




# CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Mayor Eisenbeisz and Assembly Members

**Thru:** Rachel Jones, Municipal Attorney

**From:** John Leach, Municipal Administrator 

**Date:** February 9, 2025

**Subject:** Investigation into Euthanasia of Animals at the Sitka Animal Shelter

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### I. Introduction

On December 20, 2024, in response to public concerns and Assembly guidance, I initiated an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the euthanasia of animals at the Sitka Animal Shelter in September 2024. This report provides an objective analysis of the events, agreements, decisions, and compliance with applicable regulations.

### II. Background

A Support Agreement was established between the City and Borough of Sitka (CBS) and Friends of the Sitka Animal Shelter (FOSAS) on November 14, 2022, outlining responsibilities related to animal control and shelter operations. CBS maintained primary management authority, while FOSAS was responsible for volunteer coordination, fundraising, and certain animal welfare programs. The Sitka Police Department (SPD) was designated as the agreement's administrator.

Key developments included the resignation of the previous Animal Control Officer (ACO) on December 14, 2023, followed by the hiring of ACO Olivia Magni on January 8, 2024. Several challenges arose throughout 2024, including disputes over facility access, policy revisions, and operational oversight. These escalated following ACO Magni's disappearance on August 28, 2024, and her subsequent resignation on October 17, 2024.

### III. Investigation Scope and Methodology

The investigation focused on the following key areas:

1. The euthanasia of animals in September 2024, including procedural compliance and decision-making authority.
2. The enforcement of the Support Agreement and applicable city ordinances.
3. Facility management and oversight responsibilities.
4. Compliance with state and national animal welfare guidelines.

The investigation reviewed official reports, emails, municipal codes, veterinary guidelines, public statements, and testimony from relevant stakeholders.

#### **IV. Findings**

##### **A. Timeline of Key Events**

1. July 26, 2024 – FOSAS volunteers were barred from the ACO Facility by the direction of ACO Magni.
2. August 28, 2024 – ACO Magni went missing following an accident and did not return to work.
3. August 29, 2024 – Animal care responsibilities were assumed by SPD personnel.
4. September 5, 2024 – Four cats (Verstovia, Ford, Lupine, Mia) were euthanized by gunshot. The euthanasia was carried out outdoors at the CBS's Granite Creek facility by Lt. Achee as directed by Chief Baty, who was present.
5. September 13, 2024 – Two dogs (Nieda, Romeia) were euthanized by gunshot. The euthanasia was carried out outdoors in a bank behind the ACO Facility by Lt. Achee as directed by Chief Baty, who was present.
6. October 8, 2024 – The Municipal Administrator presented an agenda item to the CBS Assembly regarding shelter management concerns, leading to renewed mediation with FOSAS.
7. December 20, 2024 – Formal investigation initiated.

#### **V. Conclusion and Recommendations**

##### **A. Conclusion**

The euthanasia of animals in September 2024 was legally permissible under SGC 8.05.040 and was carried out by trained personnel following AVMA guidelines. However, the lack of transparency, consultation, and clear policies regarding shelter operations contributed to significant public concern and eroded trust between CBS, SPD, FOSAS, and the public.

##### **B. Recommendations**

1. Policy Revision and Clarity.
  - a. Update the Support Agreement or establish a formal MOU clarifying responsibilities between CBS and FOSAS.

- b. Establish explicit guidelines for euthanasia decision-making, including consultation with a veterinarian when feasible.
- 2. Improved Communication and Transparency.
  - a. Implement a structured communication process between CBS, SPD, and FOSAS.
  - b. Issue public notices regarding major shelter policy decisions.
- 3. Volunteer and Shelter Operations Management.
  - a. Restore structured volunteer access with proper scheduling and oversight.
  - b. Provide additional training for personnel involved in shelter management.
- 4. Long-Term Shelter Strategy.
  - a. Evaluate the feasibility of transitioning shelter management to FOSAS under a lease agreement.
  - b. Explore funding options for enhanced shelter operations and animal welfare programs.

## **VI. Next Steps**

A final draft MOU is currently under review by FOSAS and will be presented to the Assembly on February 25, 2025, barring any further corrections from FOSAS. CBS will implement corrective actions based on Assembly guidance. Further investigations or policy changes will be pursued as necessary.