

To: Sebastopol City Council

3/5/26

My name is Sarah Reidenbach. I am a local veterinarian and Sebastopol resident of 11 years. My three children attended Sebastopol schools, and I am CEO of Sebastopol veterinary nonprofit Ruthless Kindness.

I wrote a letter to the Sebastopol City Council regarding the animal services issue previously, and appreciate your attention to this matter.

Since my previous communication with the Council, things have become much more concerning and urgent. Below I will address: 1. Why the contract between Sebastopol and NBAS must end immediately 2. My recommendation for how to proceed 3. Financial considerations, including an attached cost analysis.

I am unfortunately out of town for the March 17th meeting but am happy to discuss with council members at another time if helpful.

Why the contract with NBAS must be terminated immediately:

The City of Sebastopol has strong and urgent reasons to end its relationship with North Bay Animal Services (NBAS). At the beginning of this month, NBAS held contracts with five jurisdictions: Sebastopol, Petaluma, Windsor, Cloverdale, and Calistoga, but that roster is rapidly shrinking due to severe, documented failures. Clearlake terminated its \$375,000-per-year contract with NBAS in August 2025 after citing poor management, shelter overcrowding, and a lack of communication with residents, and NBAS left the facility with as many as 114 dogs living in urine, feces, and inhumane conditions for months.

A Lake County Civil Grand Jury had already warned in 2023 that the Clearlake shelter was too small to house animals properly, with some dogs left outdoors exposed to rain and cold, yet conditions continued to deteriorate. The 2024–2025 Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury then issued a scathing report finding NBAS understaffed, underfunded, and overwhelmed, documenting substandard and unsanitary conditions at its Petaluma shelter across three separate inspection visits. That report also found NBAS in violation of multiple state laws, including failures to report dog bites to the county health officer, failure to sterilize animals prior to placement, and dog licensing rates roughly half the national average.

On March 3, 2026, just two days prior to my writing this letter, the Petaluma City Council voted unanimously to terminate its contract with NBAS effective March 31, with Mayor Kevin McDonnell stating: "We have no trust, we have no record, there doesn't appear to be any structural support, no board support, they don't put out impact reports of their work, they failed completion of tasks."

Peer organizations calling for termination at that meeting included Marin Humane Society, Humane Society of Sonoma County, Humane Society for Inland Mendocino County, Forgotten Felines of Sonoma County, and the Clearlake Animal Association, as well as many impacted and concerned citizens. No representatives from NBAS attended.

Sebastopol is now in the position of potentially being one of the last cities still contracting with an organization that has lost or is losing contracts in every other jurisdiction it serves, that is the subject of two separate civil grand jury investigations, and whose track record includes the documented abandonment of more than 100 animals in crisis conditions. Continuing the NBAS contract, particularly at a price point the Grand Jury characterized as insufficient to meet legal requirements, would expose the City to direct legal liability for the state-mandated animal welfare obligations that NBAS has repeatedly failed to fulfill.

The status quo is not acceptable. The Sonoma County Grand Jury found NBAS in violation of state law - not in violation of best practices, but of legal requirements. That means Sebastopol, as the contracting city, bears legal liability for those violations right now. Every month the contract continues is a month the City is exposed. The March 31 Petaluma termination also means NBAS will almost immediately be under severe organizational and financial stress, having just lost its largest and longest-standing contract, as well as the physical shelter it operates out of. **The first corrective step is Sebastopol ending this contract immediately.**

Recommendations regarding how to proceed:

In the November 2025 staff report, staff evaluated two proposals against defined criteria and the record is clear. The HSSC/SCAS proposal meets legal requirements; the NBAS proposal cannot. The Council should act on that analysis rather than defer further, and agree to work with HSSC and SCAS immediately. The City is fortunate to have legitimate, experienced providers still willing to walk into a messy situation that has lacked data and oversight.

There are multiple options for the length and structure of the initial contract which can be worked out between the parties. A short-term contract that can cover a period where accurate data and costs can be collected and analyzed is sensible. Cost sticker shock is understandable but should be reframed. The jump from approximately \$20,000 to \$70,000 feels large for a small city in financial strain. Please see the attached cost comparison. The contract cost with NBAS was never a real price for real service - it was a price for the appearance of service. The honest question for Council is not "why does it cost so much more?" but "How did we get away with spending so little, not overseeing implementation, and allowing a contractor to not fulfill their responsibilities for so long?" And perhaps additionally: "What did that cost the animals and residents who needed help and didn't get it?" As a veterinarian and pet owner in Sebastopol, I can confirm this cost was significant.

