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CITY OF OAKLAND



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To: Chairperson Reid and Members of the Public Safety Committee  
From: Vice Mayor Jane Brunner  
Date: May 17, 2005  
RE: Oakland Animal Shelter

As the Public Safety Committee is discussing the management and operations of the Oakland Animal Shelter, I submit the following.

Animals are a part of Oakland and play significant roles in the lives of thousands of Oaklanders. As a City, it is essential that we balance the need for public safety with the humane treatment of animals. Recent discussion has revealed that the Oakland Animal Shelter has some serious problems. I believe it is a product of a general philosophy in Oakland that sees animals primarily as a public safety hazard. I believe we need to change that perspective to make the safe care and humane treatment of animals our way of doing business on Oakland.

To that end, the following will outline my support for taking the Animal Control Section, including the Oakland Animal Shelter, out from under the jurisdiction of the Oakland Police Department and be placing it directly under the authority of the City Administrator. I believe such a move will result in better service, improved efficiency and budget savings.

***Staffing***

Currently, Animal Control Officers spend time doing work that other employees could do at a lower pay rate. Much of their time is used cleaning cages, feeding animals and working the front counter instead of handling animal issues affecting public safety in the field. Frequently, there are only one to two Animal Control Officers in the field for all of Oakland, which is unacceptable: in 1980, Oakland employed 23 Animal Control Officers. Currently, Animal Control Officers are not deployed between 5:00 p.m. – 9:00 a.m. resulting in an enormous backlog of animal service calls and the use of Police Officers for calls that must be handled.

The table below illustrates the comparative cost of staff at the Animal Shelter:

Animal Control Officers (OPD Field Operations)	Animal Care Attendants (Animal Care inside Shelter)	PRS's Police Records Specialists (Clerical & Cust. Service)	Police Officers
\$22.10 Step 4	\$17.31 Step 4	\$21.98 Step 4	\$41.39 step 4

An Animal Control Section that is not part of the Oakland Police Department would realize lower staff costs without a decrease in the quality of work. Outside of operations in the Field, there is little work in the Animal Shelter itself that could not be done with non-sworn personnel.

#### ***Continuity***

OPD's Animal Control Section experiences significant turnover. In the last 10 – 15 yrs there have been 6 different officers in charge of Special Operations, which includes the Animal Shelter. Not only has the Animal Shelter Director been required to adjust to a new manager, but the Director must also fight for resources and attention in a department whose primary mission is to ensure the safety of people.

An Animal Control Section that is not part of the Oakland Police Department would ensure a staff of animal care and control professionals, as opposed to currently, where OPD staff are simply assigned to Animal Control. Additionally, the relative importance of Animal Control would not be determined by an OPD supervisor who is trying to balance the safety of animals with the understandably more pressing priority of safety for people. Removing Animal Control from the OPD would eliminate this conflict.

#### ***Dispatch***

Currently, all calls for service to Animal Control come through OPD dispatch, an average of 206 calls per day. OPD Dispatchers prioritize calls, and when an Animal Control Officer is not available, a Police Officer is dispatched. All other calls are stacked and sent to the Shelter for Animal Control Officers to handle when they have time.

There are two disadvantages to this system: callers often wait days for their call to be addressed and the calls take up valuable OPD dispatch time. Additionally, Police Officers are dispatched to handle animal control issues for which they are frequently not adequately trained (most officers receive only 8 hours of animal-related training). With adequate staffing at the Shelter many of the calls could be handled over the phone by Animal Professionals reducing costs and providing timely service to the public.

An Animal Control Section that is not part of the Oakland Police Department would handle all calls related to animals and their safety. Calls would not take up the time of OPD dispatchers or the resources of the Oakland Police Department which are, again, understandably focusing on the safety of people. Additionally, a separate Animal Control Section would ensure that City staff, once on the scene, would be adequately trained.

#### ***Enforcement***

Both the City of Berkeley and the City and County of San Francisco run Animal Control operations that are separate from their respective police departments. A significant advantage of this structure is the ability to follow-up on animal abuse cases or other legal matters that involve animals. Currently, Oakland's Animal Control Section is almost exclusively committed to responding to calls for service and eliminating imminent dangers to people and other animals. However, necessary follow-up to citations or putting cases together to press charges are lacking. In the universe of work the Oakland Police Department handles, animal abuse and welfare issues are given a low priority.

An Animal Control Section that is not part of the Oakland Police Department will be more focused on the necessary legal follow-up to animal control issues. There will be a dedicated office and staff tasked with handling animal-related cases with the District Attorney. Animal-related cases will not be thrown in with cases involving people, many of which are, given OPD's limited resources, understood to have higher priority. OPD personnel should not have to make the choice between enforcing laws related to people or animals. A separate Animal Control Section can take that responsibility on exclusively.

### ***Executive Management***

When compared with Patrol or Investigations within the Oakland Police Department, the Animal Control Section is a relatively minor office with low status within the organization. It is difficult for the Animal Control Director to have access to senior management within the City or, when part of such a large agency as the OPD, to call for necessary resources.

An improved Animal Control Section can do much to improve the quality of life of Oaklanders and reduce costs to the City. Such results, however, require the attention of senior management in the City and a commitment to funding innovation in Animal Control.

An Animal Control Section that is not part of the Oakland Police Department, but is rather independent and reporting directly to the City Administrator, is the best way to ensure the Animal Control Section gets the funding it needs while also earning it access to resources that could lead to further innovation.

### ***Community Relations***

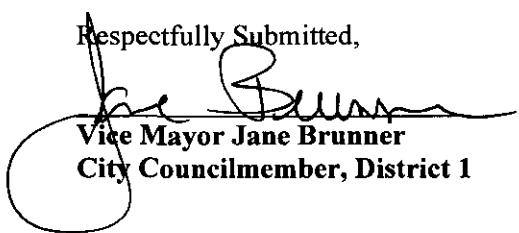
The Animal Control Section must work in partnership with concerned citizens. It must build strong working relationships with non-profits and volunteers. The Animal Control Section depends heavily on volunteers for labor and for animal placements.

We have learned from Animal Shelters in surrounding jurisdictions that their independence means that Animal Control Officers are received better when working with the community. Alone among OPD sections, the Animal Control Section relies on strong community relationships and volunteers not only for labor but also for animal placement. Public relations are extremely important for the Animal Control Section, and an independent office reporting directly to the City Administrator can ensure the transparency and community involvement that successful animal care programs require.

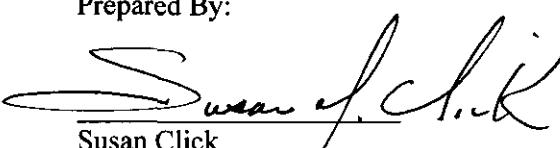
### **CONCLUSION**

The decision to remove the Animal Control Section from the Oakland Police Department is an important one. I believe the City will be better off with an independent Animal Control Section that will have greater accountability, more room for innovation and will cut down on unnecessary costs.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Vice Mayor Jane Brunner  
City Councilmember, District 1

Prepared By:

  
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