

## WESTERN SLOPE ANIMAL SHELTER - QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Q: People have talked about the cost of building the shelter. Why is the cost more than say an office building or warehouse?**

A: Building an office building or warehouse or some other light industrial or commercial building that is more like a “shell” is indeed less expensive. If you are looking for other sorts of buildings to compare to, think hospital or jail. Current shelters have fairly exacting systems for plumbing, drainage, sanitation, HVAC. Shelter design standards are based on shelter operations, separating strays from adoptables, mitigating disease transmission, and maintaining the physical and mental health of the animals in care. No longer are there long rows of kennels, for example, or big areas of cats. Just like in modern hospitals, there are smaller “wards” of dogs; smaller groupings of cats in separate rooms. This way, if there is an outbreak of disease, you can control and contain to a limited area and quarantine a smaller number - the entire facility is not contaminated.

Also, a shelter is an intensively used public building. It gets that intensive use 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Q: I have heard cost per square foot figures for the shelter in the over \$440 per square foot range. How can that be?**

A: Be aware that a \$440+ per square foot figure takes all the costs of improving the site (on site and off site work, water lines, sewer lines, storm drains, etc.), designing and constructing the building and out buildings and, and construction contingency projections and spreads them to the 18,000 square foot building. This is a valid way to describe the complete cost of this facility, including preparing this 10 acre unimproved site for use. Just be clear about what that number is and is not. If you are thinking that it’s the cost of just constructing the building demonstrated in a cost per square foot manner, it is not. The 18,000 square foot building, itself, has an engineer’s estimate of a bit over \$4,000,000, or a cost per square foot of about \$224 per square foot. This is in a typical range for this sort of construction.

**Q: Can you save some money by cutting back the building?**

A: The square footage of the shelter building has already been reduced. One of the first things that happens in any design process is the determination of the space needed for required functions - the so called building program. This analysis was conducted for this project, using El Dorado County data about numbers of animals and type cared for. Using standard formulas, driven by the numbers/types of animals, space needs per kennel/cage, numbers of officers, and support areas (e.g.: food prep and storage areas, supplies and equipment areas), a building size of about a 24,000 square feet was generated. To reduce the cost, building elements were then eliminated, leaving only the very essential functions addressed. This reduction process brought the building down to 18,000 square feet. Below the 18,000 square feet number, you are cutting into core space needs. Even at the 18,000 square foot number, a low cost spay-neuter program would ideally be implemented to curb future growth in homeless animals.

**Q: Why is the location at the El Dorado “Y” the preferred site for the shelter?**

A: County officials conducted a long search for a suitable piece of property for well over a year. It comes down to this. There simply aren’t many sites that will work. It needs to be near major

transportation routes, accessible to the public, compatible with neighboring uses and large enough to house sheltering operations, animal services officer functions (people, trucks, trailers, specialized equipment), and areas for livestock that is also the responsibility of County Animal Services. There were no sites found that already had site improvements - that would have been great, but not the case. In February 2006, the Board of Supervisors approved the purchase. Fast forward to 2010 and now a considerable investment has been made in this site for its use as the shelter: the purchase; CEQA process; and design of the project.

**Q: What is this discussion about a road that the County has to build no matter what happens?**

A: The 10-acre parcel near the El Dorado “Y” was purchased for \$450,000, a good price. As a result of the purchase negotiations, a contractual obligation was included in the agreement that calls for the County to build an access road that not only provides the necessary access to the shelter facility, but also provides access to the remaining parcel that the land owner retained. County staff has been very clear that this road must be constructed by the County regardless of whether or not a shelter is constructed here. The cost of the road, itself, is estimated at about \$400,000, not including project management costs for that “piece” of the overall project.

**Q: In these difficult budget times for the County, how can money be spent on an animal shelter?**

A: These are most certainly difficult budget times for local governments as well as households throughout this county. El Dorado County and its leaders have and continue to make very hard budget choices including reductions in force and reorganizations of departments to balance the budget. Many of the people who are strong supporters of completing the Western Slope Shelter project have had the opportunity to interact with hard working, very competent, knowledgeable County staff and have a great deal of empathy for them and those that have had to make tough choices to reduce **General Fund operating expenses**.

That is why, in March 2009, when the Board effectively put the project on hold (allowed for readying the project for bid, but said they would not authorize the bid process), we did not press for moving it forward. Now, however, another fourteen months has passed. It is our understanding that the project funding that was appropriated for this **capital project** remains intact. Meanwhile: 1) thousands of dollars are spent each month to rent temporary facilities; 2) we are not taking advantage of a great bidding climate that won't last forever; 3) the City of Placerville's plans for Placerville Drive development and road/bridge widening adjacent to the temporary shelter won't be on hold forever; and 4) the lease on this temporary site, while probably renewable in the short term, won't be renewable forever. And finally, just recently, the Board was poised to spend just under \$3,000,000 for an industrial building that would have needed another \$4,000,000 in additional land and remodel costs, for use as the permanent animal shelter. Should the Board decide to use the capital project dollars to support annual operating expenses, they would indeed “buy” some time. But then what? Those very difficult operating expense budget choices would then be faced, some time later. But then, in addition, you no longer have the capital project dollars to complete a necessary county facility.