

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Shari Streb

**Date Submitted:** 09/03/2020 01:39 PM

**Council File No:** 20-1114

**Comments for Public Posting:** Letter opposing reconstituting the West Valley Animal Shelter



Dear Mayor Garcetti and Members of the Los Angeles City Council,

I am deeply disturbed by the news that the Los Angeles Animal Services General Manager, Brenda Barnette, is proposing to eliminate the West Valley Animal Shelter from our Municipal services. I am adamantly opposed to this decision.

Proposition F, which was approved by voters in the November 2000 election, allotted \$154.1 million dollars for animal services facilities to build two new animal shelters, replace 3 shelters and renovate and expand 3 existing shelters, giving the city a total of 8 animal shelters. However, two of those eight shelters, one being the newest one built in Mission Hills and the South LA shelter, have already been given to rescue partners, in 2012 and 2018 respectively, after city tax dollars were spent from proposition F. Not only did tax dollars pay for the acquisition of the properties but also the necessary renovations. The facility maintenance and utilities are being paid for by tax dollars, but no public services are provided by these shelters. The valley constitutes 45% of the city population, about 1.75 million people which constitutes a 3.5% increase since 2000 when there was a need for 8 shelters, that were voted on and approved by city taxpayers. This increase would have given the Valley 3 shelters to provide services, now we currently have two shelters that provide those necessary services. 68% of the City's administrative citations were given out of the West Valley, indicating a generous revenue stream for the department. Closure of the West Valley shelter would be gross negligence for the animals in our city and completely irresponsible to the voters and property owners footing the bill for the promises made to us under Proposition F. Maintaining only one shelter for the valley area would drastically impact the entire population, increasing the capacity and service area of the East Valley Shelter to over 200 square miles. Ms. Barnette's response to concerns over response times is that "We will have to train the public to do more for themselves", so how exactly is that going to work in the event of dangerous animals? Failing to provide the taxpayers with the services we pay for sure seems like a lawsuit or two waiting to happen. And who will be expected to pay for those lawsuits when they occur?

Last summer, the West Valley Shelter was so full, crates were lining the hallways because there was not enough kennel space. The public and animal health is put at risk regarding dangerous animal calls involving bites, stray companion animals, the increasing amount of wildlife entering communities and medical attention to injured animals. In addition to those services, what happens when someone's animal manages to get out of their property either by accident or the increasing number of illegal fireworks use that goes unchecked? The likelihood of a good Samaritan carting the lost animal clear across the valley is remote. How will those owners be reunited with their pets? What happens to the ability to house horses and other large animals as West Valley is the only shelter in Los Angeles with the facilities for Large animals. Considering LA City Fire considers the West Valley Shelter an Animal evacuation center, and we are entering fire season, where are those animals going to go? Proposition F states, "The City's 300 dog kennels must be expanded to 1200 to be safe and humane" and that was when the population was much smaller. How many do we have now, and how does reducing the services provided address this "fact" that was cited in the proposition?

Regarding the proposal by Brenda Barnette submitted to Mayor Garcetti dated June 26, 2020, I am unclear how closing this shelter will address her claims of combating discrimination and inequality in animal services. In fact, I'm even more curious how it doesn't discriminate against even more people by taking services away from people who paid for them? Regardless, building programs and services that are accessible and welcoming to all fall under the department's current mission. If those things are not being met, then how does closing a facility achieve that goal? The proposal states "We want to create a Community Resource Center in partnership with some of our Rescue Partners and others in the City to provide services to support pet ownership so that having the love of a companion animal in your life does not become a matter of privilege." Having a companion animal in your life requires a certain amount of financial responsibility for the life of that animal to provide food, water, and medical care. Not providing that care falls under the department's own definition of animal abuse under



neglect. There is a recently renovated spay/neuter clinic at West Valley that is not being utilized and under the proposed agreement, there is no arrangement in place to provide those services. The proposed agreement only "would encourage them to offer low-cost wellness exams, vaccinations and microchipping" and leave the decision on how to deliver those services up to the partners. Who is going to ensure they are not discriminating in their delivery of services? The other services proposed fall under the purview of other city and county services such as LAHSA and LACPH – Veterinary Public Health Department. Helping with low-cost care is what non-profits are for and what the Southern California Veterinary Medical Association and other organizations do regularly for the county, so why not incorporate the same for the City? In addition, the existing staff is trained to provide some of the other proposed services and those should be implemented in all the city shelters to provide equitable services across the city. Since Los Angeles acquired no-kill status announced in 2018, what is the plan regarding the enforcement of spay and neuters for new pet owners? How would that be achieved? What is the contingency plan for all the extra animals that people are unable to care for that end up at another site? What is going to be the vetting process for the rescues chosen to operate at the shelter? How will you determine which rescues will be chosen? Aside from being denied the right to vote on our services being fundamentally removed and relocated to other geographies, why are the taxpayers of Los Angeles also being forced to subsidize private rescue organizations that we had no input in selecting? Why are we responsible for footing the bill for the renovation, upkeep, maintenance, and utilities for these shelters that are not providing city services? If this idea ultimately fails, are you going to come back to the taxpayers to ask for more money to open new facilities or are you going to take back control of these facilities that have been given away?

