

# Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury

## Calaveras County Animal Services Road Map to a Modern Shelter: Policies and Procedures

June 9, 2026



*Photo by V. Totlebensmith.*

## **SUMMARY**

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury (CCCGJ) has issued numerous reports on Calaveras County Animal Services Department over the years addressing various concerns. One perennial subject of investigation has been the dire need for a new shelter to replace the current facilities, namely the original building that now houses the dog kennels, which falls short of current standards of animal care.

Now that plans for a new shelter have been approved by the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors and a loan negotiated to finance the \$10-million build, CCCGJ wanted to know how Animal Services is prepared to meet the transition, with a focus on the department's policies and procedures and the preparedness of its staff to maintain continuity of service.

CCCGJ found that Animal Services lacks a complete, organized policies and procedures manual or handbook, and what remains in use of an older one is fragmented and in need of updating. Other procedural documents, including guidance for such delicate operations as euthanasia, are disorganized and not readily available for staff to consult. Most job descriptions have not been updated since 2015.

As for continuity of service, Animal Services is understaffed for a modern county shelter, and is struggling to retain staff, especially Officers, whose field duties often have them interfacing with potentially dangerous dogs and County residents. CCCGJ found that Officers are expected to perform those duties without a Use of Force policy, are currently working with malfunctioning equipment and without basic protective gear, and spend a large portion of their time transporting animals to and from veterinary appointments rather than fielding their caseload of complaints.

These issues require immediate action and cannot be deferred until a new shelter is in place. Instituting an updated, organized set of policies and procedures to provide clear guidance and accountability is a crucial first step to improving both morale among shelter staff and the standing of the animal shelter in the community.

## **GLOSSARY**

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

## **METHODOLOGY**

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury conducted interviews with relevant Calaveras County Animal Services (CCAS) employees as well as shelter and Friends of Calaveras Animal Services (FOCAS) volunteers; reviewed CCAS policies and procedural documents, job descriptions, and budget; reviewed previous Civil Grand Jury reports; and conducted research into animal care news and shelter best practices to better understand the standards of the field. Jurors toured the animal shelter in San Andreas on September 29, 2025.

## **BACKGROUND**

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury (CCCGJ) has issued numerous reports on Calaveras County Animal Services Department (CCAS) over the years addressing various concerns. One perennial subject of investigation has been the dire need for a new shelter to replace the current facilities, namely the original shelter building that now houses the dog kennels, which falls short enough of current standards of animal care and building codes to be considered operationally obsolete.

At the March 10, 2026, meeting of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors (BOS), the BOS voted 4-0 to approve negotiations of a \$10-million revolving loan from the California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank (IBank) to finance the construction of a new animal shelter. District 5 Supervisor Ben Stopper was absent. Construction on the 10,555-square-foot shelter facility is anticipated to begin in July 2026 and be completed by August 2027. The loan could cost the County up to \$23 million to repay over thirty years.

Now that concrete steps have been taken to move forward on the new shelter project, CCCGJ wanted to know how well CCAS is prepared to meet the transition, with a focus on the department's policies and procedures and the preparedness of its staff to maintain continuity of service during the disruptive construction process.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Policies and Procedures**

CCCGJ found that CCAS does not have a policies and procedures manual or handbook for staff to reference for guidance, nor are new staff given one to read and sign off on at the time of orientation. Training is on-the-job for most staff, though new Officers do receive the PC 832 Arrest, Search and Seizure Course and Humane Officer Training as part of their standard training in addition to shadowing a senior Officer on staff.

There are some pages remaining in use from an older policies and procedures guide, and other specific procedural documents appear to be taken from various sources such as the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program and printed on an as-needed basis, and in some cases consists of internal correspondence that was deemed useful at some point but contains personal contact information for staff members or volunteers that is outdated.

Some examples include:

- Some CCAS Policies and Procedures dating back to 2016 are designated “#: XXXX” as if they were going to be given reference numbers but never were. These include procedures for Animal Bite Reporting, Rabies Protection for Staff and Volunteers, and Veterinary Care and Treatment. They are not easily referenced due to all having the same numerical designation.
- The Animal Bite Reporting document is missing its listed attachment, the Animal Bite Reporting Form.

