter Manager- in any salary compensation study. Currently, only the SEIU positions are under consideration. The two management positions are underpaid in comparison to other middle management positions in the County of Santa Cruz.

Jonathan Brown, Representative from CEMA union which represents Santa Cruz County middle managers – advocated for middle management position be included in any shelter compensation study.

Karen Coullahan, SCCAS Employee: Karen expressed that she was hopeful that the newly formed JPA Technical Advisory Committee would result in improvements to the shelter operation. To date, there have been no changes.

Megan Carroll- Megan stated that supervisors are underpaid, overworked, and disillusioned. More resources, more support and oversight are needed.

Jill Ganley, SCCAS Employee: Jill stated she has dedicated hours of her free time to attend JPA meetings and communicated her observations and concerns to the Board but the problems are still unaddressed and worsening by the day. She stated we need action and change; the management team is not doing its job; and the people and animals deserve better.

Jesse Williams, SCCAS Employee: He stated he has been an employee of the shelter for two years and was previously a volunteer; he took a pay cut to join the shelter staff; the prevailing atmosphere within the shelter environment is undeniably disheartening; staff are committed to addressing the challenges of the shelter despite limited funding and a static staffing level; and requested more resources, better leadership, and review of employee compensation.

Laura, Spay-Neuter Advocate: Laura stated that access to spay-neuter services is critical for this community and the shelter system; shelters are over-capacity; and please continue to offer low-cost spay-neuter services.

Kelly Souza, Spay-Neuter Advocate: Kelly stated she wanted to ensure that south county is heard and supported; Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter is a success story; the cat population is exploding; the new shelter General Manager Amber Rowland has been great in bringing new ideas to the table to help with cat over-population.

Meredith Dyer, SCCAS Volunteer: Meredith stated all shelter staff are underpaid and their salaries should be evaluated; she feels obligated to spend 20 hours a week at the shelter due to limited staffing; she supports free and low-cost spay-neuter services.

Lynne Achtenburg, Project Purr Founder: Stated she wanted to acknowledge and thank Amber Rowland for being a true partner with county non-profits in their efforts to help animals; acknowledged Former Supervisor Jan Beautz as a major donor and supporter of Project Purr; that Lynne herself is a recipient of United Way and Red Cross awards; and she looks forward to continued partnership with the shelter.

5.0 Consent Agenda

5.1 Approved minutes of the February 12, 2024 Board meeting.

5.2 Accepted reports of the General Manager and Management Team for February and March 2024.

5.3 Accepted and file statistics for December 2023 and January 2024

5.4 Approved the third quarter report of all claims under \$10,000

5.5 Approved the third quarter journal entry payments with the County of Santa Cruz

5.6 Accepted gifts totaling \$6,500 from the SCCAS Foundation

Public Comment: None

Board Comment: None

Vote: A Co B Ch D S T V W

Item approved unanimously.

6.0 Regular Agenda

6.1 General Manager's Report

- Two All-Staff meetings were held during February and March: a calendar year-end briefing & a training for the upcoming "kitten season".
- Our month-long "Somebody to Love" adoption promotion in February kept animals moving through the shelter in late winter.
- We had significant forward movement on some long-standing legal cases. Special thanks to Animal Care and Animal Control teams for handling two particularly heart-wrenching cases during this reporting period: the hearings and ultimately the Destruction Order for two dogs deemed vicious, and the impoundment, transport, and euthanasia of 12 dogs and puppies with advanced parvovirus from an overwhelmed caretaker. Those were very tough, but the staff handled them with incredible compassion, professionalism and teamwork.
- There is some proposed legislation at the State level, AB 2265 that would impose multiple unfunded mandates on shelters, so I've signed on to an opposition letter, joining at least 70 other animal welfare and municipal organizations.
- We've been working on developing the proposed budget for FY 24-25, with recommendations for increased member contributions.
- We discovered two errors made several years ago in calculating JPA member contributions, and those errors were carried over for the last few years. We've made corrections to those calculations and have a recommendation for how to smooth those corrections in. This is described in Item 6.4 of today's agenda.
- Overall, shelter Intake was down this year compared to last Feb/March - but last year's numbers included 200 animals from a single case. Without those included, we took in just 19 more animals this period than last year.
- We had 121 MORE adoptions this year than last during the same period, and more reclaims and transfers as well.
- The staff is doing a fantastic job keeping animals moving through our shelter and back out into the community, where they belong, which meant we continued the "slower season" pattern of fewer animals coming IN than going OUT, but we know that...
- The Shelter's "slow" season is about to come to an end.
- The "slower season" did allow us to do more targeted outreach... just a few examples are here...