In a Facebook post from July 27, 2020, Ms. Barnette commented "We must consider that the needs will be greater as we start having evictions, job loss and companion animals surrendered." As such, it confounds basic logic that her answer is to close a shelter that barely keeps up with servicing those specific needs under the existing demand. West Valley is the most recently renovated shelter to address increasing needs in the West Valley so again, why give away the newest facility? Considering her experience prior to joining LAAS has been largely in the rescue world, giving away city facilities certainly draws into question the connections she has with the businesses benefiting from her decisions. Amidst the recent news and questions regarding City Council ethics, I believe an investigation into the "partnerships" that Ms. Barnette created is essential to addressing these legitimate concerns. It is the fiduciary responsibility of Los Angeles Animal Services and the Los Angeles City Council to deliver on the promise made to voters to provide 8 animal shelters for the city of Los Angeles. If there was a shortfall of budget, I propose that an audit should be conducted to discern where the funds were spent. In addition to opposing not reopening the West Valley Shelter, I would also propose an investigation into the legality of the Mission Hills and South LA shelters not operating under municipal services. It is time that services paid for by the taxpayers of Los Angeles be returned to us.

Thank you for taking the time to address the concerns.



Shari Streb



## **Communication from Public**

**Name:** Shari Streb

**Date Submitted:** 09/03/2020 01:41 PM

**Council File No:** 20-1114

**Comments for Public Posting:** 2nd Letter after first LAAS Community meeting

Dear Mayor Garcetti and Members of the City Council,

I am writing again in the hopes to provide some further information regarding Los Angeles Animal Services.

I am concerned that the promise to make the recordings of the meetings and the questions asked along with the answers have not yet been provided to the public. The response is that it is in the works and they hope to have it posted in the next few days.

According to the FY 2020-2021 budget presentation provided on the community call last week, the LAAS's budget is approximately \$23.2 Million dollars. This equates to \$21.2 Million for Salaries and \$1.9 Million for expenses. LESS than 10% of the budget is spent on the care of the animals. I feel strongly that a reevaluation of the allocation of the City's budget for Animal services is in order, in addition to the management staff. There were a lot of folks on the management team panel who provided no input or actual value to the zoom call. This department appears to be very top heavy with administrators and the people doing the work are being strapped with less and less.

I am genuinely concerned that our tax dollars have been spent on refurbishing the facilities and during this heat wave, the shelter with air conditioning for the animals is sitting closed. All while the staff at the East Valley Shelter is scrambling to come up with ideas to keep the animals cool, even considering purchasing ice machines. It is ludicrous.

The summary text, prepared by the Chief Legislative Analyst of Proposition F from November 7, 2000 reads "This measure will authorize the City to issue general obligation bonds to replace, build new or modernize facilities for fire, paramedic, emergency helicopter and animal services operations throughout the City to improve public safety services and reduce response times for delivering emergency services." This wording is an indicator that animal services is part of the essential services tasked with protection of public health and safety. I am mystified that when asking for tax dollars, the Department of Animal services is considered an essential department, but deployment of those services falls glaringly short.

I am most aggrieved by some of the suggestions in the proposal by Brenda Barnette to "outsource" the West Valley Animal Shelter to rescue partners. There is a critical distinction between our city shelters and a rescue. The city shelters are open admission - taking homeless, lost, abused, sick, and injured animals. They provide temporary boarding during disasters and dedicated staff that protect the public and the animals. The city taxes and licensing fees provide a fairly steady source of revenue. Rescues can be selective with the animals they take in and have sole authority regarding how they allot their resources. Those resources are exclusively dependent on donations and grants.

