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READ AND CONSIDERED
DATE 9/16 BY

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: **Animal Services in Sonoma County**

Report Date: June 13, 2025

Response by: Kevin McDonnell Title: Mayor

Agency/Department Name: Petaluma City Council

FINDINGS:

[List numbers: ie. F1, F2]

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: __F8, F9, F10_____

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: _F1, F2, F3, F6, F7, F11, F12, F13

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed with an explanation of the reasons.)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

[List numbers: ie. R2, R3]

- Recommendations numbered: ___R7, R8_____ have been implemented.
  (Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered: __R1, R2, R4, R5, R6, _____ have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
  (Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered: _____ require(s) further analysis.
  (Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. ***This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.)***
- Recommendations numbered: _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
  (Attach an explanation.)

Date: 9/8/2025 Signed: Signed by: Kevin McDonnell FE316449A062476...

Number of pages attached: 7

(See attached PC Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)

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Petaluma City Council Response to 2024/25 Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury Report:
"Animal Services in Sonoma County"

Findings

F1: Failure by the County and its nine cities to adopt the recommendations in the 2012 DHS Animal Services Report has left Sonoma County animal service agencies operating without shared standards, communication channels, data sharing or oversight.

Response: The City of Petaluma disagrees in part with this finding. It is generally accurate that Sonoma County animal services agencies do not currently operate with shared standards, communication channels, data sharing or oversight. However, we do not agree that this is due to a "failure to adopt the recommendations". The related recommendations, as stated in the 2012 report read as follows:

"Direct the Department of Health Services to work with cities, partners, and other interested organizations to develop a local governance model that could include a Joint Powers Authority, a public/non-profit partnership, or other model recommended in the Report that delivers high-quality, cost-efficient animal care and control services for Sonoma County."

And:

"Authorize the Department to work with County Counsel and the County Administrator's Office to identify financial resources to develop a proposed governance model as described in Recommendation #2 and direct the Department of Health Services to identify financial and other resources needed to implement best practices that address current system deficiencies and/or improve ACC outcomes."

Given the 13-year-old status of the County report, and the inevitable turnover that has occurred within both County and Cities' staffing during that time, it is unclear what work did or did not happen on these recommendations when the report was fresh. Regardless, both of the above recommendations are directed toward the County Department of Health Services to perform certain tasks to work toward a standardized County-wide animal services model. Therefore, we do not believe it is an accurate portrayal to cite a failure on the part of all nine cities as to why this has not been completed. Regardless, the City supports a renewed, County-led effort and will designate City representatives upon the formation of the Task Force. We have responded in the affirmative to the relevant recommendations in the "Recommendations" section below related to enhanced County-wide coordination efforts.

F2: Services provided to the four Sonoma County cities by North Bay Animal Services are non-compliant either with state laws or industry standards for the care of shelter animals as specified in its contracts.

Response: The City of Petaluma disagrees in part with this finding. Many of the grand jury's observations about NBAS' performance are not issues of "non-compliance" but rather issues of performance that can be rectified and improved over time. A few others are incorrect entirely

or appear to represent the opinion of the grand jury. Without addressing every grand jury observation, some examples include:

