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From: Michael Mavrovouniotis [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 19, 2023 9:19 PM
To: Council
Subject: OC Animal Care - Grand Jury
Attachments: Grand Jury with Comments.pdf; OCAC Summary.pdf

I am submitting two short documents on OC Animal Care for distribution to the City Council and inclusion in the record (along with the text of this message):

A 6-page file "Grand Jury with Comments.pdf" contains comments on the Findings and Recommendations of the Grand Jury report on OC Animal Care.

A 2-page file "OCAC Summary.pdf" contains a brief assessment of the decline in the performance of OC Animal Care. This assessment predates the publication of the Grand Jury report, yet reached the same conclusions. Compared to 2019, the length of stay for adult dogs has increased by 60%, and the kill rate has increased by 104%, even though adult dog intakes have decreased by 28%. This drop in performance is concurrent with changes in animal care and the adoption process:

- Adopters can no longer view available dogs in the kennels.
- Adopters select up to two dogs to visit per appointment by perusing an online photo lineup.
- Play groups for large dogs that were in existence in 2019 have been suspended.

A more detailed report can be found here:

<https://app.box.com/s/2nrpxbl7kac7wjikyc88519ssjwi5pmt>

Newer reports and data can be found on the website [OCShelter.com](https://www.ocshelter.com)

CAUTION: Think Security! This email is not from someone at the City of Lake Forest. **Do not click any links or open any attachments you are not expecting.**

The Grand Jury Report can be found here:

[https://www.ocgrandjury.org/pdfs/2022_2023_GJreport/Gimme Shelter and a Pound of Advice.pdf](https://www.ocgrandjury.org/pdfs/2022_2023_GJreport/Gimme%20Shelter%20and%20a%20Pound%20of%20Advice.pdf)

It can also be downloaded from the ocshelter.com website, along with other reports on OC Animal Care.

The text of each Grand Jury Finding is the intact text from the Grand Jury Report. Most (but not all) Findings are followed by a Comment in italics, which is the opinion of the author. The same format is used to show, and comment on, the Grand Jury Recommendations.

GRAND JURY FINDINGS

Management:

- F1** Management has limited flexibility utilizing personnel within Orange County Animal Care across departments due to structured work rules, volunteer work restrictions, and employees working in departmental silos.

Comment: The consequence is that kennels are understaffed while the office is overstaffed.

- F2** Low staff morale exists within Orange County Animal Care.

Comment: Management is not providing appropriate policies and resources to take care of the animals. The shelter is not providing proper cleaning, socialization, and enrichment programs. They advertise a luxurious adoption process which the insufficient numbers of kennel staff cannot possible provide. Stressed animals and overworked kennel staff, isn't that a recipe for low staff morale?

- F3** Orange County Animal Care staffing is negatively impacted by vacant positions remaining unfilled for greater than six months due to burdensome hiring processes. This delay in recruitment and completion of hiring has resulted in qualified candidates declining job offers.

Comment: OCAC fails to recognize that good kennel staff have valuable skills and experience. Qualified candidates for these positions are the most likely to find other opportunities while OCAC keeps them waiting.

- F4** Based upon industry standards and best practices, Orange County Animal Care kennel attendants are understaffed to meet the needs of animals under care.

Comment: The consequences of the understaffing are dire and cumulative: Dogs are not getting socialized and spend multi-day stretches shut in the kennels. Kennels cannot be cleaned frequently or thoroughly, and the dogs are typically still in the kennel during cleaning. Perhaps the management bars the public from the kennel areas so that they cannot witness these poor conditions.

As to adoptions, there is no way that overworked kennel staff can provide time-consuming "concierge" counseling service; this has been false advertising on the part of shelter management all along.

F5 Orange County Animal Care's operating policies and procedures manual is out of date.

Comment: Of course they are. The management's energy has been directed at producing outward-looking deceptive advertising. The PR documents are not truthful but they are polished. The substantive documents, including behavior evaluation, enrichment tracking, and adoption range from non-existent to outdated.

F6 The Orange County Animal Care Volunteer program was stopped during COVID-19 and restarting the program has been slow, resulting in decreased animal socialization and enrichment.

Comment: Instead of recruiting volunteers to provide better care for the animals, the management opted to lower care standards, keep the public from witnessing the deterioration, and present a false glossy image.

Animal Welfare

F7 Orange County Animal Care's Behavior Evaluation Committee evaluates dogs for euthanasia without written guidelines, policies, or procedures, resulting in inconsistent outcomes over time. Behavior evaluated euthanasia outcomes are dependent on the experience and personal considerations of the individual committee members and management rather than written objective standards.

