Animal Services has faced many challenges in its effort to provide care to the roughly 6,000+ animals that we encounter each year. We have made a number of changes to improve communications as well as coordination of services and service delivery over the last several months. While much has been accomplished, there is still significant work to do. Working in conjunction with the community we serve, there is an opportunity to together achieve the highest standards of service and care for our human and animal residents. Animal Services is exploring new initiatives to implement best practices in the field, add clarity and consistency to operations, and promote our goals of public safety and animal welfare.

First, we have drafted revisions to the County’s ordinance pertaining to dangerous dogs. Using other county ordinances as a model, we are proposing a revision to the current article on “Dangerous Dogs” to be titled “Potentially Dangerous Dogs and Vicious Dogs.” The proposed revisions allow for alternatives other than euthanasia, while maintaining a strong focus on public safety. (Please see the draft ordinance at www.sbcphd.org). We will be listening to a broad group of stakeholders for feedback and suggestions on the draft language on Wednesday, September 3, at 5:30 pm in Santa Barbara (300 N. San Antonio Road) and Thursday, September 4, at 5:30 pm in Santa Maria (548 W. Foster Road) prior to bringing the ordinance to the Board of Supervisors. We are looking forward to hearing from all on this issue, as community input is critical to identifying the best path forward.

Second, we have begun revising key policies, beginning with Animal Services’ relationship to Adoption Partner organizations. We are eager to get broad feedback on the draft Adoption Partner policy from stakeholders and have disseminated the policy widely for review, feedback and discussion. Our goal is to be fully inclusive and consider potential impacts and consequences before finalizing policies. The Adoption Partner Agencies policy will be discussed at a meeting on Wednesday, August 27 at 5:30 pm. at the Public Health Department (300 N. San Antonio Road). Finalization of the policy will only occur after there has been adequate input, discussion and consideration.

Third, County Animal Services is seeking a comprehensive assessment to consider how we may continue to improve program operations and outcomes. The assessment will identify existing strengths upon which we can build, as well as key areas in need of retooling. Recommendations will guide decision-making about where and how to direct resources to be most effective. The assessment will be conducted by an outside professional consulting agency with a national perspective, knowledge of best practices in the field, and expertise in similar Animal Services programs.
All of these initiatives are underway to promote quality services for the public, the animals and animal owners. Working in partnership with Animal Services employees, volunteers, rescues, advocates and other stakeholders, we will strengthen outcomes in our community. These are complex issues and we are looking forward to working with all to develop a premier animal services system within Santa Barbara County.