- *"NBAS doesn't facilitate rabies vaccination."* - This is incorrect. NBAS ensures that all sheltered animals are rabies vaccinated while in the shelter and prior to adoption. NBAS hosts vaccination clinics regularly, but due to additional veterinary requirements specific to rabies vaccines, does not host rabies-specific vaccination clinics. NBAS reports that they are working with their contracted veterinarian about costs and logistics to do a rabies clinic in the future.
- *"Jurors were told that NBAS received 350 to 370 bite calls a year, but the Jurors were unable to secure evidence that legally mandated bite reports had been filed or that potentially dangerous animals were being quarantined as required by state law. This is a matter of concern for public safety and poses the potential for city liability resulting from dog bites."* - This is incorrect and/or misunderstood by the grand jury. All calls to animal control reporting a bite are logged in NBAS' system as a bite call; however, importantly, many of those incidents do not rise to the legal level of mandatory bite reporting or a finding of a legally dangerous animal. Moreover, 17 CCR § 2606 only requires reporting when an animal is "known or suspected of having rabies" and then it is the local health officer that "may establish a rabies quarantine". (17 CCR § 2606.2) Therefore, only a subset of the bite calls that are initially received result in a mandatory bite report or dangerous animal report to the County
- *"NBAS does a poor job of facilitating dog licensure and license renewal."* - This is an opinion / anecdotal comment on NBAS' performance rather than an issue of non-compliance. While licensing compliance ultimately rests with the animal owners, we agree that licensing percentages could be higher and will be working with NBAS on how to improve in this area.
- *"NBAS advised the Grand Jury that animals are taken to one of several veterinarians when in need of emergency or routine care, so there is no supervising veterinarian in charge of animal medicine. The shelter has no single veterinarian contracted to consult on written protocols for physical, conditions, sanitation, or general animal care at the shelter."* – This is incorrect. NBAS has a local veterinarian under contract as their site veterinarian and utilizes other local veterinarians as needed for services.
- *"Employees serving in the key positions of Dog Coordinator and Cat Coordinator were described as "experienced," but without any specific veterinary certifications included in their bios on the NBAS website"* – This is ambiguous. The grand jury did not cite what certifications they would expect to see and, to staff's knowledge, no specific training is legally mandated or required to perform this work. That said, we understand that the dog care coordinator has a Bachelors degree in canine studies and seven years' experience in the field. The cat care coordinator with NBAS has twenty years' experience in the field.
- *"During visits to the shelter the Grand Jury experienced an overpowering foul odor that suggests that the ventilation system is unlikely to be providing air quality consistent with the health and safety of both animals and humans."* – This is an observation and opinion. Without knowing what the grand jury had to compare to, and what their

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personal expectations are with respect to odor, it is difficult to comment on this observation other than to say that a certain level of odor is inevitable in a facility housing many animals. However, after receiving the grand jury report, City staff have worked to inspect and replace HVAC and air filtration components to ensure that the system is in working order.

The City of Petaluma is committed to excellent animal services for our residents and pets. To the extent that NBAS is underperforming, we look forward to working with them to analyze what it will take to improve performance. But we do not agree that each of the cited areas of improvement constitute "non-compliance with state laws or industry standards".

F3: A lack of coordination between SCAS and NBAS is an obstacle to a fully coordinated implementation of the county-wide disaster response plan for animal evacuations.

Response: The City of Petaluma disagrees in part with this finding. While a formal written document / MOU with the County may be lacking, disaster response is an area in which NBAS has excelled. They have effectively and collaboratively provided extensive animal evacuation and care support every time they have been called upon in an emergency. City staff, operating as disaster service workers in times of emergency, have appreciated the willingness of NBAS to step in and support at a moment's notice. However, City staff believe that NBAS is willing to enter into an agreement to better formalize coordination with other agencies in the County.

F6: Having multiple different fee structures for animal licenses and services is confusing to the public and complicates billing and collection of license fees and fines.

Response: The City of Petaluma disagrees in part with this finding. A resident of Petaluma pays the fees as stated on the Petaluma fee schedule, which does not seem confusing. However, yes, it would be clearer and simpler to administer if there was a single fee schedule across the County. We support County-wide fee harmonization as part of the Task Force's scope. We also note that the fee information collected by the grand jury shown in Exhibit B to the report shows that Petaluma fees are generally in line with other local jurisdictions. The one exception of note is that license fees for un-fixed animals vary more significantly by jurisdiction.

F7: Failure to achieve high levels of licensing in all government jurisdictions and provide access to shared information undermines mandated rabies control, makes it more difficult to return lost pets, and results in a loss of revenue.