Comment: Indeed. Perhaps the shelter finds this convenient. It's easier to euthanize for space and label it as behavior.

F8 The rate of behavioral euthanasia of dogs has increased significantly over the last 2 years.

Comment: And this happened in the face of lower intakes in 2020-2022 than in the pre-pandemic period (2019). The shelter's policies, from inadequate socialization to sloppy assessment are at fault. Reliable studies have shown that no other explanation can be found for the rising kill rate. Analysis in <https://app.box.com/s/nn5dlq95f37nhiiip2l5jo720gazffs3z>

F9 Orange County Animal Care does not employ a professional or trained and certified animal behaviorist to oversee the shelter's dog enrichment program, resulting in dogs with declining behavior being placed at greater risk of being euthanized.

Comment: This is part of the overall disregard of behavior issues (except as excuses for euthanasia).

F10 While many county and city animal shelters throughout the state have active Trap, Neuter, and Return programs, Orange County Animal Care stopped its Trap, Neuter, and Return program, reportedly on the basis of the County Counsel's legal opinion that the program violates a California statute related to willful animal abandonment.

F11 The termination of the Trap, Neuter, and Return program is correlated with an increase in adult cat euthanasia rate at the shelter.

Comment: No surprise. TNR is an investment that pays off in reduced intakes and euthanasia, especially for kittens. Here is a simple comparison: In 2019 the intake ratio of kittens : adult cats was 1.8:1; in 2022 that ratio rose to 4:1. The shelter is disproportionately taking in, and euthanizing, kittens. TNR can stem that.

F12 There have been public concerns and requests expressed over the years for public programs to include a spay/neuter program by Orange County Animal Care.

Comment: Whatever the method, it is in the best interest (monetary as well as humane) of the shelter and the participating cities to reduce the overpopulation of animals. Spay/neuter programs are a good way to do that.

Communication / Outreach

F13 The current adoption appointment system restricts public access to the dog kennels, thereby limiting potential adopters' access to all available animals.

Comment: This diminished access has slowed down adoptions, and that means animals are staying longer at the shelter. Longer stays mean higher costs, more stress, behavior problems (abetted by inadequate enrichment), and more euthanasia. The rapid increase in length of stay is analyzed by the OCShelter.com website, specifically in Appendix A of this report: <https://app.box.com/s/2nrpxbl7kac7wjikyc88519ssjwi5pmt>.

F14 Orange County Animal Care's engagement with some animal rescue partners is negatively impacted due to differences of opinion in appropriate animal care policy.

Comment: Rescue partners are being asked to shoulder the burden of bad policies. For adult dogs, in 2019 there were 6 adoptions for every transfer to rescue. In 2022, there were only 3.2 adoptions for each rescue. Adult dog intakes were 28% lower in 2022 than 2019. With fewer intakes, the shelter was unable to get animals adopted and resorted to turning up the pressure on rescues. It's only natural that the rescues do not want to shoulder the consequences of the shelter's self-inflicted problems.

F15 Internal and community engagement does not adequately communicate the shelter's mission and operating strategy.

Comment: The only discernible an operating "strategy" is putting out abundant untruthful PR.

F16 The information currently on the Orange County Animal Care website for low- cost spay/neuter is not up to date with regard to referrals and prices for spay/neuter procedures.

Comment: The information on the website has a strained relationship to truth. A prime example is the "Fact Check" document, filled with misleading and flat-out false statements.

Impediments to the Investigation

- F17** The OC County Counsel's office misstated to the Grand Jury the scope of its commitment to serving and assisting the Grand Jury in its investigations into County governance respecting managing conflicts between the Board of Supervisors, OC departments and agency clients, and the Grand Jury.

GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

Management:

- R1** By October 1, 2023, OC Human Resource Services should review and update recruitment strategies to significantly increase the timeliness of recruitment of vacant positions and to anticipate vacancies due to retirement, resignations, transfers. (F3)

Comment: This must be done faster, in regard to kennel staff. The shelter is full and kennel staffing is even more deficient now (mid-2023) than at the time of the Grand Jury analysis.

- R2** By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should review hiring practices to facilitate process improvements to expedite filling OCAC vacancies. (F3)

Comment: Needed faster. See above.

- R3** By October 1, 2023, OC Community Resources and Orange County Animal Care should review their current staffing allocations of Animal Care Attendants to reflect NACA guidelines and to provide appropriate staffing allocations for animal care, feeding and enrichment. (F3, F4)

Comment: Needed immediately. The shelter is full. As a result, quality of care has declined since the Grand Jury's report. Stress has increased, and so has euthanasia.