- Oso, the dog we helped in December after he was shot in the shoulder. We got his mom, sister, and ½-brother into the shelter to be fixed!
- One of our officers spoke to an elderly woman because her 3 dogs were matted. She reported that arthritis in her hands made it too painful to brush them and she was worried because she was having surgery on both hands that week. The officer contacted Omar, in Animal Care, who's an excellent groomer, and because we didn't have many dogs at the Watsonville shelter that week, he was able to bathe and groom the dogs for her! One was dog surrendered to lighten her load, and was quickly adopted.
- Negra, the Rottweiler, was found living in terrible conditions. Our officers worked with her owners to get their yard cleaned up and provide some free materials to fix their fence so she could be unchained, and she spent several days at the shelter to be spayed.
- In February, thanks to the "slower season" and our fantastic team, we also "caught up" on all spay/neuter surgeries needed by pets that had gone out with adopters last year as "foster-to-adopters" as well as fixing all the animals in the shelter.
- In March, we made 68 appointments available for subsidized Planned Pethood surgeries for owned cats, and we plan to do 44 more in April...
- We completed significantly more surgeries in the first quarter of 2024 than in '22 or '23.
- We have a few staff vacancies, which will be a little challenging.
- Personnel and supplies & services costs continue to rise.
- We've gotten started making much-needed improvements to our cat caging in Watsonville by adding grant-funded portals – we had a delay in the manufacture of some special parts, but should finish that project this month.
- We had an attempted break-in at the Santa Cruz Shelter overnight on March 23rd, but our motion-activated lighting startled the person and we got very clear images of him with our security cameras, which have been shared with law enforcement.
- The General Manager office was moved from the annex to the main shelter building admin area.

- Moving some donated caging into the Annex, and Clinic staff have cleaned and checked surgical equipment there, in case it needs to be activated for higher-volume and/or larger-dog surgery days.
- The February adoption promotion and events were very successful and popular.
- Megan, our Volunteer Coordinator, did a series of fun educational tours with students from Live Oak School District.
- In March, our St. Pittie's Day promotion was a big hit, with 21 local breweries, cideries and pubs participating. Proceeds went to our Dog Enrichment program, which is volunteer-run and is doing incredible work.
- The Top Dog Film Festival at the Rio Theatre was a sell-out, and some proceeds benefit the shelter.
- We are updating our ACO uniforms after discussion with staff and SEIU.
- Recognized the SCCAS Foundation: they are KEY to our operations: In addition to major monetary support for hard costs like fencing, clinic equipment, and a forthcoming new washing machine, they provide critical in-kind support to our print, on-line and social media presence, as well logistical support for our community events. They've been working very hard to re-build and restructure to become an even stronger support for the shelter, and I want to give them the recognition they deserve!

Public Comment: None.

Board Comment:

BM Chung: thanked the SCCAS Foundation for their support and offered the JPA Board support. Expressed satisfaction with the increased spay-neuter stats and the re-starting of the Planned Pethood Program. Also asked about the proposed legislation that GM Rowland expressed concerns about.

GM Rowland: indicated that they are early in the legislative process, it is well-intentioned but would have a lot of negative impacts on the shelter.

BM Chung: Asked how the shelter will mitigate staff leaves as we enter the busy season.

GM Rowland: The Shelter can't easily mitigate animal control officer leaves due to the level of training required to become an officer so we will need to pull back on advocacy efforts. We are working to fill openings in client services and animal care.

BM Dally: Expressed interest in adding the two shelter-specific mid-managers into the salary study.

BM Bush: Supported that potential action.

