

## **A Shelter in Crisis – Part II**

### **A Critical Assessment of “Animal Care Services Review: Phase Two”**

This document presents the response of animal advocacy group No Kill Long Beach (formerly Stayin’ Alive Long Beach) to the major findings reported in “Animal Care Services Review: Phase Two.”

Phase Two of the Auditor’s Review addresses staffing levels and revenue generation, both of which impact animal welfare at the Long Beach Animal Care Services animal shelter. Phase One of the Auditor’s Review, released in December 2017, addressed issues of shelter operations, including animal care, veterinary services, euthanasia procedures, and cleanliness, among others. No Kill Long Beach’s response to Phase One of the Animal Care Services review can be found [here](#).

No Kill Long Beach would like to thank City of Long Beach Auditor Laura Doud and her staff for completing this comprehensive study of Long Beach Animal Care Services (LBACS).

### **Volunteer Program Recommended**

As was the case with the first phase of the Auditor’s Review, “Animal Care Services Review: Phase Two” makes some of the recommendations No Kill Long Beach has made over the past five years; in particular, Phase Two makes a strong recommendation for a volunteer program, which No Kill Long Beach has advocated for repeatedly in [research reports](#), in conversations with City Council members, [while speaking at City Council](#), and on social media as a cost-effective method for increasing the live release rate at the shelter. This is a positive, and we believe, progressive direction for LBACS to move in; however, it is not one that City management, the Mayor and City Council did not know about, and it is one that for five years they have avoided, at great cost to taxpayers. We hope that the audit’s recommendation to have a robust volunteer program is fully embraced by the Mayor, Council and City management going forward.

### **Chronic Mismanagement of LBACS Points to Deficits in City Management**

The volunteer program notwithstanding, the theme developed in the first phase of the Auditor’s Review is revisited and deepened in the second. There now can be no doubt that LBACS is a shelter in crisis – lacking proper staffing to maintain humane care of animals, while simultaneously mismanaging taxpayer funds in ways that show a gross disregard for or misapprehension of fiscally-responsible management of taxpayer resources.

Based on the Auditor’s findings, it is clear that LBACS has been chronically mismanaged, not only currently, but also at least since 2009, and likely earlier. Given the depth and breadth of the problems documented by the Auditor’s review, and the nearly ten-year span of financial hemorrhaging of taxpayer dollars discussed in the report that has occurred through LBACS’ mismanagement, all to the detriment of shelter animals and taxpayers in Long Beach, it is clear

that oversight of the shelter by the current City Administration, led by City Manager, Patrick West, since he took the position in 2007, has been inadequate and has cost the taxpayers of Long Beach over a million dollars over the past decade.

In addition to the above, Long Beach taxpayers and the animal welfare community must take note of the following points arising from the second phase of the audit, all of which are detrimental to Long Beach's shelter animals:

- 1. The report continues to provide overwhelming evidence that LBACS is performing below standard in many of the most basic areas of animal sheltering.** Phase Two reveals a shelter that provides grossly inadequate care to animals, including an inability to properly feed animals or clean animals' housing. According to the report, animals receive only 6 minutes of care per day -- less than half the industry-recommended standard of 15 minutes. Even more troubling, the report finds that veterinary care is insufficient, with a very high ratio of animals to veterinary staff, and with veterinary staff at times unable to complete daily rounds to check on animals' welfare. Daily rounds are a very basic requirement of animal sheltering, without which animals often fall ill. No Kill Long Beach's research has shown that animals euthanized for illness at LBACS often come into the shelter healthy but suffer declines in health over time, and they are subsequently euthanized for illnesses caused by the shelter itself. The Auditor's review blames a lack of staffing for these deficits; however, the City has repeatedly hired managers from within the City's ranks with no experience in animal shelter management. It is difficult to believe that the City's habit of hiring managers with no animal shelter management experience has not affected staff's ability to work at optimal levels. Now that the current LBACS manager is now leaving LBACS, the City has an opportunity to remedy this. Hiring a shelter manager with demonstrated knowledge and experience in animal sheltering management would bring efficiencies to LBACS operations that could potentially mitigate, at least to some extent, the need for additional staff.
- 2. Fiscal mismanagement at LBACS continues to be a problem, in spite of the fact that such mismanagement is a longstanding issue and has been the subject of two prior audits.** The Auditor's review notes that LBACS has failed to collect nearly \$1 million in citations since 2009, collecting only 13% of the fees due to LBACS. Nearly 2/3 of the outstanding amount can no longer be collected due to statutes of limitation in effect. Even more troubling: this is part of a pattern that has been in place at LBACS for nearly a decade. The report alluded to, but did not explain, that the City Auditor's Office (CAO) carried out [an audit](#) in 2011 that revealed that an LBACS employee had embezzled over \$250,000 from LBACS. The audit found that the theft was made possible by lax accounting procedures in place at LBACS. Subsequent [news articles](#) reported that the employee had embezzled \$600,000 over the course of a career at LBACS. A [2014 audit](#) found that problems with LBACS' accounting procedures that had led to the embezzlement had not been fully resolved.

