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September 9, 2009

Lane County Board of Commissioners and
Honorable Peter Sorenson, Chair
125 East 8th Avenue
Eugene, OR 97401

Dear Chair Sorenson and Board Members:

In response to your earlier request for our advice and recommendations with respect to the future facility needs of Lane County Animal Services, we are pleased to share our thinking and requests on the matter with you.

The Board, realizing the need for a new shelter and working with citizen advisory committees over the past seven years, has done some serious initial exploration and laid expert professional conceptual groundwork regarding the necessity for eventually either replacing or radically remodeling the existing LCAS complex, located on West 1st Street in Eugene.

As we all know, the existing facility, which was excellent at its 1978 construction debut, is rapidly nearing the end of its useful life-span and is now significantly deficient in both capacity and functionality. As a consequence, it poses risks to citizens and animals, as well as limiting the potential for public support and adoption-oriented visitation. It has been professionally described as "a liability waiting to happen", due to its congested spaces. The current facility falls short as an animal-friendly, staff-friendly, and public-friendly shelter. Although LCAS staff is operating at a high level of outstanding service delivery and has been admirably implementing the Board's "Save Adoptable Animals" mandate, they are significantly hampered by the facility's now out-of-date design and condition.

For example, while the euthanasia room has been successfully converted into a general medical area, where impounded animals can be assessed and treated by trained veterinary staff, the room itself is too small to allow for a computer to record and keep medical information efficiently. There is scarcely room for two staff members and a large dog or litter of kittens. Moreover, it has no running water. Renovating the current structure to alleviate the cramping and turn this into a fully-functional exam room is nearly impossible—or would be prohibitively expensive.

The Board of Commissioners hired the nationally renowned design firm of Animal Arts from Boulder, Colorado to conduct on-site inspections of both Lane County Animal Services (formerly LCARA) and Greenhill Humane Society. Animal Arts was hired to come on two separate occasions, the last visit in collaboration with the County's consulting architects (Pivot) and its lead architect, Bill Seider. In September 2005, they also conducted a Needs Assessment Workshop "to assist in establishing goals, programs, scope, and capacity requirement for the LCARA shelter".

At that time Animal Arts provided three options, two of which we believe fail to meet our current and projected needs:

1) Option One: expansion of the existing facility by approximately 7,500 square feet at a cost of \$2,800,000. However, the report states that "renovating to the standard of a newly constructed shelter may well exceed the cost of new construction, along with other identified disadvantages."

2) Option Two: "...would replace the existing shelter with a new 16,000 square foot, state of the art facility with approximately the same holding capacity". Total estimated 2005 expenditure: \$4,253,000. This does not address the need for more kennel space, necessary to maximize adoptions and extend holding time for

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treatable and adoptable animals.

3) Option Three would replace the existing shelter with a new 22,000 square foot, state of the art facility with additional holding capacity. This would meet local needs as measured by the standard, widely-used formula: a community's animal shelters should have a capacity equivalent to 4% of the human population. Total estimated costs were \$5,700,000. The intervening four years presumably has increased probable costs. We nevertheless believe that this is the option the Board should pursue.

It has been subsequently asked whether it might be more feasible and less costly to split the facility into two parts, with an adoption-oriented boutique in downtown Eugene and a rural holding area for new impounds and animals requiring more intensive care and management. In our view this creates more problems than it solves, potentially increasing administrative difficulties and staffing costs, while decreasing adoptions. If the public came to see only the animals at the low-capacity boutique as adoptable, it would be significantly more difficult to save and find homes for all the county's adoptable and treatable animals.

It is essential that any new facility have significantly enlarged holding capacity, so that it can handle current and future demand. Holding capacity is vital in maximizing chances for individual animal adoption and treatment pursuant to eventual adoption, as well as in handling surges in impounds, which place extra stress on both animals and the facility's ability to avoid the tragic potential for space-related euthanasia considerations. Moreover a variety of other spaces, currently lacking, are badly needed: a larger cattery, where healthy cats have space to play and interact with the public, and can enjoy a modicum of natural light and fresh air; quiet spaces where frightened, stressed, or sick animals can adjust to the shelter environment and be accurately evaluated for health and temperament; and "real-life room" spaces (kennels, etc.), designed to replicate an animal's familiar surrounding in order to minimize fear, stress, and the consequent degradation of the animal's mental health—areas which can also be used as quiet places for prospective adopters to meet an animal and talk with staff about its personality and needs. Noise reduction is desperately needed throughout the facility; the incessant, reverberating barking of agitated dogs is not only detrimental to the dogs in the main kennel, but to sick animals held elsewhere, and it significantly interferes with the ability of visitors to interact with the animals, with staff, even with each other. These conditions undermine LCAS's ability to maximize adoption and enhance the treatment of animals in its care (including those quarantined for health or court-ordered reasons).