- R4** By October 1, 2023, OC Community Resources and Orange County Animal Care should review their current staffing allocations of all positions within the OCAC and reallocate resources to increase Animal Care Attendants to reflect NACA guidelines to provide appropriate staffing for animal care, feeding, and enrichment. (F3, F4)

Comment: Needed immediately. See above.

- R5** By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should review and update policies, procedures, guidelines, and practices to assure they are accurate and reflect current operating practices. (F5)

Comment: There are steps that can be taken immediately, such as: Remove the deceptive "Fact Check" document and certain similar portions of the website. Remove the false claims of concierge service and oversold counseling that the shelter is in no position to provide.

- R6** By June 30, 2024, the Board of Supervisors should evaluate the strategic option of creating a Joint Powers Authority for the County and fourteen contract Cities to take ownership and shared responsibility for the financial and operating policies and practices of OCAC. (F1 thru F16)

Welfare

- R7** By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should establish written guidelines, policies, and procedures as standards for evaluating animal behavior for use by the Behavior Evaluation Committee. (F5, F7)

Comment: Sorely needed.

- R8** By December 31, 2023, in the interests of transparency, Orange County Animal Care management should add a representative from a rescue organization to serve as a non-voting, at-large member on the Behavior Evaluation Committee. (F7, F14)

Comment: Needed both to improve the decisions and to re-establish trust with rescue organizations.

- R9** By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should hire an animal behaviorist or certified dog trainers to work with aggressive animals to reduce the high rate of dogs being euthanized and enhance their adoptability. (F8, F9)

Comment: Needed, both to work directly with dogs and to systematically train volunteers and kennel staff, so that all can work as a team to preempt and address behavior issues.

- R10** By December 31, 2023, the Orange County Board of Supervisors and Orange County Animal Care management should request that County Counsel reconsider its opinion about the shelter's former Trap, Neuter, and Return program, or seek an independent second opinion to County Counsel's opinion, to ascertain whether the program can be re-established, or a modified version of the program can be implemented. (F10, F11)

Comment: An outside counsel opinion could be obtained on a faster timeline.

- R11** By July 1, 2024, Orange County Animal Care should implement a low-cost public spay/neuter program. (F12)

Communication / Outreach

- R12** By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should hold all- hands staff meetings at least every quarter. (F1, F2)

- R13** By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should conduct annual

surveys of staff to monitor morale and identify opportunities for operational improvement. (F1, F2)

- R14** By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should open the shelter to the public for walk throughs to maximize opportunities for the public to adopt animals under the care of the shelter. (F13)
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Comment: There is no reason to wait until December. The shelter is full now and in dire need of more adoptions. Allowing the public to walk through the kennel areas is merely a return to the 2019 practices. It's nothing radical. If the shelter needs to ease into this, it can easily do that by designating certain days of the week as free-walk-through days.

- R15** By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should look for new ways to be more inclusive and engaged with volunteers and the rescue organizations that are necessary for the shelter's success. (F14, F15)
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Comment: Indeed. Both of these fall in the purview of the Community Outreach department, which has in the past run roughshod over volunteers and rescues. The entire mode of operation of this department will have to change.

- R16** By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care should schedule quarterly meetings with community stakeholders to facilitate transparency and engagement. (F14, F15)
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Comment: These meetings need to be inclusive and substantive. In the current Community Outreach Committee meetings, shelter management treats the community as an adversary to be undercut, not as a partner to work with. Anybody raising a question or a different point of view is beaten back. A different model is needed.

- R17** By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should update the information currently on its website for low-cost spay/neuter of feral cats with regard to referrals and prices for spay/neuter procedures. (F16)

Impediments to the Investigation

- R18** Beginning with the 2023/2024 Grand Jury training, and all training thereafter, County Counsel should provide detailed instruction about the circumstances under which the County Counsel's office might recuse itself from assisting with Grand Jury investigations and the alternatives available to the Grand Jury under such circumstances. (F17)

An Assessment of OC Animal Care – Summary

Orange County Animal Care (OCAC) had excellent performance in 2019. The picture is different in 2022. For adult dogs:

- The length of stay has increased by 60%.
- The kill rate has increased by 104%.

This is not the result of a higher number of incoming animals. Comparing 2022 to 2019:

- Adult dog intakes have decreased by 28%.

