



February 17, 2010

To: Joint Elected Officials
From: Karen Gaffney, Health and Human Services Assistant Director
Subject: Community Animal Care and Education Center

Background

The current facility that houses Lane County Animal Services (LCAS) and the Eugene Spay/Neuter Clinic was built in the late 1970s, and is co-owned by Lane County, Eugene, and Springfield. When the facility was constructed it was state of the art and a significant step forward for animal care and control, providing for important services in the community.

LCAS is an open door shelter for dogs for the three jurisdictions, meaning that we cannot turn away stray, abused, or homeless dogs based on health or behavioral issues. The situation for cats is slightly different, with LCAS serving cats in Eugene and unincorporated Lane County as space in the cattery allows, managing waiting lists for much of the year. The building was originally built at approximately 6,700 square feet, with later remodeling to slightly expand the office and storage and to add a small cattery. The current shelter has 30 indoor dog kennels. For a number of reasons, the building no longer meets the needs of the community.

Issues related to animal care and control have historically been very important to the community, generating significant public involvement whenever these issues are discussed. In response to constituent interest and comment, Lane County has taken many steps to improve services related to homeless, abused, and neglected animals.

In 2003, the Board of Commissioners appointed a citizen Animal Regulation Advisory Task Force, and in its report it called for the addition of 60 kennels and for "either a thorough overhaul or a complete replacement of the LCARA (now LCAS) facility."

In 2005, the Board of Commissioners brought a Denver architectural consultant from Animal Arts to the community to conduct a needs assessment. After extensive interviews and analysis, the needs assessment recommended construction of a new 22,000 square foot shelter. The assessment was clear that "the goal of any renovation, expansion, or new shelter should be to create a safe, efficient, and humane facility. The report highlighted specific concerns about the ADA accessibility of the facility, as well as stating "the arrangement and flow of the existing facility does not allow for the segregation of animal control functions and public access. This permits conflicts between potentially dangerous animals and the public." The report suggested improvements for parking and for the entry and reception that would project a friendly image and minimize human/animal, dog/dog, and dog/cat conflicts. The report addresses needed facility improvements to address adoptions, stray animals, animal holding areas, and animal handling and evaluation.

In 2007, the Board of Commissioners appointed a citizen task force to make recommendations about how Lane County could do more to save adoptable and treatable animals. The task force looked at best practices from shelters across the country and presented 10 key recommendations that would significantly improve the county's ability to save adoptable and treatable animals.

In 2008, the County contracted with PIVOT Architecture and their consultant Larry Gates from Animal Arts to complete a master plan for LCAS. The program suggests a capacity should be approximately 83 dogs, 121 cats, and 10 small mammals. The master plan outlined four different options for improving the space, ranging from a remodel and expansion of the current facility, to a new expanded facility, or a remodel/expansion combined with a satellite outreach center. The costs for those options were estimated at between \$6.6 million and \$9.8 million.

Current Situation:

In 2007 the Board of Commissioners re-named LCAS (formerly Lane County Animal Regulation Authority) and moved it into the Department of Health and Human Services. Staff have worked with the community to implement a number of programs and revised processes to improve the service provided to the animals and to the community. This has resulted in increased numbers of dogs licensed, increased private donations, more stray dogs returned home rather than impounded into the agency, and a dramatically lower rate of euthanasia.

While significant progress has been demonstrated, there are very real limitations imposed because of the facility. The current facility has only 30 dog kennels, meaning that often LCAS is housing multiple dogs in single runs, and housing dogs in outdoor kennels. The medical treatment and isolation spaces are inadequate, and there is very limited space for behavioral evaluation or treatment. We have significantly increased the number of volunteers (averaging about 600 hours per month), which highlights even more the lack of space. There aren't spaces for adoption counseling, and the lobby and front areas are very crowded. Officers have very limited space for the work associated with their investigations.

In December of 2009, the Board of Commissioners asked the County Administrator to convene a small group representing the three jurisdictions to explore and advise the Board about how a new state of the art replacement shelter could be financed, structured, and operated. That group is due to report back no later than March 31, 2010.

A Vision for the Future: A Community Animal Care and Education Center

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.

A new shelter would be designed with the following in mind:

- Healthy and comfortable home-like housing for adoptive animals
- High performance systems to reduce noise and odors
- Advanced ventilation and sanitation systems for disease control
- Well-designed intake unit to properly manage incoming animals
- Visitor-friendly adoption center
- Animal medical area for efficient, high-volume spay/neuter surgeries, as well as veterinary services for animals in our care
- Community education center to promote responsible pet ownership
- Obedience training center to offer classes for shelter animals and the general public

The long-term benefits of creating a shelter that is an inviting destination, and programs that support the adoption of healthy, behaviorally sound animals, is that the shelter will increasingly become the place of choice for the adopting public when seeking a new family companion animal. Focusing on education and outreach programs such as training, behavior classes, hotlines, and abuse intervention will help keep animals from entering the shelter in the first place, and help reduce the financial impact on this important community program in the future.

Building a modern new animal control facility is not only an opportunity to provide more animals with better housing, but it also presents a chance to reinvigorate staff and volunteers by providing them with a less stressful, more productive work environment. Modern animal services facilities are designed to allow the public the opportunity to socialize with animals in the shelter in much the same way as they would in their adoptive homes, making it much easier to place companion animals into appropriate homes.

Environments can be designed that stress the comfort of animals, engenders a more pleasant working environment for the staff, and are more adoption friendly for the public. Small, incremental improvements, such as visual and auditory separation and the creation of comfortable and defensible spaces have a remarkable cumulative effect. When dogs are happier and less stressed, they tend to bark less. This in turn decreases the stress level and consequently the barking of the other dogs in the housing unit. Possibly the most exciting change in animal housing that we are seeing is a change toward rooms, not runs, for dogs and cageless housing for cats. Animal housing that looks more like your living room than a jail cell is more pleasant to visit, and ultimately will better “market” the adoptive animals. On the most fundamental level, a home-like environment is also better for the animals.