- The euthanasia procedure from the old policies and procedures document (General Order No. AS-06-004) was last updated December 12, 2012, and includes guidelines that no longer appear to be CCAS procedure or current with California Penal Code Title 16 Section 2039. For example, policies covering the euthanasia of adoptable animals and owner surrenders, who may be allowed to perform euthanasia with which substance, and the responsibility of CCAS Officers to perform euthanasia in the field with the use of tranquilizers and/or firearms.
- It is unknown when the Feline/Shelter Protocol document was written, but it contains extensive guidelines for taking in healthy and sick cats, including those scheduled for euthanasia, that are not organized in any discernable way, and includes reference to Sergeants and Lieutenants which are not current CCAS positions.
- Some policy and procedural documents, including Animal Bite Reporting and Euth Procedure (the latter dated January 16, 2015), include contact information that may no longer be correct a decade later.

Job descriptions provide much of the guidance for hired staff as to what duties they are expected to perform at CCAS facilities and, in the case of Officers, in the field. Most job descriptions have not been updated in at least eight years, for example the Office Technician position which was last updated in 2009. This leaves in doubt whether all of the responsibilities of a position are still relevant to the way the job is performed today and current with California law. Only the job description for Animal Care Specialist has been revised since the COVID-19 pandemic.

CCAS Officers' job descriptions in particular were last revised in 2015, but still include language from 1991 when Animal Services was a division of the Calaveras County Sheriff's Office. CCAS became a department of the Environmental Management Agency in October 2012. According to current job descriptions, Officer I and II are expected to: "learn and perform animal capture involving tranquilizers, traps and related equipment" and "discharge firearm[s] safely and accurately," neither of which they are allowed to do without a Use of Force policy; and perform humane euthanasia, despite California Code of Regulations Title 16 Section 2039 requiring certified training in euthanasia in order for shelter staff to legally perform it. CCAS Officer training and equipment is further covered in the next subsection, Staff Preparedness.

In addition to outdated job descriptions, CCCGJ learned that CCAS staff have not received performance reviews. In the absence of organized, up-to-date, and accessible policies and procedures, it falls to CCAS management to ensure that continuity of training is maintained and that staff are accountable for their performance on the job. With neither a current policies and procedures handbook nor regular performance reviews of staff, it is unclear by what measure management ensures CCAS staff understand their responsibilities and have the tools and support necessary to perform them to the best of their ability.

### **Staff Preparedness**

CCAS is considered fully staffed with one (1) Manager, three (3) Officers, one (1) Office Tech, and three (3) kennel techs which includes two Animal Care Specialists. It also has the ability to take on extra-hires for part-time help.

Even when CCAS is considered fully staffed, this basic crew creates continuity concerns when an experienced full-time staff member is unavailable or retires. CCAS functionality depends on volunteers to socialize animals, do laundry, and help with outreach (e.g. social media posts, community education, and contacting rescue organizations), but there are duties that can only be performed by staff (e.g. cleaning cages and litter boxes, caring for quarantined animals, and answering calls and responding to citizen complaints). However, when essential staff are unavailable or overworked, it may fall to volunteers to perform essential animal care duties that are more appropriately handled by staff. The lack of redundant staffing can also result in inadequate training of new hires, compounded by the absence of a policies and procedures manual that could otherwise provide continuity.

