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September 17, 2024

The Honorable Michael Jurkovich
Supervising Judge of the Grand Jury
Madera County Superior Court
200 S. G Street
Madera, CA 93637

Subject: Response to the 2023-24 Grand Jury Report entitled "Madera County Animal Services: It's a Dog's Life"

Honorable Judge Jurkovich:

Pursuant to the California Penal Code 933.05, the Madera County Board of Supervisors submits this response to the findings and recommendations in the 2023-24 Madera County Grand Jury report entitled "Madera County Animal Services: *It's a Dog's Life.*"

Finding 1:

The Madera County Grand Jury (MCGJ) finds that the tax-sharing contract between Madera County and the cities of Madera and Chowchilla should be more equitable based on the number of animal intakes per jurisdiction.

Response

Respondent partially disagrees with the finding per California Penal Code 933.05 (a) (2). While, as referenced in the Grand Jury's report, 40% of animal intakes in 2023 came from the City of Madera, the Madera County Animal Shelter does not provide animal intake for the City of Chowchilla. Respondent agrees with Finding 1 as it pertains to the City of Madera.

Finding 2:

The 2023-2024 MCGJ finds and agrees with previous findings, that the Madera County Animal Services (MCAS) facility is inadequate to meet Madera County's current needs and future growth.

Response

Respondent agrees with the finding per California Penal Code 933.05 (a) (1).

Finding 3:

The 2023-2024 MCGJ finds and agrees with previous MCGJ findings, that staffing shortages persist due to the significant gap between the budgeted number of full-time equivalent employees and the actual number of positions filled.

Response

Respondent agrees with the finding per California Penal Code 933.05 (a) (1).



Finding 4:

The 2023-2024 MCGJ finds and agrees with previous MCGJ findings, that the MCAS does not have an established written Policy and Procedure Manual.

Response

Respondent agrees with the finding per California Penal Code 933.05 (a) (1).

Recommendation 1:

The MCGJ recommends that the Board of Supervisors renegotiate the tax-sharing contract between the County of Madera and the cities of Madera and Chowchilla regarding the MCAS funding within 90 days of the MCGJ report posting.

Response

The recommendation requires further analysis. After a period of negotiation between the parties, the County of Madera and the City of Madera, agreed to terms of a new Tax-Sharing agreement which was approved by the Board of Supervisors on December 20, 2022. It was subsequently approved by the Madera City Council on October 4, 2023. The initial term of the agreement is for 5-years. As with the prior agreement, the renegotiated agreement does not include provisions for the funding of the Madera County Animal Shelter. Funding of the Animal Shelter is subject to a separate agreement between the City and the County which dates to 2018. The County maintains neither a tax sharing agreement nor a separate agreement with the City of Chowchilla which provides for Animal Services funding as the County does not provide services to the City of Chowchilla. With respect to renegotiating the terms of the separate animal services contract between the City of Madera and County, the parties meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest between the City and County and any modifications to the agreement is a topic for discussion during these regularly scheduled meetings.

Recommendation 2:

The MCGJ recommends that the Board of Supervisors propose a new plan to complete the renovation of the current MCAS facility or the construction of a new facility within 90 days of the MCGJ report posting.

Response

The recommendation requires further analysis. County General Services is currently negotiating an agreement with an architectural firm to conduct a feasibility study, the focus of which is the potential renovation of the previous County Juvenile Hall facility into an animal services facility. Contract approval is anticipated in mid-September 2024. Once approved, results of the study should be available in 60-90 days.

Recommendation 3:

The MCGJ recommends that the Board of Supervisors remove the hiring freeze affecting MCAS within 90 days of the posting of the MCGJ report.

Response

The recommendation will not be implemented because the recommendation is not warranted or is not reasonable. The hiring freeze was put in place as there are insufficient county discretionary revenues to fund the cost of services currently being provided (operating deficit). It will not be possible to lift the hiring freeze for one department as all departments that are funded primarily with county discretionary revenues will need to reduce expenditures to help reduce the County's operating deficit.

Recommendation 4:

The MCGJ recommends that MCAS develop and adopt a written Policy and Procedure Manual within 180 days of the MCGJ report posting.

Response

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future. On October 10, 2023, the Board of Supervisors appointed Amy Toler as the Director of Animal Services. Since that time, Ms. Toler has had to devote a significant amount of time and resources to two separate animal hoarding cases that required County intervention. Nevertheless, development of a department Policy and Procedure Manual is currently underway. It is anticipated that a final draft policy will be completed within the next 90 days and implementation should be complete within 120 days.

The Board acknowledges the Grand Jury's review and time involved in this matter and appreciates the opportunity to respond to the findings and recommendations.

Sincerely,



Robert Poythress
Chairman of the Board of Supervisors