These past issues point to a persistent problem at LBACS that has been a problem during the entire tenure of the current City Manager, and they should have been clearly articulated in Phase Two. The fact that they were not raises questions as to the Auditor's commitment to full transparency in the way that LBACS has been and is being managed, and to the issue of

accountability by City management as to the shelter's overall operation.

3. **The Auditor's reviews continue to de-emphasize adoptions as a primary means of saving lives.** In spite of the several positive recommendations contained in the report, the report makes almost no mention of an adoption program as a primary way to increase the live release rate and thereby save more shelter animals' lives. We note, in particular, that although a robust volunteer program is the first recommendation made in the report, none of the volunteer tasks specifically named in the report involve volunteers organizing, assisting with or staffing on- or offsite adoption events or working on mobile adoptions. Instead, the report cites administrative functions (filing, organizing supplies, data entry, opening mail) and assisting the veterinary team (cleaning and prepping instruments) as examples of areas in which volunteers can be utilized, ignoring the great potential for the use of volunteers in adoption program-related activities.

Further, Phase Two notes that that LBACS' rehoming team (charged with adoptions, rescue transfers, and behavioral enrichment, among other duties) is understaffed compared with other shelters, and recommends the use of volunteers to complement their efforts, but makes only passing reference to the use of volunteers to assist the Rehoming Team with adoptions. An adoption program is an absolutely essential program in animal sheltering. The omission of adoption-related activities in the discussion of permitted volunteer activities is noticeable and gives rise to questions of whether the Auditor has properly examined the role of SpcaLA in inhibiting LBACS' adoption program, as has been explained by shelter management to animal advocates in the past.

4. **Increases in licensing compliance enforcement recommended by the Audit could have adverse consequences for people's companion animals.** One of the recommendations made in the audit is to have "external veterinarians submit vaccination data which can alert [LB]ACS to the need for new licenses" (Phase Two, p. 16). This recommendation is controversial. Veterinarians in other locales considering such measures have voiced concerns about the erosion of trust between client and veterinarian that occurs when veterinarians report vaccination data to animal control. Veterinarians also have raised concerns that such an intrusion into the veterinary-client relationship may discourage people from taking their pets to the vet for necessary care for fear of being reported to authorities. There are few benefits to increasing licensing compliance, particularly when increased funding is not specifically linked to an increase in the shelter's budget. Further, the potential drawbacks of increasing licensing enforcement are many.

5. **It is not clear that a sufficiently broad base of stakeholders will be permitted to be involved in the creation of the LBACS strategic plan.** The Auditor's review and City's response show overreliance on a small task force to provide input into the strategic plan. Mayor Garcia announced the new task force just prior to the April 2018 election. While it is encouraging to see that community members will have a voice in the creation of LBACS' strategic plan, the process by which the plan is crafted needs to involve a large base of stakeholders, with data collected by a third-party consultant (the City implies that this will be the case) who gathers data from a wide range of stakeholders through a series of listening tours, focus groups, surveys and other data-gathering methods commonly used in strategic planning.

More broad-based input from a variety of stakeholders will ensure that the City of Long Beach has the shelter that reflects the compassionate and humane values of the people of Long Beach.

6. **Sacramento ACS's performance continues to prove that more money is not the answer to LBACS' poor shelter performance.** The audit's recommendations for more staffing and more resources ignore a key data point that the audit itself made, and that No Kill Long Beach has made many times over the past 5 years: Sacramento ACS continues to outperform LBACS, in spite of the fact that: 1) Sacramento ACS is responsible for covering a larger service area than Long Beach is, 2) Sacramento has a comparable population to that of Long Beach, 3) Sacramento ACS has a smaller budget than LBACS does, 4) Sacramento ACS has fewer full-time employees 5) Sacramento ACS takes in almost two times as many animals as Long Beach, and 6) Sacramento ACS has no partner shelter like LBACS has in SpcaLA. Yet, Sacramento still manages to have a higher live release rate than LBACS (see Phase Two, p. 3 for a chart comparing Sacramento ACS and LBACS).

Taken as a whole, it is clear that LBACS is a shelter in crisis, a fact amply demonstrated by two CAO reports that have taken more than 18 months to complete. Looking at the results of the Auditor's two reviews, it seems clear that the mismanagement at LBACS reflects larger mismanagement at the City Manager level – mismanagement that has resulted in the killing of more than 40,000 animals at the Long Beach Animal Care Services shelter since 2007. While this information is daunting, it is, nonetheless, for many animal advocates, a relief to have the deplorable state of the LBACS animal shelter finally on public record. This presents the City with a clear opportunity to reform Long Beach Animal Care Services by implementing best practices in sheltering and by hiring a shelter manager who has demonstrated experience in implementing No Kill policies and practices, who is compassionate and hardworking, and who will work to ensure that Long Beach fulfill its promise of being the humane and compassionate No Kill City the good people of Long Beach want it to be.