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Los Angeles Animal Services' Draft Proposal for the West Valley Animal Shelter

The Problem: The budget for Los Angeles Animal Services Department (LAAS) is being cut by \$3,946,927. (Fiscal Year 2019-2020 budget allocation was \$27, 156,069 – less than one half of one percent of the City budget. This year's budget allocation is \$23,209,142. This is a 14.5% budget cut.) This will result in a reduction of personnel that makes it difficult for LAAS to operate all six City animal shelters.

The LAAS Draft Proposal: In order to deal with this budget cut, LAAS has written a draft proposal to turn the West Valley Animal Shelter into a "Community Resource Center" which would be used by rescue organizations to house animals and provide certain limited services to the community. Under the current proposal, residents of the West Valley would not be able to bring stray animals or animals to be surrendered to the "Community Resource Center," adopt animals from there, or have Animal Control Officers dispatched from there to deal with animal issues in the West Valley. That would all have to be done at the East Valley Shelter, which is already normally (pre-Covid) at or over capacity. In addition, with the loss of the sheltering capacity of the West Valley Shelter, there would not be enough kennel space and other resources to deal with all of the stray, surrendered, and abused animals in the Valley, raising the possibility of animals having to be killed in the City shelters for lack of space. The Valley would be losing close to half of its animal resources; the West Valley would be losing almost all of its animal resources, hardly an equitable result.

Meetings Regarding the Proposal: There have been and will be several meetings regarding this Proposal. Councilman Blumenfield was the scheduled speaker at the Tarzana Neighborhood Council meeting on July 28, so many people (including at least two current Animal Control Officers) called in with comments and questions regarding the West Valley Shelter Proposal. Councilman Blumenfield appreciated the comments and spoke extensively in response. On August 10, there were two meetings with LAAS Management and Shelter Volunteers. More than 30 Volunteers and the entire LAAS Management (including the General Manager and Assistant GM) participated in the meetings. (I participated in both meetings.) On August 10, 11, and 12, meetings were held with LAAS leadership and members of the Community. (I participated in the meetings on August 10 and 11.) LAAS leadership was open to input from Volunteers and the Community during these meetings.

Issues That Have Been Raised: *The overwhelming majority of people who have expressed a view on it much prefer that the West Valley Shelter remain a municipal shelter and operate the way it did prior to Covid. Over 8,000 people have already*

signed a petition against de-municipalizing the West Valley Shelter. They support additional funding for LAAS to be able to operate West Valley as a municipal shelter. Several people also advocated for raising funds from charitable organizations and individuals, to supplement what cannot be provided from the General Fund and other budget sources. People, including Shelter Volunteers, have also suggested that Volunteers be given additional responsibility so that the current and projected number of regular employees can operate all six shelters. LAAS' response to this last suggestion is that the MOU with the unions prohibit non-union persons from performing jobs that union employees do. However, I think this may not apply to Volunteers performing additional work, especially during a pandemic, and that the unions may not object to Volunteers performing additional work if that could help to keep West Valley open. All the regular employees I have spoken with want West Valley to remain open, and in the current situation Volunteers would not be displacing any regular employees. To the contrary, keeping West Valley open will secure the jobs of regular employees. Their jobs are more secure with 6 shelters than with 5 shelters.

People have expressed the view that the City and LAAS have not done enough to explore ways that the West Valley Shelter can remain a fully functioning municipal shelter. Many people believe that the City and LAAS have immediately rushed to dump the Shelter onto rescue organizations and the Community to deal with, even though West Valley residents pay taxes to have a municipal animal shelter. There is a lot of anger regarding this.

There has also been the suggestion that rather than having the entire budget cut fall on the West Valley Shelter and most municipal functions being shut down at that one shelter, that all six City Shelters should share in this burden. For example, a percentage of kennels (possibly 10 to 15% of kennels) at all six shelters could be turned over to rescues, rather than turning over 100% of the kennels at just one shelter, West Valley.

I've put together a summary of the issues that have been raised at the meetings which have taken place so far, as well as from calls and emails I have gotten and my own comments, as follows. I am still getting comments in, which I will add to this. These issues are the reasons West Valley Stakeholders oppose the loss of the Shelter as a municipal shelter, as well as issues that have to be dealt with if it is ultimately determined that there is no way the West Valley Shelter can continue to operate as a fully functional municipal shelter:

1. Response time for Animal Control Officers (ACOs) at East Valley to respond to emergencies in the West Valley. Incidents involving dangerous animals, wildlife, injured animals, strays, and other services ACOs provide, will be delayed. Will the number of ACOs at East Valley be increased to fully account for the loss of ACOs at West Valley? Will ACOs continue to be stationed at West Valley? This issue has been raised by several ACOs as well as community members.
2. As the Proposal is currently written, West Valley residents will not be able to turn in strays or surrender animals (intakes), redeem, foster, adopt, and get other services from the West Valley Shelter, and will have to go to East Valley. West Valley residents, who VANC represents, will be losing a valuable resource which they have paid for.
3. The East Valley Shelter does not have enough capacity to handle all the stray, surrendered, and abused animals in the Valley. Animals will either be left on the street or killed. Losing the West Valley Shelter will set back No-Kill. The capacity of citizens to foster to make up for this loss will be depleted, especially as people go back to work as the Covid safer at home requirements are eased.
4. There is a health hazard for the West Valley because of more stray animals on the streets, including a health hazard for the homeless population.
5. West Valley is the only City shelter that takes large animals – horses, goats, sheep, etc. If those animals are taken to Hanson Dam or the Equestrian Center, who is going to care for them?
6. West Valley takes in animals in emergencies, like fires and earthquakes. West Valley is closest to fire areas; where will those animals go?
7. West Valley takes overflow from other shelters when they are overcrowded and West Valley has room.
8. West Valley has air conditioning for the dog kennels while East Valley does not. The two exercise yards at West Valley have artificial turf, while the one at East Valley does not. Volunteers can walk dogs around the block at West Valley, while they cannot do so at East Valley because it is in a residential neighborhood. The dog kennels at West Valley have two sections separated by the guillotine door, while East Valley does not, making it harder to get some dogs out of the kennels at East Valley. West Valley is a better facility. Why give away the better shelter? If all West Valley Volunteers start going to East Valley, there will be nowhere for the larger number of Volunteers to take dogs since there is only one play yard and the dogs cannot be walked around the block at East Valley.

LAAS claims that East Valley does have air conditioning. LAAS takes the position that because East Valley has misters, it is not any hotter than West Valley. That simply is not correct. The misters at East Valley are not as effective as the air conditioning at West Valley. Furthermore, some dogs do not like the misters and try to stay out of the mist.

9. If rescue organizations are running the West Valley Shelter, there has to be direct community oversight.

10. If rescue organizations have facilities at the West Valley Shelter, will LAAS Volunteers be able to put in volunteer time caring for and walking the rescue animals that are housed there?

11. There should be community input into determining the rescues that will be at West Valley. Rescues that have had disagreements with LAAS cannot be automatically excluded.

12. West Valley hoarder cases, barking dogs, administrative citations, and other animal matters have to be dealt with.

13. Classes are taught at the West Valley Shelter through the LAUSD Regional Occupational Program (ROP), for West Valley students. These classes are taught by West Valley Animal Care Technicians (ACTs) with West Valley Shelter animals. These classes should continue at the West Valley Shelter.

14. As noted above, serious consideration should be given to expanding the role of LAAS Volunteers, so as many municipal functions of the West Valley Shelter as possible can be maintained, even if some functions are lost or turned over to rescue organizations.

Best regards, Jeff

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