

# Fresno County wants to build new animal shelter

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/02/24/3789546/fresno-county-wants-to-build-new.html>

By Marc Benjamin

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Fresno County will soon embark on a new animal control shelter at the site of the former county coroner's office in southwest Fresno.

The county Board of Supervisors will discuss designing the new building and demolition of the old coroner's facility at its meeting Tuesday. It's possible that construction of the new shelter could begin later this year at Nielsen and Teilman avenues, officials said.

For now, the shelter, which primarily handles dogs, has kennels arranged outdoors with some shielding from the elements, but a new shelter will allow the county to have indoor facilities.

Supervisor Phil Larson said he expects about \$2.5 million can be set aside for the new animal control project. He said the new building will likely be a simple steel structure with basic office space.

"Something needs to be done to make it more permanent," he said.

Tuesday's discussion will determine the amount of money to be set aside for a new shelter.

"We are in a little better shape now than we were (financially)," Larson said. "But we are not in great shape."

Demolition of the old coroner's office will consume about \$266,500 of the budget, said David Pomaville, Fresno County Department of Public Health director.

He suggested that the county could build something similar to Madera County's newest animal control building.

That structure measures about 4,000 square feet and accommodates about 35 to 40 cats and up to 50 dogs, said Kirsten Gross, Madera County animal control director.

The cost was \$675,000 in 2008, she said, and was added to supplement a similar-sized building that serves about the same number of animals. Fresno County will need more space, Gross said.

She said the newer building is a temporary fix for Madera County.

"They have to have someplace to facilitate the need in a humane way," Gross said. "A building like ours would accommodate that."

Fresno County took over animal control services in October 2012 after a dispute with the Central California Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

A makeshift shelter was created on the grounds of the old coroner's office site. Since then, the county has been cobbling together funds for a permanent shelter.

"We are doing the best we can," said Supervisor Henry R. Perea. "We are trying to make the best of a bad situation and I know the conditions are not ideal."

But Perea said the county's contractor, Liberty Animal Control Services, is doing a good job considering the level of county funding for animal control, about \$900,000, nearly identical to what the county annually paid to the SPCA.

Much of that money pays contractor Liberty Animal Control Services, which oversees animal care.

Liberty has faced criticism, but Perea, Larson and other county officials have supported its efforts.

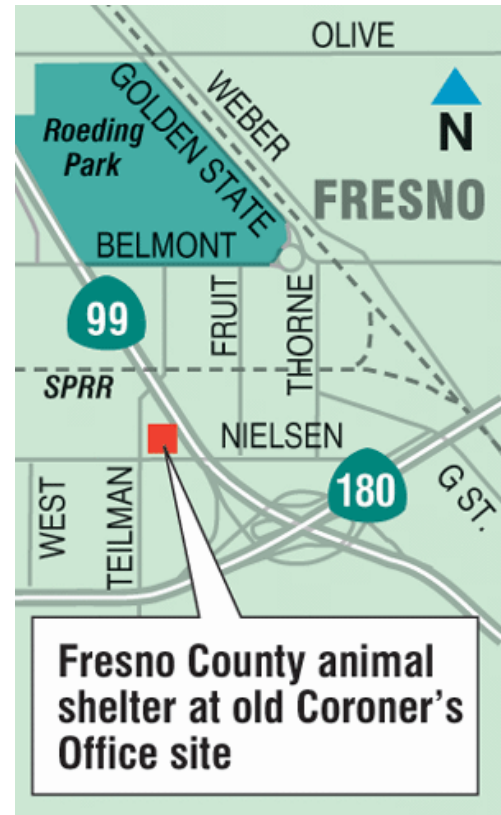
In its first year of operation ending Sept. 30, Liberty handled 3,942 animals and was dispatched to 4,000 animal control calls.

Local animal-rescue groups say some animals are coming to them with illnesses, such as distemper, a virus that is fatal in dogs if not detected early.

"There are a high number of distemper cases," said Brenda Mitchell of the Fresno-based Animal Compassion Team animal rescue. "They have to figure out how to stop the spread of illness."

But, she said, Liberty employees do the best they can while working in "substandard conditions"

Daniel Bailey, president and co-owner of Liberty Animal Control, recalled one Labrador retriever that had distemper, but said Liberty's kennels were not the place the dog caught the illness.



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Bailey said the county investigated and found that the dog's illness had likely surfaced from conditions at the rescue.

"We vaccinate everything that comes in," said Bailey.

The only exception, he said, are animals that are quarantined because of viciousness.

"Our records are open to the public," Bailey said. "We have nothing to hide.

The county, Mitchell said, made the correct move to take over animal control services so the public can have a say in the way services are provided.

### **At a glance**

Liberty Animal Control Services' first year by the numbers:

**Handled:** 3,942 animals

**Daily average housed:** 200

**Euthanized:** 2,363

**Reunited with owner:** 208

**Adopted:** 532

**Sent to rescue groups:** 493

**Bites investigated:** 247

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