

# Humboldt County Animal Shelter

## Animal Shelter + Animal Rescues = Lifesaving Paw-tnership



"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members." Coretta Scott King

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### SUMMARY

Euthanasia rates for some California municipal animal shelters are among the highest in the nation. However, this is not the case in Humboldt County. The Humboldt County Animal Shelter maintains a low rate of euthanasia even though an increasingly large number of homeless animals stretches shelter capacity to the limit. This is due in no small part to the work of the incredible animal rescue network that supports the shelter.

The purpose of the Animal Shelter, according to its policy and procedures manual, is to provide food, water, and shelter for animals in their care but there are other factors to be considered when the term “deemed unadoptable” arises. Euthanasia is considered a last resort for animals that are injured, ill, temperamentally unstable, aggressive, too young for adoption, or possess another condition that precludes them from placement into a new home. This is where the rescue network excels. Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury’s site visit and investigation found an extensive and far-reaching effort to provide each animal every opportunity to thrive and be given every chance to be adopted.

The staff of the Animal Shelter provides clean areas with bedding for the animals. The dogs are in runs with outdoor access and are provided with toys. Their identification and necessary information are attached to their kennel for clear viewing. The cats are in a separate enclosed area and are allowed to roam or find comfort in a cage. Beds, cat trees, and toys are provided to give each cat optimal enrichment and a comfortable place to sleep.

The real hum of activity in the Animal Shelter centers around the volunteers. A local animal rescue organization, whose mission is to save at-risk animals at the Shelter, oversees a lot of the activity. They provide walks, enrichment, and training for the animals. Organization boards with the animals' names are posted for volunteers to refer to with suggested activities and buddy walks. While this is a huge undertaking, it's only the tip of the rescue efforts. A wide-ranging animal rescue network, that often reaches other counties and states, works to lessen the number of "deemed unadoptable" animals.

Animal Shelter staff and volunteers working together provide a safety net for animals and much needed assistance to an unappreciated, understaffed shelter.

Problems with the roof and lighting have plagued the Animal Shelter for several years. The longer the leaking roof goes unfixed, the more damage results. Another problem associated with the leaky conditions pops up, compromising its ability to effectively protect the building. The delay in fixing the roof and outdoor lighting fixtures have created unsafe and unhealthy conditions for the staff, the volunteers, and the animals. Repairing equipment and replacing the roof would let the shelter shine like the gem it is, representing the efforts of a community-government collaboration.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Humboldt County Animal Shelter is a 13,000 square foot building that was built in 2004 to house stray domesticated animals. The Animal Shelter has contracts with the cities of Eureka, Arcata, Trinidad, and Blue Lake. Dogs are housed in kennels that have solid walls so no dog faces another dog. An enclosed outside area with agility equipment provides the dogs a place to run, train, and meet their potential adopters. An outdoor kennel area, away from the central facility, is where dogs involved in court cases are kept with only Animal Shelter staff allowed to take care of them. The shelter can accommodate a variety of domesticated animals such as birds, rabbits, reptiles, and guinea pigs. There is a four-day stray hold for an animal that comes into the shelter; after that the dogs are temperament tested for people, dog, and food aggression. All dogs and cats are vaccinated, spayed or neutered and microchipped before being adopted.

Fees are charged by the Shelter for licenses, impoundment, and adoptions. A special reduction in adoption fees occurs when the Animal Shelter's capacity is at 75% or greater.

The Animal Shelter has a staff of nine and an annual budget of 1.5 million dollars. Although the Animal Shelter falls organizationally under the Sheriff's Office, its budget was moved in 2024 out of the Sheriff's budget unit and into its own budget unit.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury conducted a site visit of the facility and we conducted interviews with people who have substantial knowledge of the Humboldt County Animal Shelter and the local animal rescue network.

Documents reviewed included:

- Capital Assets Allocation 2024-2025
- Hayden Act
- Animal Shelter Fees and Charges
- Animal Shelter Budget 2024-2025
- Roof Condition Phase I Report
- Roof Construction Report Phase I
- The Animal Shelter's Policy and Procedures Manual

Extensive online research was conducted concerning animal rescue organizations and shelters, laws and codes for animal shelters, shelter and rescue partnerships, shelter and rescue social media, and funding sources for animal shelters.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Staffing**

The Animal Shelter operates with these paid and unpaid workers:

- Shelter Manager and three Animal Control Officers
- Two Kennel Attendants and three office personnel
- Volunteers have contributed, on average, 400 hours/month.

The staff stated that an Animal Control Officer and a Kennel Attendant are positions that remain vacant. Volunteers have been filling in where needed to support the staff.

Working at an animal shelter can take its toll on the staff especially when the Shelter is at capacity, which is very common. It is important for the shelter staff to remember that communication with animal rescue organizations and the community should be professional and respectable. A family or individual's first exposure to adoption is the reception they receive from the minute they walk in the door.

### **Animal rescue network**

The animal rescue network consists of several nonprofit animal rescue & adoption organizations in the county.

The animal rescue network provides the following services:

- Foster homes
- Low cost spay & neutering vouchers

- Free vaccines for dogs of people who are homeless
- A puppy network: a network spearheaded by one animal rescue to immediately find a placement for puppies
- A strong system of social media awareness and adoption
- If the shelter puts out an “all call” for food, or assistance for an animal in need, the animal rescue network responds and, in turn, the community responds.
- An Emergency Medical Fund which aids ill animals or animals that need surgery that their budget doesn’t cover is overseen by a specific animal rescue organization.

### **Rescues: Quantity and Impact:**

The Animal Shelter has had 3,117 adoptions over the past five years. Add another 1,509 animals transferred to the animal rescue network and the total number of saved animals increases significantly. Collaboration between the Animal Shelter and the animal rescue network means more animals are saved; it means better community education, better care, and more resources for animals.

