

# Rescue group lands nod for Fresno County animal control

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An animal rescue group has earned a tentative recommendation to take over animal control services for Fresno County.

The Animal Compassion Team was the recommended group among four that submitted proposals for those services. Others applying were: Central California Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; California Animal Control; and Valley Life Animal Control.

Financial details of the Animal Compassion Team bid were not available Tuesday evening, county officials said. There are items still subject to negotiation, said Gary Cornuelle, the county's purchasing manager.

The evaluations were done by a team of county employees in early July, he said. Price is a factor in the decision, but doesn't dictate the selection, Cornuelle said.

"Everything is looked at in the proposal," he said. "Price is part of it and also how they approach what we want them to do."

The recommendation is pending approval by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, who will be given all the financial documentation and details that led to the panel's decision. Supervisors will consider the proposals at the end of this month or in early September. The new contract starts in October.

"We want a vendor that's going to provide quality service for these animals," said Supervisor Henry R. Perea. "I think the real discussion will begin now based upon the funding available and that everyone agrees what will be done."

He said a new animal control contractor will offer "a fresh start" for the county, which also is in the process of trying to build a new animal control shelter.

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Brenda Mitchell, president of the Animal Compassion Team

Perea said the county is considering shelter sites near the Fresno County Juvenile Justice Center near Malaga and land near Grantland Avenue and Highway 99 in north Fresno that Derrel Ridenour, retired owner of Derrel's Mini-Storage, has offered to donate.

Fresno County's animal control services shifted from the SPCA in 2012 to Liberty Animal Control Services after the SPCA said it would no longer provide services for the city of Fresno or Fresno County. Eventually, the SPCA worked out a deal with the city, but the county decided to go on its own.

Liberty filed for bankruptcy at the end of May. California Animal Control, operated by Daniel Bailey, who also worked for Liberty, took over animal control services at the beginning of June.

Bailey learned of the county panel's recommendation Tuesday and was concerned about the mission his group carries out, which is animal control, versus the role of a rescue organization.

"It's a big difference in mission," Bailey said.

Since taking over in June, he said, the euthanasia rate has dropped from 70% to about 40% in the county shelter,

which is at the old Fresno County Coroner's Office at Teilman and Nielsen avenues, west of Highway 99.

"Rescue groups have wonderful ambitions, their mission is great, but this is animal control," he said. "It's not a walk in the park."

He said he intends to finish the term of his contract with the county.

Brenda Mitchell, president of the Animal Compassion Team, who also learned of the decision Tuesday afternoon, said she was excited at the prospect of overseeing animal control services.

"The only thing that scared me more than getting the contract was not getting it," she said.

Mitchell said many local animal advocates have been looking for a change in animal control philosophy.

"Everyone who cares about animals has been wanting change for so long and we have had to leave it in the hands of other people," she said. "We get the chance to set the example for all of Fresno County, the city and the smaller cities around us."

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