When I asked Ms. Barnette how she justified leaving 45% of the city population with just one shelter, she had no reply. I then asked how she determined that West Valley should be the Shelter for her pilot program, her response was, "Well I looked at the smaller shelters which were Harbor, West LA and West Valley. The West LA shelter has a contract with the city of Beverly Hills so we cannot close that one. The Harbor Shelter is in a unique location that is hard to get into and out of, so nowhere to go there. That leaves West Valley." This is an unacceptable answer to me that failed to address any option other than the Community Resource Center model, that does not require shutting anything down. Aside from that, who allowed an individual facility to enter a contract with Beverly Hills that fundamentally hijacks services and dollars that do NOT belong exclusively to that facility. Have you considered having the West Valley or any other location service Beverly Hills? LAAS won't have broken the contract if one of the shelters can provide the services. I would also like see the review of the contract that determined this was not an option because there are always ways to terminate a contract under force majeure or insolvency events, which have fundamentally been entered by going down this restructuring road,



much like a company navigating bankruptcy. The Valley was meant to have three shelters in 2000. But now twenty years later when the population has increased, she feels we can function properly with just one shelter.

I would like to call attention to the ineffectiveness of the rescue partners for LA Animal Services. In the call I attended, Ms. Barnette stated that the rescues would be pulling city shelter animals. If you look at the table below, compiled from the LA Animal Services Woof Stat Reports, you can see that there has been a steady decline over the last two years, despite the fact that this duration includes both of the shelters that have been given over to rescue partners. It does not appear to be a successful endeavor for anyone except perhaps the rescue organizations that get free buildings and utilities paid for by the taxpayers of Los Angeles.

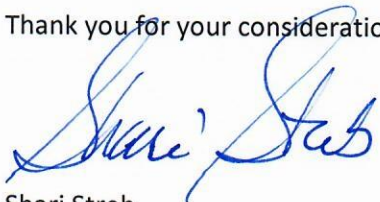
#### LA Animal Services Woof Stat Report Statistics

	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>% Change</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>% Change</u>	<u>YTD 2019</u>	<u>YTD 2020</u>	<u>% Change</u>
<u>Cats</u>								
Adoptions to Public	5715	6279	10%	7715	23%	2819	1780	-37%
Best Friends	1855	2135	15%	1742	-18%	933	495	-47%
New Hope Placements	1125	1380	23%	1450	5%	581	566	-3%
Redeemed	352	337	-4%	317	-6%	143	106	-26%
Released	343	348	1%	261	-25%	102	134	31%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9390</b>	<b>10479</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>11485</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>4578</b>	<b>3081</b>	<b>-33%</b>
<u>Kittens</u>								
Adoptions to Public	1397	1300	-7%	1858	43%	724	236	-67%
Best Friends	3068	2994	-2%	2737	-9%	1487	619	-58%
New Hope Placements	2213	3313	50%	4097	24%	2029	1255	-38%
Redeemed	8	1	-88%	4	300%	1	0	-100%
Released	413	560	36%	597	7%	364	166	-54%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7099</b>	<b>8168</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>9293</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>4605</b>	<b>2276</b>	<b>-51%</b>
<u>Dogs</u>								
Adoptions to Public	11426	11022	-4%	9877	-10%	4731	2895	-39%
Best Friends	1211	912	-25%	580	-36%	380	176	-54%
New Hope Placements	2920	3238	11%	3495	8%	1707	1368	-20%
Redeemed	5773	5524	-4%	5395	-2%	2873	1547	-46%
Released	411	486	18%	658	35%	223	241	8%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>21741</b>	<b>21182</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>20005</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>9914</b>	<b>6224</b>	<b>-37%</b>
<u>Outcomes for all animals</u>								
Adoptions to Public	19538	19965	2%	21021	5%	8946	5484	-39%
Best Friends	6137	6057	-1%	5059	-16%	2800	1289	-54%
Died/DOA (not Euth)	3371	3229	-4%	3418	6%	1577	913	-42%
Euthanized	7425	6492	-13%	7831	21%	3313	2269	-32%
Missing/Stolen/Escaped	46	86	87%	143	68%	61	28	-54%
New Hope Placements	7831	10468	34%	10874	4%	5426	3946	-27%
Redeemed	6171	5904	-4%	5752	-3%	3030	1665	-45%
Released	2059	2250	9%	2297	-7%	1134	773	-32%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>52578</b>	<b>54451</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>56395</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>26287</b>	<b>16367</b>	<b>-38%</b>

Table 1

I feel it is imperative to speak out for the animals and to call attention to this blatant misuse of tax dollars. Ms. Barnette is not functioning to protect public health, public safety, or for the welfare of the animals in this city. Please do not support the proposal to repurpose the West Valley Animal Shelter and remove it from the Municipal Services. I think it is time for someone else to oversee Animal Services.

Thank you for your consideration,



Shari Streb