BM Walpole: When can we request this come back for Board vote?

BM Coburn: We would need to add it to a future agenda.

6.2 Considered Accepted a \$200,000 grant award from the UC Davis Regents to fund spay/neuter services and authorize the General Manager to sign the award agreement and take appropriate actions.

GM Rowland: Low and no-cost spay-neuter services are very scarce. Project Purr has been a tremendous resource for these services and has lost major funding. The grant-funding will serve as a stop-gap measure to offset Project Purr lost funding, and keep these services available.

Public Comment:

Joan DeNeffe: Joan stated this grant funding is fabulous and Project Purr has done amazing work to reduce cat population in Santa Cruz County. Joan expressed concerns that Project Purr supports community cats, however the SCCAS must comply with the law that does not support community cats. Joan recommended that this be stipulated in a written agreement with Project Purr.

Jill Ganley, SCCAS Employee: the rise in demand for spay-neuter has come from friendly cats and not from feral cats. We need funding for friendly, owned animals more than for feral, unsocial cats. Jill expressed concerns about the transparency of the plan for the use of the grant funds.

Kelly Souza, Project Purr Volunteer: Project Purr requires a caretaker for all residents requesting services from Project Purr. Each cat is micro-chipped, and Project Purry keeps records on where each cat lives. We don't abandon cats. We provide spay-neuter and trap-neuter-return services. Without Project Purr, the cat population would explode.

Laura, Advocate: Lives in Monterey County, has trapped over 200 cats in Santa Cruz County as well. Shelters are over-capacity and we are in a crisis. Santa Cruz County has been successful in adopting more animals that are being euthanized. Other counties are euthanizing many animals each day. Santa Cruz Shelter is offering spay-neuter through Planned Pethood. We are lucky that Amber Rowland requested this grant. We need to accept this grant.

Lynne Achtenberg: Project Purr acts as a go-between as the general public can be fearful of coming to the shelter for support with feral cats. Project Purr microchips and records all cats under Project Purr. Project Purr knows where all cats live and who the caregivers are. 80-90% of all cats born are from feral cats.

Feral cat spay-neuter is a critical component of slowing population growth and allows more funding to be spent on social cats.

Board Comment:

BM Coburn: How are we going to ensure compliance with existing law? How would we memorialize use of the funds?

GM Rowland: Project Purr would not be funded directly but the funds would be directed to the veterinary clinics who provide spay-neuter services and would mitigate Project Purr's lost funding. This is much-needed additional funding. There are more details to work out. Funding could be used for not only feral cats but for low-cost spay-neuter. We have systems in-place to pay external vets for spay-neuter services.

BM Coburn: Stated we have a general need for low-cost spay-neuter services and hopes that the funds could help in a number of different situations cats/dogs, low-income, etc.

BM Schmidt: Do we have a list of veterinary providers who are contracted with the shelter to provide spay-neuter services? How would that work under the grant?

GM Rowland: Project Purr utilizes a few core providers. The Shelter uses a number of local providers to assist with spay-neuter services.

BM Schmidt: Will you be using a provider network to increase spay-neuter capacity? And how will you choose which provide and what type of animal (cat/down, feral/friendly, etc.).

Clerk Phares: Ideally residents would be able to directly deal with the participating provider of their choice. We intend to reach out to all area vets to solicit their participation and negotiate favorable spay/neuter rates. We have several vets already offering us discounted services. We would want the system to be easy for both clients and providers to navigate. Rates would vary depending on each client's ability to pay. We have time to design/implement a process as this program likely won't kick-off until July. We need to comply with our animal ordinance.

BM Schmidt: Clarifying the program parameters will help alleviate concerns.

BM Chung: Agreed with BM Schmidt and stated we need to ensure the funds are used based on equity and data.

BM Coburn: Stated that if the Board approves the grant today, it would be helpful to have a report back in June with detail on how the program will work and ensure it is in alignment with supporting Board goals and the ordinance.

BM Vides: Agreed with BM Coburn and commented that this is a good opportunity to tap into available funds and help the community with spay-neuter. A report back will be helpful.