Near-term: The HSSC/SCAS model is the pragmatic near-term path. It is a known quantity, it has institutional backing from two well-established organizations, it meets the compliance bar the Grand Jury set, and it was designed to serve small cities. The Council should move quickly given the Petaluma situation. The SCAS and Humane Society capacity that exists today may look different in six months if other jurisdictions are also scrambling for coverage.

Long-term: Mismanagement and lack of oversight means that we do not have accurate data and numbers about Sebastopol's animal services needs. We are fortunate that HSSC and SCAS

are willing to collect and report back on these necessary numbers which should have been established and monitored previously. Fees and contract structure can be revisited once needs, numbers and costs are known, which could occur through a contract extension, an RFP process, per animal reimbursement, or other options. Sebastopol is not alone in this problem. Windsor, Cloverdale, Petaluma, and Calistoga are all in varying degrees of uncertainty about their animal services arrangements. The Grand Jury recommended that county and city governments explore a Joint Powers Agreement or county-wide governance model - the same structure that has worked well in Marin for decades. Sebastopol could be a constructive voice in this conversation.

Financial Considerations:

I have attached a cost analysis for animal services to assist the Council in understanding typical animal services costs in comparable areas. This is compiled based on publicly available data with the help of AI, and therefore all information should be verified. Due to the void of accurate or trusted data from the current contract with NBAS, including cost data, this analysis is intended to help give the council context for evaluating contract proposals and budget decisions.

As a veterinarian practicing in this community, as a resident of Sebastopol, and as someone who has worked inside both shelter medicine and nonprofit veterinary care in this area, I want to speak to the financial reality of what this Council is being asked to consider. \$18,900 per year is not a contract price. It is fiction.

I can tell you from direct professional experience that a single after-hours veterinary emergency - one dog struck by a car, one cat with a urinary obstruction, one bite case requiring quarantine and treatment - can easily cost upwards of \$5,000. One emergency. That is a meaningful fraction of Sebastopol's entire annual animal services budget under the current NBAS arrangement, which requires outsourcing veterinary care to private vets. And yet that \$18,900 is supposed to cover not one emergency, but an entire year of emergencies, field response, impoundment, sheltering, daily animal feeding and care, vaccines, spay and neuter surgery, rabies vaccination and licensing programs, dog bite investigation, enforcement, public safety response, and coordination for disaster evacuation. It cannot. The math is not sensible. No legitimate operation can deliver all of those legally mandated services (services the state of California requires this city to provide) for \$18,900. The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury confirmed exactly that, finding NBAS in violation of state law across every dimension of its operation. The crisis in Clearlake, where more than 100 animals were found living in their own waste after that city terminated its contract, was not an accident or a fluke. It was the inevitable result of a price point that was never honest about what it could deliver.

The liability exposure of the current arrangement should frighten this Council far more than the cost of fixing it. California law does not give cities the option of outsourcing their animal welfare obligations along with accountability for them. When NBAS fails to report dog bites to the county health officer, as the Grand Jury documented, that is Sebastopol's legal failure. When animals are not sterilized prior to placement as required under the Food and Agriculture

Code, that is Sebastopol's legal exposure. When licensing rates fall to half the national average and the city's rabies control obligations go unmet, the city is the responsible party. The cost of one serious lawsuit arising from a documented animal control failure, such as an unquarantined bite case, an improperly handled dangerous dog, or a public health incident, would dwarf the entire gap between what NBAS charges and what compliant and ethical service actually costs. The Council should understand that the approx. \$50,000 difference between the NBAS price and the HSSC/SCAS proposal is not a cost. It is insurance against a far larger one.

This Council needs real data, and until now it hasn't had it. You cannot manage what you cannot measure, and you cannot protect the city's finances against risks you cannot see. The HSSC/SCAS model, and any responsible successor contract, must include regular reporting of intake, outcomes, licensing rates, response times, and legal compliance. That data is how the Council will know whether it is getting what it is paying for, and it is how Sebastopol protects itself legally and financially going forward.

My ask of this Council is simple: Look at the independent cost analysis. Recognize that Sebastopol has been dramatically underinvesting in a legally mandated public safety function. Terminate a morally, legally, financially, and functionally indefensible contract with NBAS immediately. Accept the HSSC/SCAS bid to begin the process of proper service delivery, program clean up, and data discovery. Explore sustainable long-term models. Assign an oversight committee. Make the decision that protects this city, its budget, its residents, and the animals this program exists to serve.

