

Controversial West Slope animal shelter moves forward

By Kathryn Reed

It's possible the multi-million dollar animal shelter that has been in the works for a number of years on the West Slope will break ground this fall.



The 17,700-square-foot facility would consolidate the multiple locations El Dorado County Animal Services Authority currently occupies. It would also mean no longer needing to pay \$145,000 to lease space for large animals.

The shelter has been a bit controversial – with the latest attack coming from the grand jury. The 2010 report that came out this summer questions the Board of Supervisors' logic in 2006 to purchase the 10 acres between Shingle Springs and El Dorado when only 7.5 acres are useable; why the seller wasn't asked to help with improvements – like the \$1.5 million needed to put in a road to the location, drainage and other basics that will ultimately help the neighbors at no cost to them; and how the purchase got approved when the seller was a friend of a supervisor.

Despite the grand jury's findings, the county in July went forward with asking staff to come up with bid documents. The board could be asked to approve the bid package in September. The infrastructure improvements would be the first phase, with the building likely being under construction next summer, with a move-in date of 2012.

"I think the county itself has done everything in its power to find the right location for the shelter," said Henry Brzezinski, who runs Animal Services Authority. He oversees

the Meyers location, too. What happens on the West Slope won't affect operations in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

This is Brzezinski's second stint with the agency. When he worked for the county from 2003-08 he spent about 1.5 years helping to find a spot for the shelter.

"We have an excellent architect who has designed numerous shelters around the country so he knows what is needed," Brzezinski said.

Right now adoptable cats are in cages in the front lobby. A facility in Latrobe houses livestock. The administration office is about a half mile from the main shelter. A special use permit is required because it is not zoned for an animal shelter.

The new facility will have everything in one spot. It will be designed to accommodate adoptions, the nearly 100 volunteers associated with the facility, housing for animals that are quarantined, animals that may be involved in a lawsuit or criminal case.

"Sheltering in general is almost like having a medical hospital. You have to have proper control. You have to have separate zones for upper respiratory issues like kennel cough," Brzezinski said. "Even though you have to have secure closures, they have to be comfortable for animals for the long term."

Supervisors in May 2009 put \$6 million into the capital improvement budget for the facility.

At a time when the county continues to reduce services and eliminate jobs, some question why it is spending the money now on something like this.

"Technically, yes, they could spend all that money for ongoing operations, but that is not something our office would advise

they do because if you use it to fill an ongoing budget hole, it helps fill the hole in the budget year, but then the hole re-emerges the next year. And then you don't have anything to build anything with," said Mike Applegarth, senior administrative analyst for El Dorado County.

Another reason to start this year is contractors are scrambling for work – making bids on projects lower than years past, plus it provides jobs.