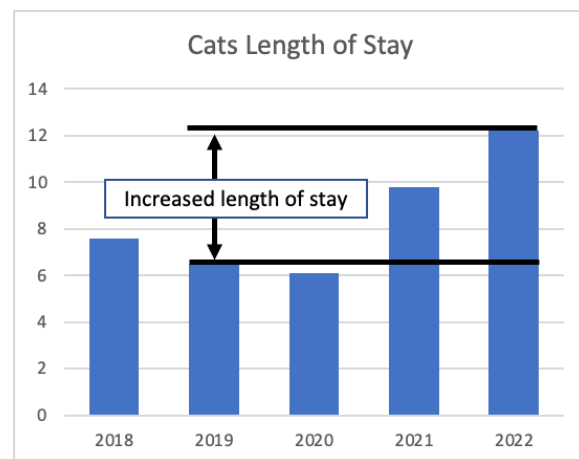
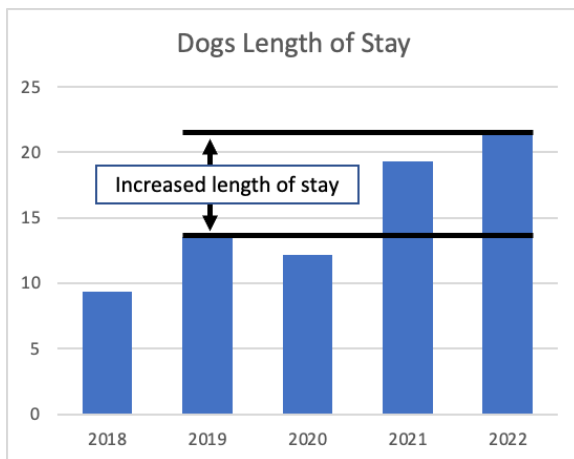
This drop in performance is concurrent with changes in animal care and the adoption process:

- Adopters can no longer view available dogs in the kennels.
- Adopters select up to two dogs to visit per appointment by perusing an online photo lineup.
- Play groups for large dogs that were in existence in 2019 have been suspended.

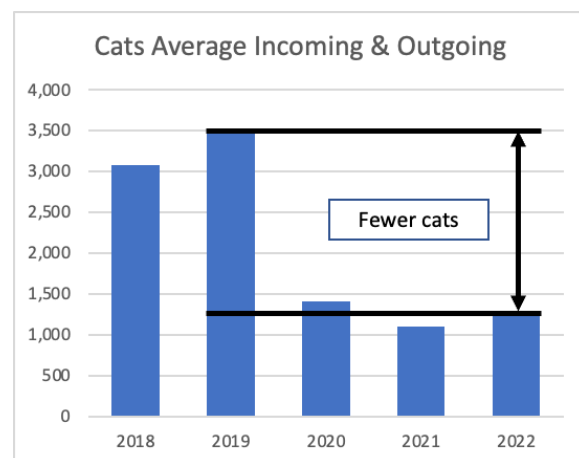
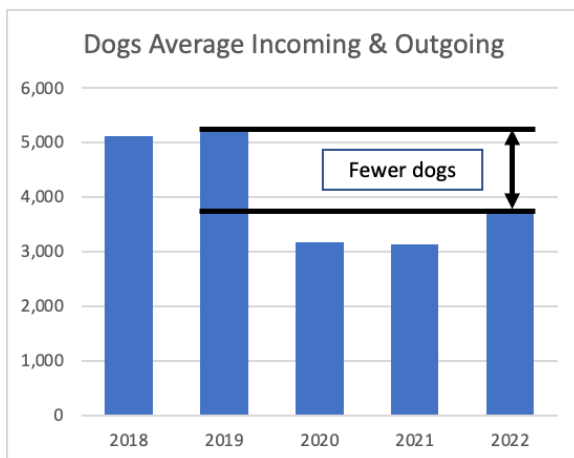
OCAC appears to be unaware of the decline in their critical metrics.

- The only way to ensure continuous improvement is to have better data analysis.