Response: The City of Petaluma disagrees in part with this finding. We agree that a higher rate of licensing is more desirable than a lower rate of licensing. As mentioned in our response to F2, we agree that performance in this area should and can be improved. We also agree that this results in lost revenue. However, we don't agree that low licensing performance has a significant impact on reunification of lost pets. Microchipping, as a permanent form of identification for a pet, is a much more effective technique that is not reliant on collars or ID tags that may be lost. NBAS performs micro-chipping as a standard practice. In addition, state law recognizes limits on sharing information. Health & Safety Code § 121690(h) states that, "all

information obtained from a dog owner by compliance with this chapter is confidential to the dog owner and proprietary to the veterinarian. This information shall not be used, distributed, or released for any purpose, except to ensure compliance with existing federal, state, county, or city laws or regulations." Accordingly, any county-wide data system must be designed within these statutory confidentiality parameters.

F8: Based on SCAS data, uniform adoption of online licensing management through DocuPet (or a comparable vendor) would increase county-wide licensing rates and enhance compliance with state law.

Response: The City of Petaluma agrees with this finding.

F9: Failure to promote the benefits and legal requirement to license dogs, and failing consistently to send license renewal reminders, contribute to low license compliance and loss of revenue.

Response: The City of Petaluma agrees with this finding. While licensing remains the responsibility of the animal owner and licensing via NBAS' website and in person have remained available to pet owners, a more proactive approach will result in higher rates of pet licensing.

F10: Making centralized training resources available could enhance performance of animal services employees and volunteers.

Response: The City of Petaluma agrees with this finding. However, we believe that some of these resources already exist through statewide and national organizations who provide training and certification programs such as PACCC, NACA and CalAnimals.

F11: Insufficient oversight either by the cities or by the organization's board of directors has allowed NBAS to be non-compliant with state law and the terms of its contracts by: failing to effectively manage licensing and renewals; failing to offer legally mandated rabies vaccination clinics; failing to perform legally mandated spay/neuter of animals prior to placement; failing to consistently submit bite reports to the county health officer (through SCAS); failing to maintain the Petaluma animal shelter in compliance with industry standards; and failing to collect accurate data and provide reports that demonstrate compliance with contract terms.

Response: The City of Petaluma disagrees in part with this finding. Oversight in and of itself does not cause or "allow" a contractor to be non-compliant. Rather, the function of oversight is to either verify compliance or reveal non-compliance. The more important question is what to do when non-compliance is discovered. The only contractual remedy contained within NBAS' agreement with the City is to find them in default of the agreement and terminate it. This is obviously not a realistic solution every time an issue of non-compliance is discovered. Instead, the City has taken the approach of partnering with NBAS to identify needs and issues and address them as they arise.

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City staff meet regularly with NBAS to assess operations; obtain details on fleet or capital needs; discuss significant complaints or coordination issues; and ensure that reporting timelines are being tracked and met. These in-person check-in meetings are in addition to regular City staff communication with NBAS for operational questions or requests.

The City has recently contracted with a third-party consultant to assist the City and NBAS make improvements in several key areas: organizational structure and oversight; shelter operations and animal care; behavioral assessments and staff training resources; and licensing performance and rabies control. We look forward to the consultant's recommendations on these aspects of the City's animal services.

F12: A lack of responsiveness to phone calls has eroded public confidence in the ability of NBAS to respond in a timely manner to calls for service or follow-up.

Response: The City of Petaluma disagrees in part with this finding. There is no discussion of this finding in the report, so it is difficult to assess how responsiveness was gauged by the grand jury. NBAS has acknowledged some lags in responsiveness yet also responded to over 3,000 calls for service in calendar year 2024. While improvements could be made in this area it appears that the public still calls NBAS and NBAS responds, including monitoring calls 24/7 for emergency response as needed.

F13: While NBAS is responsible for general maintenance of the shelter, the City of Petaluma is not exercising due diligence with regard to facilities maintenance and repair, which may include an adequate ventilation system based upon the Grand Jury's observations during its visits.

Response: The City of Petaluma disagrees in part with this finding. The City responds to all requests for facility maintenance from NBAS. At the same time, it is also true that the animal shelter facility is aging along with the other 50+ facilities for which the City is responsible for maintenance. We have created a prioritized list of deferred maintenance tasks for the facility that we are currently working through, to ensure that the shelter continues to serve the animals, staff, volunteers, and members of the public who use the facility.