CCAS has had difficulty hiring and retaining Officers in particular, and as of the publication of this report is down to one full-time Officer on staff. CCCGJ identified these challenges to hiring and retaining qualified Officers:

- CCAS Officers are not provided deescalation or crisis training as part of their standard training despite being expected to interface with animals and people who may be in crisis and/or potentially dangerous.
- Calaveras County does not currently have a Use of Force policy that covers CCAS Officers, leaving Officers underequipped to handle potentially dangerous situations in the field on their own.
- The lack of a clear policies and procedures manual for Officers means that, rather than given the ability to act independently to make informed decisions about animal welfare, they are dependent on the CCAS Manager or Environmental Management Director to provide that guidance, which may be delayed or inconsistent.
- Equipment and cages aboard Officer vehicles are frequently nonfunctional, hampering their ability to carry out their duties safely and in a timely manner. Computers in the vehicles are nonoperational.
- The only protective gear Officers are issued are tactical vests and catchpoles. Pepper spray is often used by county and municipal animal control services but CCAS Officers are not allowed to carry or discharge it. Without a Use of Force policy, they are also not allowed to carry knives that could be used to free entangled pets or livestock.
- Officers spend much of their time transporting animals to and from veterinarian clinics and hospitals, some as far away as Stockton, which leaves them less time in the day to address citizen complaints, leading to a perpetual backlog of cases.

In the case of veterinary care and animal clinic visits, CCAS spent \$142,000 on animal care in 2024. This number does not include the cost of fuel and vehicle maintenance associated with these visits, though it is noted in the 2025-2026 budget that Gas and Oil expenditures did increase due in part to a greater number of emergencies and travel related to medical care; nor

does it factor in the amount of Officer time spent on medical transport rather than following up on complaints from the public.

Many county and municipal shelters either have a veterinarian on staff or contract with one to provide animal care at the shelter. Sometimes these vets are also able to provide spay and neuter clinics and rabies vaccinations to the public at a reduced rate, which can be a source of revenue for the shelter. At this time the plans for the new CCAS shelter do not include dedicated space for an in-house veterinarian. However, it is worth studying whether CCAS could save Calaveras taxpayer money, as well as make better use of its Officers' time, by either hiring or contracting with a shelter vet.

Another obstacle to the retention of qualified staff is morale. Shelter workers face many of the same stress factors as veterinarians, including interfacing regularly with members of the public in heightened emotional states and making difficult decisions about animals' health and welfare. Add to that the exposure to excessive noise and uncleanliness in a shelter environment, decapitations of carcasses that must be performed for rabies testing and reporting, and a lack of redundancy in staffing essential CCAS positions leading to overworked employees and compassion fatigue.

These stressors make the need for leadership who is receptive and effective all the more important. Shelter staff and Officers should be given the tools and training to make basic procedural decisions on their own, in order to make effective use of their own time. They also need to know that any concerns they raise with management about the way animals are being cared for at the shelter will be addressed and corrected with the animals' welfare in mind, as animal care is the primary mission of a county animal shelter.

### **Shelter Population and Reputation**

During interviews, one common refrain was that Calaveras residents frequently confuse the County animal shelter for the Humane Society. Many residents are not even aware that the County has its own shelter. CCAS is working to educate the public on what services it provides and the animals that are available for adoption by holding adoption events and having a presence at local fairs and BOS meetings, but the work is ongoing. They also use Facebook as a way to connect to members of the public both in and outside the County. Reputation also matters, and the public is more likely to visit a modern facility that is clean and inviting, where they can trust the staff to help them address their concerns and provide certain essential services.

The new shelter facility should bring animal care and housing up to modern standards. However, the number of kennels is expected to remain about the same. This brings up the question of whether the new facility will also be at or over its capacity for housing dogs, as a new shelter cannot fix some of the problems endemic to a rural county: roaming and abandoned dogs, often unsterilized, interacting with other pets, people, livestock, and wildlife.

The current shelter is frequently overcapacity with dogs and has to triage cases it takes in, prioritizing animals that are sick, intact (i.e., not spayed or neutered), in danger, or posing a danger to the public. Dogs that are considered low risk are often left where they were found. Many calls to have found strays picked up by CCAS staff do not get addressed due to a backlog

of higher priority calls, such as dog bites, and unaddressed calls are not well documented.

These policies, sometimes called “community animal” and “managed intake” policies, while more humane than euthanizing healthy animals, are part of a shift nationwide away from spay and neuter programs, which are costly but proven to reduce the number of animals at shelters. CCCGJ learned that CCAS has not obtained grants to help offset the cost to the department of spaying and neutering since 2022, meaning CCAS has had to use money from its budget to pay for sterilization of adoptable animals.

