

Fresno County supervisors approve new animal control contract

By Marc Benjamin
mbenjamin@fresnobee.com

Fresno County supervisors approved a new three-year animal control contract with an organization that has its roots in pet rescue.

Fresno Humane Animal Services will replace California Animal Control, which took over services in June after the previous contractor filed for bankruptcy at the end of May.

The contract, valued at \$3.76 million, met the county's requirements and cost less than the other qualified vendor, California Animal Control.

Two other bidders, Valley Life Animal Services and the Central California Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, did not meet the county's proposal guidelines, said David Pomaville, the county's director of public health.

Valley Life didn't offer the depth of experience the county was seeking, Pomaville said; its bid was \$200,000 per year less than Fresno Humane Animal Services. The SPCA only submitted a bid for animal control field services and transportation to the county shelter, he said. California Animal Control's price was also higher than Fresno Humane Animal Services, Pomaville said.

Supervisors voted 5-0 to approve the contract, but want benchmarks in place to ensure that euthanasia is reduced, and adoption and pet reunification are increased.

The leadership of Fresno Humane Animal Services comes from the Animal Compassion Team rescue, whose president, Brenda Mitchell, said that "no one will hold us to a higher standard than ourselves."

No one will hold us to a higher standard than ourselves.

Brenda Mitchell, Fresno Humane Animal Services/Animal Compassion Team

Mitchell also is president of Fresno Humane Animal Services. She said the nonprofit has an experienced local veterinarian, an animal control director who has overseen shelter operations and a financial officer who is experienced in animal welfare programs.

"We are very excited and nervous and absolutely honored to have this opportunity, and we hope to bring Fresno in a completely new direction and move us 20 years ahead of where we are today," she told supervisors.

The new contract will begin Oct. 1.

Fresno Humane Animal Services will take over for California Animal Control, which took over for Liberty Animal Control Services when its leadership declared bankruptcy.

After California Animal Control took over, euthanasia fell by 50 percent. Liberty Animal Control Services euthanized about 70 percent of dogs brought to the shelter. Daniel Bailey, owner of California Animal Control, said his company cut that number in half during the past three months.

Bailey thanked the board for allowing him to show that his company could do the job.

"We will be out there if you need our help in the future," he said.

He told supervisors that animal rescue is different from animal control, and the county's animal control program is operating well today – and the county should maintain its contract with California Animal Control.

“Rescue has a wonderful mission, they do a fantastic job and I support them 110 percent,” Bailey said. “But you have animal control right now that is working. I know we don't have the best facility, working out of the parking lot of an abandoned morgue (the county-owned facility), but it is working.”

Bailey's bid also was supported by several residents who adopted dogs through his shelter, and supervisors thanked Bailey for improving the county's animal control services since taking over.

Fresno Humane Animal Services also had its supporters.

Becky Holly, a board member with Fresno Bully Rescue, said the county has been seeking a coalition of animal welfare organizations, and “you could not have gotten a better coalition of people for this group.”

She said the group includes rescues, veterinarians with experience in shelter management and an animal control manager with experience operating a facility.

The goals for Fresno Humane Animal Services will be to reduce intake, increase pet owner responsibility, including spaying and neutering, vaccination, licensing and speeding up animal rescues and adoptions, Pomaville said.

In other action, supervisors also approved a five-year, \$949,000 contract with the city of Fresno to preserve five beds in Fresno County Jail for inmates that come from Fresno Police Department arrests. The contract represents the county's costs to keep inmates in Fresno County Jail.

The contract continues an arrangement the city and county have had in recent years. It has been used principally to keep auto thieves, burglars and other inmates behind bars who otherwise may have been released. It allows the city to control which of its inmates remain in jail.

Supervisors also rejected a lawsuit filed by Pacific Gas & Electric Co. that declared the county responsible for the April pipeline explosion adjacent to the Fresno Sheriff's Foundation shooting range. The suit claims that a county employee using a front loader struck a pipeline, causing the blast.

Marc Benjamin: [559-441-6166](tel:559-441-6166), [@beebenjamin](https://www.instagram.com/beebenjamin)