Length of Stay – Adult Dogs & Cats

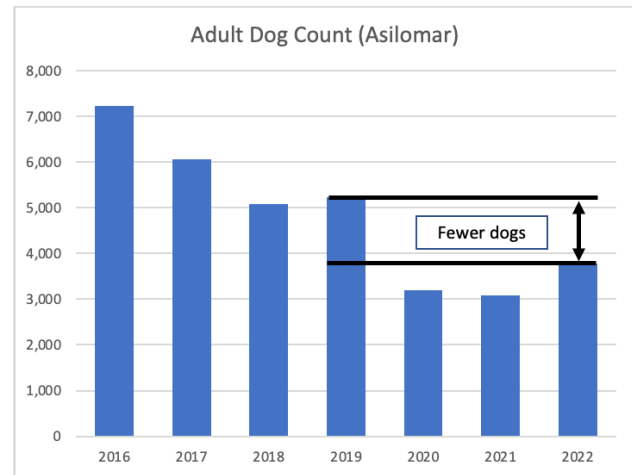
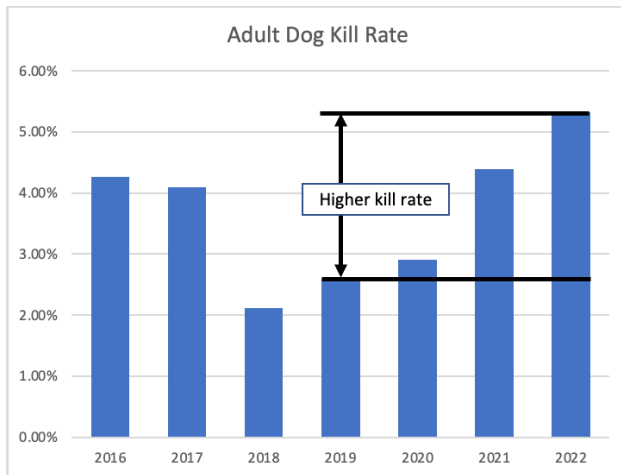


The length of stay was estimated from the average inventory (based on values from the first and last days of year) and the annual flow (based on incoming and outgoing animals). The graphs above show that the length of stay for adult dogs and cats has increased dramatically from 2019.



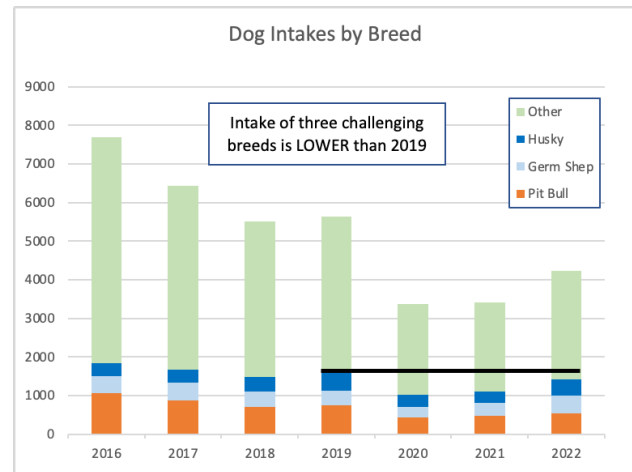
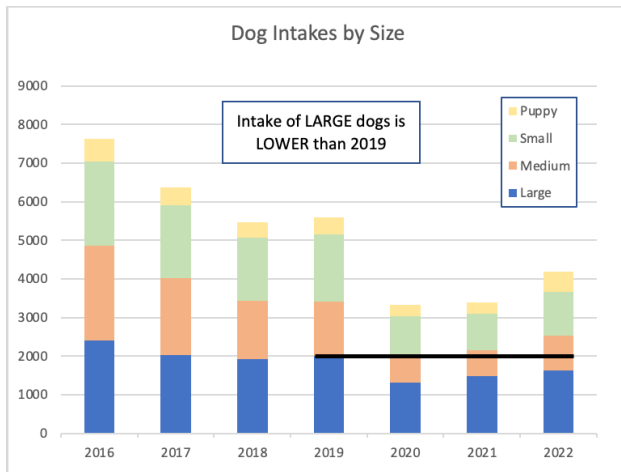
The change in the length of stay wasn't due to more animals coming into the shelter. In fact, the graphs above show that fewer adult dogs and cats were handled by the shelter than in 2019.

Kill Rate – Adult Dogs



The kill rate for adult dogs was calculated from the Asilomar data. The graphs above show that the kill rate has more than doubled since 2019 even though the shelter handles significantly fewer dogs.

Are there other mitigating factors?



The intakes for large dogs are somewhat lower than in 2019. The same applies for three of the more challenging breeds. If higher intakes for large dogs or challenging breeds aren't the problem, what is? The problem appears to be the long length of stay that results in: (1) a higher inventory, (2) more behavioral challenges, and (3) higher costs.

What can be done?

The adoption system is obviously performing poorly now compared to its performance in 2019. What was working in 2019 that isn't working today?

Picking a dog: Why can't people walk through the kennels to view the dogs prior to picking a dog? An online photo lineup doesn't tell you anything about the dog's personality. Since a person can only choose two dogs to visit with, being able to see and connect with the dog prior to visiting is important. How does a person choose from multiple huskies that all look similar without seeing them in person?

Reducing behavior problems & determining sociability: Play groups for the large dogs are no longer happening. Not only do play groups help reduce stress for the long term residents, but they also provide information to adopters that already have another dog at home.