Because of a shortage of kennels at the County shelter, CCAS does not take owner surrenders except after a waiting period or immediately in extreme cases. However, it appears that management has an unwritten policy of accusing people turning in strays, without proof, of being owners attempting to surrender their own animals. Assuming that people in need of help are lying does not help CCAS’s reputation with the community they exist to serve. If Calaveras taxpayers and residents are not able to trust that the services of the County animal shelter will be there to help them when they need those services most, they may turn to other solutions, including animal abandonment, contributing to the stray dog problem in this County.

## **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 officials, and within 90 days from governing bodies. In order to be included and published in the next CCCGJ report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

After conducting interviews and reviewing documents, CCCGJs findings and recommendations are as follows:

**F1:** Calaveras County Animal Services lacks any centralized, organized, and up-to-date policies and procedures to guide Animal Services Officers and shelter staff in the performance of their jobs, negatively affecting accountability among staff and leadership.

**R1a:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services update and organize their policies and procedures for Animal Services Officers and shelter staff to current standards and in accordance with State law by December 31, 2026.

### **Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

### **Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**R1b:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services distribute its updated policies and procedures to all paid Animal Services staff and obtain signed acknowledgement of receipt by December 31, 2026.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**F2:** Calaveras County Animal Services job descriptions, with the exception of Animal Care Specialist, have not been updated in the last eight years, listing duties that are no longer relevant to the job or legally allowed, resulting in inconsistent and delayed resolution to problems as they occur.

**R2:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services update the job descriptions for Animal Services Manager, Animal Services Officers I and II, and Office Technician II by December 31, 2026.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**F3:** Calaveras County Animal Services management is not conducting annual performance reviews of its staff, denying staff members a crucial opportunity to receive and provide feedback on their job performance, as well as opportunities for advancement, and negatively affecting team cohesion and morale.

**R3:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services management conduct performance reviews of hired staff, beginning no later than December 31, 2026, and annually thereafter.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**F4:** Calaveras County Animal Services Officers are ill-equipped to fulfill their duties in the field, due to a lack of deescalation training, adequate protective gear and safety equipment, a Use of Force policy, and vehicles that are safe for Officers and the animals in their care.

**R4a:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services provide current Officers with deescalation and crisis training as part of their standard Officer training regimen by December 31, 2026, and as new Officers are onboarded.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**R4b:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services adopt a Use of Force policy and provide Animal Services Officers with the appropriate protective gear and safety equipment by December 31, 2026.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**R4c:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services repair the equipment on their Animal Services Officer vehicles and create a routine maintenance schedule to make sure safe, fully functioning equipment is always available, each by December 31, 2026.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**F5:** Currently Calaveras County Animal Services spends a large portion of its budget on veterinary services and transportation to animal hospitals, and the time spent in transportation greatly decreases the amount of time Animal Services Officers have to address a growing backlog of complaints from the public.

**R5:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether taxpayer money and Animal Services Officer time could be saved by hiring or contracting for in-house veterinary services, by December 31, 2026.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**F6:** Calaveras County Animal Services has not obtained grants for spay and neuter programs since 2022, despite such programs having proven to reduce the number of stray dogs and feral cats in the community as well as shelter intake.

**R6:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services apply for new spay and neuter grants to offset the cost of these crucial services to the County by December 31, 2026.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

**F7:** The Calaveras County Animal Services shelter remains overcapacity for dogs despite staff and volunteers' dedicated struggle to increase adoption rates through community education and outreach to rescue organizations.

**R7:** Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends Calaveras County Animal Services adopt a policy to identify and list eligible rescue organizations in order to reduce the shelter population, beginning no later than December 31, 2026.

**Required Response**

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

**Invited Response**

Director of Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency

## DISCLAIMER

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

This report was prepared by the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury, with the exception of one juror who volunteers at the Calaveras County Animal Services shelter. This juror did not participate in any aspect of the investigation, including interviews and deliberations, or the writing of this report.

## REFERENCE SOURCES

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