The County benefits from and should acknowledge the work being done by the animal rescue network and its volunteers as an integral government/community partnership that created a solution to a local challenge by pooling resources, knowledge and skills that led to building a stronger, more resilient community.

### **Facility**

The Shelter is a 20-year-old building with roofing, lighting, and heating problems. There are leaks in the roof which started several years ago. Two prior Grand Juries have recommended that the roof be fixed; each year of non-action has resulted in additional damage.

The flat roof system houses all the mechanical equipment that serves the building. A roof conditions report was done by an outside roofing consulting agency in October 2024. Coring samples provided evidence that the roof needs to be replaced because it is saturated with water.



Phase I of the Roof Conditions Report addresses the mechanical equipment well. The condition of the well walls is a major concern. Past leaking has led to swelling of the siding, rusted vents,

and leaking access doors. The Roofing Report recommended that the walls be roofed and brought under the warranty coverage of the roof membrane.

A Roofing Construction Phase I Report was drafted by the Humboldt County Public Works Department. Phase I requires fixing the Mechanical Equipment Well first before replacing the roof. The next step would be a roofing bid or a request for contract proposals. A good bid clearly explains what work will be done, the cost of materials and labor, and any other relevant factors.

Phase I covers only the well area where all the equipment that serves the building resides. The report states that the roof needs to be torn off and a new roof system installed. The plywood has to have time to thoroughly dry and the new roof has to absorb residual moisture migration (once water is present it can move within the plywood under certain conditions) as the roof continues to dry. Vents need to be installed to promote drying. Leaving the roof uncovered for a long as possible to promote drying would be best practice.

Prior Grand Juries have also recommended that the lights in front of the building need to be repaired or replaced for safety concerns. The lights have not been replaced but Public Works states that the replacements of these lights has been added to the ADA work being done at the Animal Shelter.

The lighting in the outdoor fenced areas has been addressed. Staff had solar lights with motion detectors installed.

## **Hours of Operations**

The Animal Shelter is open to the public on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10:00am to 4:00pm and on Tuesday and Thursdays from 10:00 am to 7:00pm. The Shelter is closed on Saturday and Sunday.

Adoptions would likely increase if the shelter was open on a weekend day.<sup>1</sup> In a report on increasing adoption outcomes released by Shelters Animals Count, a national data base, weekend days are more likely to result in an animal adoption because people have more free time to visit a shelter and consider adoption. The Animal Shelter has extended hours on Tuesday and Thursday, but people are often busier with work or other activities. When a comparison of animal shelters' operational hours is made with other counties in California of similar size to Humboldt, the Animal Shelter is the only one that is not open at least one weekend day.

Animal shelters throughout the state have come up with creative ways to be operational during the weekend. A full day or even a half day is one option. Being open Tuesday to Saturday instead of Monday to Friday is another alternative. Having weekend appointments could offer yet another possibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelter Animals Count, National Data Base and Kristen Hassan, 7 Things Your Animal Shelter Can Do to Increase Outcomes, February 6, 2023

## **FINDINGS**

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury finds that:

**F1:** The staff of the Humboldt County Animal Shelter are dedicated. Their efforts allow them to work effectively under the stress of handling high volumes of animals with less than a full staff. **(R1)**

**F2:** Collaboration between the Animal Shelter and the local benefit our community. **(R1)**

**F3:** Volunteers donate approximately 400 hours per month. Their crucial contribution to animal enrichment by socializing, walking, and training animals is a factor in increasing adoptions and meeting other needs of the Animal Shelter. **(R2)**

**F4:** Long-standing leaks have led to a severely damaged roof that houses necessary mechanical equipment for the Animal Shelter. This damage can significantly impact staff and animal health and safety. **(R3)**

**F5:** The outside lighting at the Animal Shelter needs replacement and repair; this poses a safety concern for both staff and visitors, especially during the winter hours. **(R4)**

**F6:** The Animal Shelter is only open to the public from Monday to Friday. Offering operational hours on the weekend would increase the rate of adoptions. **(R5)**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

**R1:** Collaboration between the Animal Shelter and the animal rescue network, in a professional and respectful manner, should continue as it is beneficial to the animals and everyone involved. **(F1, F2)**

**R2:** The Board of Supervisors shall establish a Volunteer Appreciation Day for all Humboldt County Volunteers on April 20th, which is National Volunteer Recognition Day, by October 1, 2025. **(F3)**

**R3:** The Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Works to complete the reroofing of the Animal Shelter and any necessary repairs by no later than October 31, 2025. **(F4)**

**R4:** The Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Works to complete the replacement and repair of outside lighting at the Animal Shelter by no later than December 31, 2025. **(F5)**

**R5:** The Animal Shelter includes weekend hours by no later than September 1, 2025. **(F6)**

## RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, each entity or individual named below must respond to the enumerated Findings and Recommendations within specific statutory guidelines.

Responses to Findings shall be either:

- The respondent agrees with the finding; or
- The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefore.

Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:

- The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action; or
- The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation; or
- The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency where applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of the publication of the Grand Jury report; or
- The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefore.

### REQUIRED RESPONSE - WITHIN 90 DAYS

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors  
(F1, F2, F3, F4, F5) and (R2, R3, R4, R5)

### REQUIRED RESPONSE - WITHIN 60 DAYS

The Humboldt County Sheriff  
(F1, F2, F3, F4, F5) and (R1, R5)

### Invited Responses

The Humboldt County Department of Public Works  
(F4, F5) and (R3, R4)

**Responses are to be sent to:**

The Honorable Judge Kelly L. Neel  
Humboldt County Superior Court  
825 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Eureka, CA 95501

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury  
PO Box 657, Eureka, CA 95502 A

*Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.*