

---

**From:** Dr Bill Larson [mailto:drbilllarson@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 29, 2008 11:44 AM  
**To:** Exec.Sims@kingcounty.gov; KCC, Comments; cclarridge@seattletimes.com;  
skrishnan@seattletimes.com; TracyV@KOMOTV.com; dfeldman@king5.com  
**Subject:** Current State of King County Animal Care and Control

September 26, 2008

Dear Mr. Sims, King County Council Members, and Editors:

I have been following the events at King County Animal Care and Control closely for the past year, and am compelled to write regarding the current state of the Kent facility. Ten years ago when I was employed by King County as the shelter veterinarian, I resigned in large part due to the poor facilities, bad management, inadequate funding, and unwillingness of the management all the way to the top to see the problems right before their eyes.

Several months ago, reports from the Citizens Advisory Committee, Nathan Winograd (No Kill Advocacy Center) and a team from UC Davis Shelter Medicine program all indicated that conditions had not improved in the years since I had been employed. Unfortunately, this criticism has also been coming from a number of other fronts including local veterinarians, and there is a distinct tendency for the blame to fall on the shelter staff. As a result, the council is considering privatizing Animal Care and Control, hoping someone else can solve the problem.

Based on my experience in a number of animal shelters working closely with the front line staff, and based on my visit to the Kent facility this week, I can state with certainty that the staff responsible for the day to day operation of the Kent facility are doing an amazing job under nearly impossible circumstances. These people are asked to care for the cast off animals with no place left to go and no one to care for them. They love animals deeply, but are asked to face the grim task of euthanizing those that are chosen because they are unhealthy, suffering, or at worst, because there is simply no place left for them to go.

It's easy for those on the outside to wonder how this can be. Surely there can be homes found, veterinary care provided, and space in the shelter to keep them until they can be moved to a better place. King County is a progressive, relatively wealthy community, and surely care can be provided for all these animals.

In reality, animals are abandoned every day for reasons such as "I'm moving", "he got too big", "she keeps having kittens", "he sheds too much", "her pee stinks", and many more. Add to that the animals that are lost, found roaming, being neglected, and endangering other animals including humans, and a small appreciation of the magnitude of animal sheltering in an urban environment can be found.

In addition, KCACC provides service to one of the largest geographic counties in the country, around 2000 square miles, with large amounts of both rural and urban areas. However, the funding available is about the same as that provided for the City of Seattle Animal Control to cover less than 1 tenth the area, care for half the number of animals, and with the same number of field officers. The Kent facility was originally intended to be temporary, but has been in operation for over 30 years. On a fully staffed day, one staff member at Kent is responsible for the care of about 100 animals; in addition to working with the public looking for lost animals or looking to adopt a new pet.

As a shelter veterinarian, I know these problems are not unique. The goal of reducing euthanasia is one all shelter staff work for. Every shelter has its own method of dealing with these issues, and one of the most

popular is the "No Kill" movement. In spite of the plethora of books, articles and testimonials about the successes of this movement, the reality is that in order to achieve "no kill" status (most often defined as no euthanasia of healthy adoptable animals, virtually all of these shelters still euthanize animals) shelters invariably reach a population crisis of their own, and must stop taking in new animals. Some discourage intake by charging money for owner release animals. Some stop taking specific breeds most often pit bulls, which begs the question if the shelters won't take them, would there not be more running loose? While not universal, it is all too common for "no kill" shelters to become long term warehouses for homeless animals, where they have minimal basic care at best, and neglect at worst. Ultimately, King County cannot and should not refuse to take in any animal in need. Unfortunately, this makes the "no kill" goal nearly impossible.

However, this does not mean that significant improvements are not being made. After visiting the Kent shelter this week, I must say I was extremely impressed. There are certainly still problems to be overcome, but the facilities have improved dramatically. There is now good ventilation and separation of different populations. Isolation now has running water and independent ventilation. Volunteers are walking dogs, and an outdoor exercise area has been provided. Cat cages are now stainless steel, and much easier to sanitize. Grates have been placed over the drain trough in the dog runs, preventing direct access to waste. The veterinary staff in particular should be commended for outstanding work in the face of overwhelming numbers of animals.

Progress must continue, but progress is being made. The staff is dedicated and care deeply about the animals in their care. The fire that was lit a few months ago is showing signs of having done a great deal of good. In order for that good to continue, the council and the executive must fully support and adequately fund Animal Care and Control. Privatizing the shelter is merely an easy way out, and pushes the responsibility to someone else.

When I was employed in the mid 1990's, the agency constructed and began operating the spay/neuter clinic at the Kent shelter in less than 2 years. This state of the art facility is still performing thousands of surgeries each year, and has been a dramatic improvement. This proves that King County is indeed capable of moving forward quickly and efficiently, and can provide dramatically improved care for homeless animals. I ask that all people who care about homeless animals do everything they can to support their local animal shelter, and spay or neuter all your dogs and cats! I urge the council and the executive to keep the shelter operating as a county agency, and give the homeless animals of King County and the heroic staff of KCACC everything they deserve.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bill Larson

Owner, Peninsula Mobile Veterinary Clinic PS, Poulsbo, WA

Board Member, Kitsap Humane Society, Silverdale, WA

Member of the American Association of Shelter Veterinarians

Associate Veterinarian in private practice in Edmonds, WA and Silverdale WA 1999-2006.

Shelter Veterinarian, King County Animal Care and Control 1996-1999.

Shelter Veterinarian, Humane Society for Seattle King County, 1995-1996

Shelter Veterinarian, Progressive Animal Welfare Society Lynwood, WA, 1993-1995

Spay/Neuter surgeon volunteer and paid for The Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project, Seattle WA, 1997-2007

Relief veterinarian, Seattle Animal Control, mid 1990's

Volunteer veterinary services post Hurricane Katrina, Houma, LA, Fall, 2005

Senior year elective quarter in Shelter Medicine at The Ohio State University College of Veterinary  
Medicine, 1992.

19689 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE #327  
Poulsbo, WA 98370  
360-598-3900  
[drbilllarson@hotmail.com](mailto:drbilllarson@hotmail.com)