Recommendations

R1: By November 1, 2025, the Board of Supervisors will direct DHS to establish an Animal Services Task Force comprising county, city, and shelter representatives to revisit the 2012 DHS Animal Services Report and recommend a governance structure for animal services that will: 1) provide county-wide oversight to ensure compliance with State Law; 2) standardize fees and engage a common licensing vendor to enhance public health and safety, licensing rates and revenue, and; 3) achieve economic efficiencies through shared resources. (F1, F3, F4-F6 and F9-F10)

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be in the future, upon the formation by DHS the City will designate representatives within 30 days to participate in the

Task Force. The City will absolutely participate on such a task force once the task force has been formed by DHS.

R2: By January 1, 2026, each of Sonoma County's 9 cities will delegate one or more representatives to participate in the county-wide Animal Services Task Force convened by DHS. (F1)

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be in the future, upon the formation of the Task Force by DHS within 30 days of DHS notice. The City will absolutely participate on such a task force once the task force has been formed by DHS.

R4: By May 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors will direct DHS to launch a county-wide public information campaign in cooperation with the cities to explain the legal imperative and benefits of licensing pets. The campaign will commence no later than July 1, 2026. (F7-F9)

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be in the future. Petaluma will assign staff lead by March 1, 2026, and coordinate messaging. The City is happy to coordinate with DHS on such a campaign.

R5: By November 1, 2025, each city contracting with North Bay Animal Services will inspect and evaluate the shelter condition, and evaluate the shelter operation and animal control services, to determine whether NBAS is complying with legal mandates and other terms of its contract. (F2, F11-F12)

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be in the future. As mentioned in our response to F13 above, we have already inspected and evaluated the shelter condition and are working to complete a prioritized list of facility maintenance items. We will be evaluating the shelter operation and animal control services over the next 3-4 months and expect to have that process completed by December 31, 2025.

As mentioned in our response to F12 above, the City has recently contracted with a third-party consultant to assist the City and NBAS make improvements in several key areas: organizational structure and oversight; shelter operations and animal care; behavioral assessments and staff training resources; and licensing performance and rabies control. We look forward to the consultant's recommendations on these aspects of the City's animal services.

R6: By September 30, 2025, each of the cities that contracts with NBAS will require quarterly reports that include data and performance criteria sufficient to evaluate compliance with its contract and all relevant laws. (F2, F11)

Response: This recommendation has not been implemented but will be implemented in the future. Petaluma's contract with NBAS already requires bi-annual reporting, and this would increase that frequency to four times annually. On-time reporting with an agreed-upon set of statistics and metrics will help to assess performance. Given the contract expiration / renewal

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date of July 31, 2026, Petaluma will look to integrate this recommendation with an updated contract with the selected provider at that time.

As mentioned in our response to F12 above, the City has recently contracted with a third-party consultant to assist the City and NBAS in making improvements in several key areas including: organizational structure and oversight; shelter operations and animal care; behavioral assessments and staff training resources; and licensing performance and rabies control. We look forward to the consultant's recommendations on these aspects of the City's contracted animal services.

R7: By November 1, 2025, the Petaluma City Council will direct staff to implement a facilities assessment of the city-owned shelter and submit a report of findings related to the adequacy of the HVAC system and any improvements that may be required for the health and safety of animals and humans. (F13)

Response: This recommendation has already been implemented. As mentioned in several responses above, a list of repair and renovation tasks related to the shelter has already been created. We are in the process of completing those tasks.

R8: By June 1, 2026, the City of Petaluma will correct any identified ventilation and/or other defects that put animal and/or human health and safety at risk. (F13)

Response: This recommendation is currently being implemented . As mentioned in several responses above, a list of repair and renovation tasks related to the shelter has already been created and are underway. We are in the process of completing those tasks and anticipate completion by June 30, 2026.

The City of Petaluma remains committed to ensuring high-quality, legally compliant animal services. We appreciate the Grand Jury's review and will use these findings and recommendations to strengthen both oversight and outcomes for animals and the community.