Modified Motion:

BM Coburn: Made motion to approve recommended action with the additional direction that the Board receive a report back in June detailing how the proposed grant program will operate.

Vote: Co V A B Ch D S T W

Item approved unanimously.

6.3 Considered and approved financial reports for February and March 2024

GM Rowland read the financial report.

Public Comment: None

Board Comment: None

Vote: Ch S A B Co D T V W

6.4 Considered and deferred vote on member contribution reallocation plan to the June JPA Board meeting

GM Rowland: Reviewed written report delineating allocation errors and the proposed reallocation plan.

Public Comment: None.

Board Comment:

BM Schmidt: City of Santa Cruz would realize a 28.65% increase to their member contributions if you add the reallocation plan and a 10% general budget increase.

BM Coburn: We can consider the timing of the reallocation plan to address part of the deficit this year and extend the plan over multiple years.

BM Schmidt: We will need to review the plan with fiscal staff.

BM Coburn: Recommended we not take action today and vote on the item in June.

Clerk Phares: Recommended shelter management work with the members between now and June to develop a workable solution.

Modified Recommendation:

BM Coburn: Directed shelter management to work with the members to work with the impacted agencies on an appropriate resolution to correct the allocation errors and return to the Board in June for consideration.

Vote: Co A B Ch D S T V W

6.5 Approved an AUD74 authorizing the General Manager to transfer appropriations in the amount of \$340,112.

GM Rowland: Reviewed the request for transfer, delineating the rationale for the request.

Public Comment:

Laura, Spay-Neuter Advocate: Commented that the cost of pet food has increased exponentially and requested the Board approve the request.

Board Comment: None

Vote: S W A B Co Ch D T V

6.6 Considered General Manager's proposed budget for FY 2024-25

GM Rowland: Reviewed the written budget request and recommended a 15% increase to member contributions to continue moving toward a balanced budget model. This increase would cover the increases to our operational costs without increasing staffing, and slightly reduce the operating budget structural deficit. The average member contribution increase over the past ten years has been 4.8% which has led to an ongoing structural deficit.

Clerk Phares: The 10%, 15%, and 20% increase scenarios work toward reducing the structural deficit. The reserve funds required to offset the deficit are quickly being diminished. Ultimately, we'd like to eliminate the structural deficit so that future increases can be used to increase staffing and programs rather than simply reduce the deficit.

GM Rowland: We have presented three models and are available for discussion between now and presenting the recommended budget at the June meeting.

Clerk Phares: For the member contribution we incorporated the member allocation plan adjustments as delineated in item 6.4.

Public Comment:

Laura, Spay-Neuter Advocate: Thanked the Board for approving the \$200,000 grant, thanked Project Purr for their ongoing work, and thanked the Board for working with GM Rowland collaboratively.

Joan DeNeffe: Commended the Board for working to deal with the structural budget deficit and recommended the Board support the 15% budget increase.

Gary Bencomo, SCCAS Foundation Board Member: encouraged the Board to complete compensation studies agency-wide to prevent future equity issues.

Kelly Souza, Project Purr Volunteer: Encouraged continue support for spay-neuter program.

Board Comment:

BM Coburn: What does the increase in extra help support? Is there potential for other grant opportunities?

GM Rowland: Increase in extra help is due to increase in shelter population which has required additional staffing support and the potential addition of facilities maintenance support as well as custodial support.

Clerk Phares: Our FY 24-25 budget is based on current year estimated actuals.

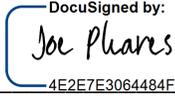
GM Rowland: There are other grant opportunities and possibly more state funding available and we hope that both the shelter and the shelter foundation can apply for and land more grants. More guidance would be welcomed on grant application processes in order to increase transparency.

Clerk Phares: the member contribution represents 70% of our total budget, with fees, donations, and reserve funds making up the rest.

7.0 Adjourned to Closed Session at 12:08 p.m.

7.1 Public Employee Performance Evaluation [Cal. Govt. Code §54957(b)]
Joint Powers Authority Board's Performance Evaluation of General Manager

ATTEST:  8/2/2024
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Chairperson Bush

 8/2/2024
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Clerk Phares