



Dr. Sarah Reidenbach, DVM

CEO, Ruthless Kindness

Sebastopol, CA

9/2/2025

Mayor Zollman and City Councilmembers
City of Sebastopol

Dear Mayor Zollman and Councilmembers,

I am writing to you as a resident of Sebastopol, a veterinarian, and the CEO of the Sebastopol-based nonprofit Ruthless Kindness. In addition, I served for five years as the Veterinary Medical Director for the Humane Society of Sonoma County, have worked in local animal disaster response since 2015, and have collaborated with both North Bay Animal Services and Sonoma County Animal Services, as well as nearly every animal nonprofit in our region.

Through Ruthless Kindness, I oversee programs that support people and pets facing severe crises, including domestic violence victims who are unable to leave dangerous situations because they cannot find safe shelter that is pet-friendly. Over the past decade, I have had direct professional and personal experience with multiple models of animal control services for Sebastopol, and I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective as the city evaluates its options.

Most importantly, I want to offer myself as a resource to the city. I would be happy to discuss animal welfare or animal control in greater detail, and to provide professional advice that may be useful. I currently do not work for any of the involved organizations and do not have conflicts of interest in my input below.

Key Components of Effective Animal Control

A strong and effective animal control contract must include (but is not limited to):

- **Field services:** Professional animal control officers who respond to calls regarding dangerous, stray, injured, or nuisance animals, conduct investigations, handle cruelty cases, assist in emergencies, and engage with the community. These officers must be well-trained, empathetic, and responsive to ensure both public safety and animal welfare.
- **Sheltering and animal intake:** A local, accessible facility where stray and injured animals can be housed and receive medical care, where residents can reunite with lost pets, and where animals may be surrendered in cases of genuine emergency.

- **Medical care, licensing, enforcement, and reunification:** Ensuring that animals are cared for appropriately, public information is disseminated adequately, laws are upheld with compassion, and families can be quickly reunited with their pets.
- **Emergency response:** It is essential that the city's animal services contract includes provisions for coordinated emergency and disaster response.

Models That Work Best for Sebastopol

In my professional experience, the model that has best served Sebastopol is a partnership between **Sonoma County Animal Services (SCAS)** and the **Humane Society of Sonoma County (HSSC)**.

- HSSC is the closest shelter to Sebastopol, which makes it practical for residents to bring in stray animals, reclaim lost pets, and obtain licenses. HSSC also has medical services on-site. It is confusing and frustrating for residents to not be able to bring an injured animal to their nearest shelter, and leads to animal abandonment and unnecessary distress.
- SCAS has a long-standing role as the county's expert in animal control, field services, and disaster response. They currently provide these services across the majority of Sonoma County, which reduces confusion for residents and ensures continuity in cases where animals cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- SCAS and HSSC have successfully partnered in this manner in the past, and continue to collaborate in other jurisdictions.

Alternatively, **North Bay Animal Services (NBAS)** has dedicated and capable staff, and with adequate funding and support, may also be able to meet Sebastopol's needs. Should the contract remain with NBAS, I hope we can provide everything that is necessary in terms of support, funding, and oversight to set them up for success.

Risks of Inadequate Animal Services

Communities without comprehensive animal services face significant risks: increased dog bites and attacks, traffic hazards, unchecked stray populations, wildlife conflicts, spread of infectious disease, cruelty and neglect, erosion of public trust, legal liability, increased burden on law enforcement, and failures in disaster response. I have witnessed these consequences in communities without adequate animal services and strongly urge the council to avoid exposing our city to unnecessary risks.

I want to emphasize that if we do not have a process for pets to be surrendered to a shelter when there is a true and urgent reason, such as a client needing to go into hospice or flee violence, animals end up abandoned or harmed. This is essential to include in our city's contract.

Recommendation

I encourage the City of Sebastopol to:

1. Consider contracting jointly with SCAS (for field services) and HSSC (for sheltering and intake), leveraging their combined expertise, proximity, and history of collaboration. This

is, of course, assuming that these agencies are open to taking on the contract for these responsibilities.

2. Alternatively, if partnering with NBAS, ensure that the city provides adequate funding, oversight, and support so that all of the above components of animal services are fully met.

In closing, I urge you to take this contract seriously and ensure Sebastopol residents, and their animals, receive the professional, compassionate, and effective services they deserve. Many of us in the community, myself included, are willing to lend our support to help make this successful.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I would be happy to discuss further if helpful.

Respectfully,

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