Thank you,

Dr. Sarah Reidenbach



Animal Services Budget Analysis

Research based on public records, audited financial statements, and city budget documents

Purpose

This document provides budget and cost data for animal services programs in Marin County and Napa County — jurisdictions with no direct stake in Sebastopol's current provider negotiations. These figures are intended to give the City Council an independent baseline for evaluating what compliant, professionally operated animal services cost per capita and per animal in comparable Northern California communities.

Data for Sonoma County comparables (NBAS, HSSC, SCAS) is included in the final rows of the comparison table for reference.

This information is gathered based upon publicly available information and should be verified with each organization.

Key Findings

1. MARIN COUNTY is the clearest independent benchmark. Marin Humane operates a county-wide program under a Joint Powers Agreement serving all 11 cities and the unincorporated county (~270,000 residents). Its FY2023 audited financial statements show \$3.67 million in government contract fees and approximately \$10 million in total program expenses. This works out to roughly \$37 per capita per year, or an estimated \$2,174 per animal based on ~4,600 animals served annually.

2. NAPA COUNTY runs its own public shelter serving ~170,000 residents across four jurisdictions, with approximately 1,722–2,300 animals processed annually (per 2024 public statistics). The estimated cost per capita is \$14–21/year. The exact budget is embedded in the county Department of Public Works allocation and requires a Public Records Act request to confirm precisely.

3. SEBASTOPOL'S CURRENT SPENDING (\$2.42–\$2.56 per capita under NBAS) is far below every independent comparable — roughly 1/6 of Napa County's level and 1/15 of Marin County's

level. The 2024–2025 Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury documented that NBAS is operating in violation of applicable state laws and its contract terms.

4. THE HSSC/SCAS PROPOSAL (\$8.74 per capita) is more consistent with other small-city NBAS contract rates in Sonoma County (Windsor: \$8.29; Cloverdale: \$14.30) and represents a significant step toward legal compliance, though it is still below Napa and well below Marin quality levels.

Jurisdiction Comparison Table

Sources: Marin Humane audited financial statements (FY2023); Napa County Animal Shelter 2024 Asilomar statistics; City of Sebastopol staff report (November 2025 City Council meeting); Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury report (2024–2025); public contract documents.

Jurisdiction	Provider / Model	Annual Budget	Annual Intake	Cost / Animal	Cost / Capita	Source / Notes
MARIN COUNTY						
Marin County (county-wide)	Marin Humane – nonprofit contract via JPA	~\$10M total ops	~4,600 animals/yr	~\$2,174	~\$37	Audited financials FY2023; \$3.67M in govt fees; ~\$10M total program spend; pop. ~270K
<i>Note: Marin Humane's \$3.67M in government contract fees (FY2023 audited) represent the public subsidy portion; total program expenses were ~\$10M. Marin Humane also raises private donations. The \$10M figure covers all services county-wide for a population of ~270,000 across 11 cities/towns. This is the most rigorous animal services program in the North Bay — consistently cited as a model system.</i>						
NAPA COUNTY						
Napa County (unincorp. + City of Napa + American Canyon + Yountville)	County-run shelter (Dept. of Public Works); Sheriff ACOs for animal control	Est. \$2–3M	~1,722 animals (2024)	~\$1,160–\$1,740	~\$14–21	2024 Asilomar stats: 1,722 live releases + 92 euthanized = ~1,814 total. Budget est. from Napa County DPW allocation; exact figure requires

Jurisdiction	Provider / Model	Annual Budget	Annual Intake	Cost / Animal	Cost / Capita	Source / Notes
						public records request.

Note: Napa County shelter serves ~4 jurisdictions covering ~170,000 residents. The shelter takes in an average of ~2,300 animals per year (per county website) across cats, dogs, and rabbits. The 2024 Asilomar stats show 1,722 live outcomes + 92 euthanasias = ~1,814 recorded. The shelter operates under the County Sheriff and Public Works departments. Budget not publicly itemized online — a Public Records Act request to Napa County would yield the exact figure.

SONOMA COUNTY — FOR REFERENCE (parties active in Sebastopol negotiations)

Rohnert Park + Cotati	City-run shelter (RPAS); animal control via Rohnert Park Dept. of Public Safety	Unknown — embedded in Public Safety budget	~1,200/yr (est.)	Unknown	Unknown	Budget line not publicly separated. Serves pop. ~50K (RP + Cotati). Requires Public Records Act request.
Windsor	NBAS (contract)	\$228,042	Unknown	Unknown	~\$8.30	Contract awarded May 2024. Pop. ~27,500. No public intake data found.
Cloverdale	NBAS (contract)	\$118,716	Unknown	Unknown	~\$14.30	Contract eff. June 2021. Pop. ~8,300. No public intake data found.
Sebastopol (FY25-26 budget allocation)	NBAS (current, month-to-month)	\$20,000 (budget allocation)	Unknown	Unknown	~\$2.56	City's allocated budget for animal services FY25-26. Pop. ~7,800. Corresponds to NBAS proposal of \$18,900/yr.
Sebastopol (HSSC/SCAS proposal)	SCAS (field) + HSSC (shelter) collaborative	\$68,174	Unknown	Unknown	~\$8.74	Nov. 2025 RFP response. \$2,319/mo field + \$3,362/mo sheltering. Full legal compliance included.