Six years ago already, in November 2003, your Lane County Animal Regulation Advisory Task Force Report called for the addition of 60 kennels and for "either a thorough overhaul or a complete replacement of the LCARA (now LCAS) facility". The need is more urgent today as the facility rapidly nears its maximum life-span. Time is of the essence. We, the LCAS Advisory Committee, urge the Board to accelerate its focus and exploration of options for a new shelter, or a sharply enhanced existing one.

The animal-friendly revolution in shelter design has seen new shelters being constructed in communities across the country, using approaches that decrease an impounded animal's stress levels, raise adoption rates, reduce disease transmission and enhance public visitation and support for this vital public service. Here again, even with the limitations of a part-time behaviorist, LCAS has been making great strides in enhancing the quality of life of our shelter's dogs. But so much more could be done by staff and volunteers if the restrictions imposed by the current facility were alleviated.

At this point we recommend two immediate steps to move this badly-needed and long-postponed project forward:

First, while previous reports from Animal Arts presumed the renovation or expansion/replacement at the existing shelter site as a feasible option, we believe the question of a new shelter's location warrants

closer study on its own terms. The American Humane Society's guidelines for "Planning and Building an Animal Shelter" (December 2000) emphasize that visibility and access are paramount. The goal is to avoid "the real or imagined obstacles for the public when they think about visiting your shelter" and instead "expand its effectiveness by being located in highly visible locations." The site should also be "central to the area you serve." The issues should be objectively evaluated in conjunction with current projections for development and population growth in the Eugene-Springfield area and Lane County as a whole.

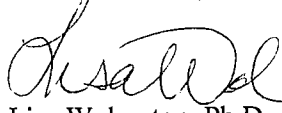
We therefore ask that the Board appoint a 120- to 180-day duration citizen task force to explore, with the help of staff, ideal location options for any new LCAS shelter, including the existing site. Such an appointed LCAS site option recommendation task force should consist of identified LCAS supporters in the community as well as companion animal champions and advocates, members from the Eugene-Springfield-Lane County philanthropic community, two LCAS Advisory Committee members, and experts in local land/real-estate resources.

We further ask, second, that the Board instruct its Administrator to have County staff outline potential funding sources and options, including partial bond financing. To that end, we realize that the current LCAS/City of Eugene partnership has its genesis in the 1978 Tri-Agency Animal Control partnership and collaboration between Lane County, the City of Eugene and the City of Springfield. The County-Eugene partnership has been indispensable to the continued operation and successes of the LCAS facility and programs. As such, we ask that the Board instruct its Administrator to engage both cities' administrators in serious discussion about how any future facility might be cooperatively created and sustained over time. Obviously, the County would need a guaranteed, long-term partnership with the City of Eugene in order to venture any replacement of the current facility, since the majority of impounds, enforcement incidents, adoptions, and other service requests originate from Eugene. Eugene's substantial annual contracts with LCAS enable the County to provide this level of service. We recognize that other future options for shelter operation and financing exist, including having a City of Eugene initiated funding ballot measure which might pose a greater prospect of voter approval than a County-wide vote might garner.

The Oregon Humane Society has a state-of-the-art facility and other counties in Oregon—including Deschutes County—have new facilities for companion animals. Austin, Texas; Knoxville, Tennessee; San Francisco, California; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Boulder-Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado and Omaha, Nebraska are but a few of the communities with new animal shelter facilities. Lane County's outmoded, deficient and cramped facility is cause for community concern.

Given the expertise on the current Board of County Commissioners and the in-depth history which Board members have had on the companion animal services set of issues, we believe that there will never be a more sympathetic and knowledgeable Board than today's. As such, we, your LCAS Advisory Committee, strongly urge the Board to accelerate its time-frame and efforts for performing due-diligence in a thorough exploration of the various concrete factors which are needed pursuant to a firm decision to move forward and commit to a new animal services shelter.

Yours in service,



Lisa Wolverton, Ph.D.

on behalf of the Lane County Animal Services Advisory Committee

cc: LCAS Advisory Committee, Karen Gaffney, Tom Howard, Jeff Spartz