

Please support reopening West Valley Animal Shelter as the full-service municipal shelter it was prior to its temporary closure due to the pandemic in spring 2020. The LAAS General Manager has put forth a proposal to discontinue services at West Valley Animal Shelter such as animal intake, housing and licensing in favor of giving part or all of the animal housing space to private rescue groups with one LAAS supervisor on the premises. The General Manager's stated reasons are inadequate staffing for animal care and budget cuts. The data from public government documents below, in fact, provide evidence against the proposal and support the resumption of West Valley Animal Shelter as a full-service municipal shelter.

**1. Workload: Total animal intake per year**

Steady since 2013 with minimum 51,676, maximum 58,111

2013: 58,111

2014: 57,226

2015: 51,676

2016: 52,460

2017: 52,898

2018: 54,527

2019: 56,468

YTD2020: 14,527 with Covid-19 reduced intake policy

**2. Manpower**

**a. LAAS**

	Total # Positions	# Direct Animal Care Staff*	# Nondirect Animal Care Staff
FY2014-15:	332	185	147
FY2015-16:	345	185	160
FY2016-17:	359	185	174
FY2017-18:	359	185	174
FY2018-19:	360	185	175
FY2019-20:	374	185	189
FY2020-21:	370	185	185

\*Direct Animal Care Staff:

154 Animal Care Technicians (ACT), 6 veterinarians (DVM), 25 veterinary technicians (RVT).

Total # positions = # direct animal care staff + # nondirect animal care staff

The budgets since FY2014-15, including 2020-21, have appropriately left the number of direct animal care positions unchanged. There is no shortage of budgeted direct animal care positions.

**b. Volunteers (2019)**

3,000 active volunteers

Each shelter has a core group of volunteers who give hundreds of hours of service annually.

Volunteers assist staff in various aspects of shelter operations in a manner that does not violate labor union contracts.

<b>3. LAAS Budget</b>	<b>Total # LAAS positions</b>	<b># Nondirect Animal Care Staff</b>
FY2014-15: \$23,192,781	332	147
FY2015-16: \$23,055,166	345	160
FY2016-17: \$23,982,367	359	174
FY2017-18: \$23,510,372	359	174
FY2018-19: \$24,910,654	360	175
FY2019-20: \$27,156,069	374	189
FY2020-21: \$23,209,142	370	185

The annual total animal intake has been relatively stable which is reflected in the 185 direct animal care positions (154 ACT, 6 DVM and 25 RVT) remaining unchanged during this period.

91.8% of the LAAS budget is for salaries.

The United States is currently in the worst economic recession since the Great Depression of 1929. The Los Angeles County seasonally adjusted unemployment rate as of June 2020 was 19.4% (4.4% last year); the insured unemployment rate in California as of July 25, 2020 was 16%. The \$600 federal financial assistance program to individuals ended on July 31, 2020. Municipal animal shelters should be prepared for the possibility of mass pet surrenders from individuals facing eviction and food insecurity, similar to what happened during the 2008 housing crisis.

If layoffs are needed, this is an appropriate time to evaluate for possible removal from the 2020-21 budget, nondirect animal care positions that were added since the emergence from the last recession, including high salary managerial and executive assistant positions.

#### **4. Shelter Kennel Capacity**

There were 424 LAAS kennels prior to the passage in 2000 of Proposition F, a 25-year bond measure to provide \$154 million for the construction and rehabilitation of the city animal shelters. Proposition F increased the number of kennels to 1,176. The Northeast Valley Animal Shelter, with its 163 kennels, was contracted to Best Friends Animal Society in 2012 due to lack of city funding for staff. The current proposal to use West Valley Animal Shelter and its 152 kennels to house rescue dogs, will reduce the number of city kennels to 861 kennels, a reduction of 26%. It was never the intent of Proposition F to increase municipal animal shelter housing capacity, only to later give it away to the private sector.

This report discusses kennel space because this data is more complete in public records. However, the same discussion can be applied to other animals as the proposal is to give away West Valley animal housing space to rescue groups working with different animals such as cats and rabbits, in addition to dogs.

Once municipal animal housing space is given to private rescues, that space is no longer available for incoming LAAS animals. The transfer of legal responsibility from LAAS to a rescue ends that animal's status as an LAAS animal. The number of animal housing units given to rescues reduces LAAS capacity by that amount.

## **5. Key differences between municipal shelters and rescues**

### **a. Open admissions**

Municipal shelters accept **ALL** animals presenting for admission; this is a primary function of a government animal shelter. This requires adequate animal housing so animals are not killed because the shelter ran out of space.

Rescues can select which animals for whom they will assume responsibility and reject others.

During 2019, when West Valley Animal Shelter regular kennels were full, dogs were temporarily housed in the 8 training kennels, 7 built-in grooming room cages and crates inside and just outside the grooming room (up to 23 little dogs) to minimize killing dogs for lack of space.

During last year's Sylmar fire, West Valley housed 100+ guinea pigs in the Community Room when a local rescue had to evacuate; other animals, including dogs, were also housed for evacuees.

### **b. Power to enforce public and animal safety measures**

Municipal shelters can enforce mandatory rabies vaccination, licensing, sterilization, and prosecute animal cruelty and neglect. Rescues cannot.

## **6. The San Fernando Valley as a part of the City of Los Angeles**

The city of Los Angeles has 3.9 million people and covers 503 square miles.

The San Fernando Valley has 1.5 million people and covers 260 square miles which amounts to 38% of the population and 51% of the land area of the city of Los Angeles.

When North Central Animal Shelter reopens after remodeling is complete, four shelters (West LA, Harbor, Chesterfield and North Central) will serve 62% of the city population (15% of the population per shelter) while East Valley, with the current and proposed future closure of West Valley, serves 38% of the city population, more than double that amount.

It is a betrayal of San Fernando Valley residents to have asked for their support of Proposition F by promising three municipal animal shelters in exchange for financing the bond measure only to reduce it over the years:

2000 Three municipal animal shelters promised

East Valley Animal Shelter, West Valley Animal Shelter, Northeast Animal Shelter

2012 Two municipal animal shelters

East Valley Animal Shelter, West Valley Animal Shelter

Northeast Animal Shelter leased to Best Friends Animal Society

2020 Proposed: One municipal animal shelter

East Valley Animal Shelter

Proposal to discontinue West Valley Animal Shelter municipal services and municipal animal housing and give away animal housing space to private rescue groups.

**Recommendation:**

The data support the conclusion that LAAS can carry out its mission, remain within budget and reopen West Valley Animal Shelter as the full-service municipal shelter it was prior to closure in spring 2020 due to the pandemic.

Since 91.8% of the LAAS budget is for salaries, if layoffs are needed, nondirect animal care positions added since the emergence from the 2008 recession, including high salary managers and executive assistants, should be evaluated for possible removal from the 2020-21 proposed budget since total animal intake has been stable and all 185 direct animal care positions have been retained.

West Valley Animal Shelter should be prepared for the possibility of mass pet surrenders, similar to that which happened during the 2008 housing crisis, from unemployed individuals facing eviction and food insecurity.

Reducing or eliminating West Valley Animal Shelter as a full-service open admissions municipal shelter during a major recession is irresponsible and would be an abdication of the responsibility LAAS has to the residents and animals of the San Fernando Valley.

Data sources:

LA Animal Services Reports

LA City Chief Administrative Officer Reports

LA City Controller Reports

LA City Bureau of Engineering Reports

State of California Employment Development Department Reports

U. S. Department of Labor Reports