Per Capita Cost Summary

Per capita spending is the most useful cross-jurisdictional metric because it normalizes for population differences. The figures below compare what residents in comparable communities pay each year for animal services.

Jurisdiction / System	Annual Budget	Population Served	Cost / Capita / Year	Notes
Marin County (Marin Humane JPA)	~\$10M	~270,000	~\$37	Full-service, high-quality, well-funded regional system. FY2023 audited financials.
Napa County (county-run)	~\$2–3M (est.)	~170,000	~\$14–21 (est.)	County-operated with Sheriff ACOs. Budget not publicly itemized — est. from dept. structure.
Sebastopol (NBAS current)	\$18,900–\$20,000	~7,800	~\$2.56	Below all comparable jurisdictions. Grand Jury found NBAS in violation of state law and contract terms.
Sebastopol (HSSC/SCAS proposal)	\$68,174	~7,800	~\$8.74	Full legal compliance, split SCAS field + HSSC shelter model. Nov. 2025 RFP response.
Windsor, CA (NBAS contract)	\$228,042	~27,500	~\$8.29	Awarded May 2024. NBAS provider. Note: NBAS compliance issues documented county-wide by Grand Jury.
Cloverdale, CA (NBAS contract)	\$118,716	~8,300	~\$14.30	Contract eff. 2021. NBAS provider. Same compliance caveats apply.

Recommended Budget Planning Range for Sebastopol

Based on independent comparables, the following ranges represent realistic planning scenarios for the City of Sebastopol (population ~7,800):

Scenario	Annual Budget	Cost / Capita	Est. Cost / Animal*	Assessment
NBAS current (status quo)	\$18,900	\$2.42	Unknown	Below legal compliance threshold per Grand Jury. Not recommended.
HSSC/SCAS (Nov. 2025 proposal)	\$68,174	\$8.74	~\$150–250 (est.)	Meets legal requirements. Comparable to Windsor per capita. Recommended minimum for compliance.
Napa-comparable (county-quality service)	\$110,000–\$165,000 (est.)	\$14–21	~\$250–450 (est.)	Estimated range for Sebastopol if services scaled to Napa County per-capita quality. Would require dedicated contract or JPA participation.
Marin-comparable (full-service regional)	~\$290,000 (est.)	~\$37	~\$500–700 (est.)	Reflects Marin Humane model. Requires JPA or county-wide partnership. Aspirational benchmark — not achievable as single small city.

** Cost per animal is an estimate only. Sebastopol's annual animal intake is not publicly documented in any contract reviewed. Requesting this data from the provider is recommended.*

Data Gaps and Recommended Next Steps

Several data points could not be confirmed from public sources alone and would strengthen the Council's analysis if obtained:

1. Sebastopol annual animal intake: Request from NBAS (or Police Dept. logs) the number of animals handled in Sebastopol each year. This is required to calculate a true cost-per-animal figure.
2. Napa County animal services budget: File a California Public Records Act request with the Napa County Department of Public Works for the Animal Shelter budget line item (FY2024-25). This would produce an excellent, fully independent cost-per-animal benchmark.

3. Rohnert Park animal services budget: Same approach — CPRA request to the City of Rohnert Park for the animal services budget line within the Public Safety department. Rohnert Park operates a city-owned, open-admission shelter serving a similar regional role.
 4. Marin Humane's government contract breakdown by city: The MGSA (Marin General Services Authority) manages the JPA contract and publishes annual budgets. Requesting the per-city cost allocation would show what a Sebastopol-equivalent community pays within the Marin system.
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Independent Third-Party Budget Tool

The Human Animal Support Services (HASS) organization, a nationally recognized nonprofit animal welfare research group, offers a free public Budget Calculator (humananimalsupportservices.org/the-hass-budget-calculator) that calculates an evidence-based ideal budget for government-funded shelters based on a community's population, animal intake volume, local wage rates, and call volume. The Council may wish to have staff run Sebastopol's parameters through this tool to produce an independent, third-party budget estimate that is entirely unconnected to any current provider.