

## Costs for new Fresno County animal shelter higher than estimated

By Marc Benjamin



In a June 21013 file photo, a terrier mix named Einstein seeks attention in the intake area at Liberty Animal Control, operating at the former Fresno County morgue location. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE

Fresno County's new animal shelter will take at least 18 months to build and could cost up to \$3.5 million, county supervisors learned in a report last week.

The project could be built at the old Fresno County Coroner's Office site, but the cost to demolish and remove asbestos is more than 50% higher than originally anticipated. The board will discuss the issue Tuesday.

Those costs, plus the expense to build a new 8,500-square-foot facility, could cause the county to build or renovate at another site.

County officials say they have been evaluating numerous sites, including a large industrial facility that sits kitty-corner from the existing facility at Teilman and Nielsen avenues.

For now, most of the shelter's dogs are in outdoor kennels under temporary awnings. Some are indoors in a temporary aluminum building.

The county's contractor, Liberty Animal Control Services, does not regularly pick up cats.

About 4,000 animals are housed yearly at the county shelter.

In May, county supervisors voted to set aside \$250,000 for demolition and asbestos removal. But last week's report to supervisors shows that demolition costs may have a price tag of \$455,000.

The overall cost for building on the old Coroner's Office site could reach \$3.5 million, with a proposed opening date of August 2016. Supervisors previously set aside about \$2 million for a new shelter.

The money available now isn't enough for the county to move ahead with the project at the old Coroner's Office, said Alan Weaver, the county's public works and planning director.

County public health officials are fanning out across the Fresno area to find industrial buildings suitable for the new shelter, he said.

"If there is an existing vacant industrial site where zoning is appropriate it may be significantly less expensive," he said.

David Pomaville, the county's public health director, said he will keep an open mind when it comes to eyeing sites other than the old Coroner's Office.

"This is a location worth considering, but with the costs we need to evaluate other options," he said.

Pomaville said he has no preference for other properties, but is seeking easy access to the freeway system.

Building at the old site also will require moving the dogs to a temporary site during demolition and construction.

Buying another site would require Liberty to move animals once. The site across from the old Coroner's Office will require renovation and possibly roof replacement. Some costs of a different site are not factored in, but the report said it could total at least \$2 million. It could open as early as February 2016.

Supervisor Henry R. Perea said he prefers converting the old coroner's building into a shelter, even if it's costlier than originally projected.

"We have to do something," he said. "The original intent was to do a temporary site and now we are going on two years. Temporary is now becoming permanent and that isn't right."

Even though the second option is to consider other buildings, no actual backup site is selected "so it's a big unknown," he said.

Supervisor Phil Larson also supports using the former Coroner's Office site — even though asbestos removal will raise costs — because if demolition is required, it makes sense to do it sooner rather than later.

He said the project is taking too long to get started.

"I think we should go ahead with the project we have," he said. "When we opened it was an emergency situation and now it's dragging out. Why don't we get on with it?"

**If you go**

**What:** Fresno County Board of Supervisors meeting

**When:** Tuesday, 9 a.m.

**Where:** Hall of Records, Tulare and M streets

The reporter can be reached at (559) 441-6166, [mbenjamin@fresnobee.com](mailto:mbenjamin@fresnobee.com) or [@beebenjamin](https://twitter.com/beebenjamin) on Twitter.

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