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Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Animal Services in Sonoma County: Separate and Not Equal

Report Date: June 12, 2025

Response by: Evelyn L. Mitchell

Title: Mayor, City of Healdsburg

Agency/Department Name: City of Healdsburg

FINDINGS:

[List numbers: ie. F1, F2]

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F6, F7, F9, F10, F11

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F3, F8

(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: _____ have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered: _____ have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered: R1, R2, R4 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: R5, R6, R7 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: August 19, 2025

Signed: Evelyn L. Mitchell

Number of pages attached: 2

(See attached PC Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)

FINDINGS

F1. Failure by the county and its nine cities to adopt 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 Healdsburg participated in the Animal Services Partnership that was formed as a result of the 2012 DHS Animal Services Report. The City of Healdsburg was just one of many members of the partnership and lacked the authority to adopt county-wide standards, communication channels, data sharing or oversight.

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 Healdsburg clarifies that its contract is with the Humane Society of Sonoma County (HSSC), which subcontracted with NBAS until February 29, 2025. HSSC elected to end subcontracting with NBAS and transitioned to a direct contract with Sonoma County Animal Services (SCAS) effective March 1, 2025. This move was made in consultation with City of Healdsburg officials.

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: No Response.

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 Healdsburg has no data that would suggest that an online licensing management system through the identified provider, by itself, would increase county-wide licensing rates.

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: The City of Healdsburg supports the creation of a task force to review animal services. Adoption of this recommendation, though, rests with the Board of Supervisors.

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: The City of Healdsburg would appoint a representative upon formation of the Task Force by the Board of Supervisors.

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: The City of Healdsburg, through its animal care and control contractor (HSSC) and subcontractor (SCAS), would collaborate with DHS on outreach to promote pet licensing and rabies control.

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: Not applicable. Healdsburg's contract is through HSSC, which has ceased NBAS subcontracting as of March 1, 2025.

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: Not applicable to the City of Healdsburg, as HSSC no longer uses NBAS for any 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: Not applicable to the City of Healdsburg.