



COUNTY *of* VENTURA

Civil Grand Jury

Compliance Reviews

OVERVIEW

Each year, a new Ventura County Civil Grand Jury is empaneled to investigate complaints and concerns raised by the residents of Ventura County regarding potential noncompliance by city and county governments, special districts, local law enforcement agencies, and specific nonprofit organizations to ensure their functions are lawful, economical, and efficient.

Based on its investigations, the Civil Grand Jury produces reports outlining Findings and Recommendations for the entities investigated. The Findings and Recommendations are also made available to the public.

The reports require responses from entities identified in the report, per California Penal Code 933.c. The California Penal Code mandates specific language in the response to Findings and Recommendations.

For each finding directed to a respondent, the respondent must state one of the following:

The respondent agrees with the finding; or

- The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response must specify the disputed portion and provide an explanation.

To each recommendation directed to the respondent, the respondent must indicate one of the following:

- The recommendation and summary of the actions have been implemented.
- The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be in the future, including a time frame for implementation.
- The recommendation requires further analysis, along with an explanation of the study's scope and a response time frame of up to six months from the report's release.
- The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable, with an explanation.

Compliance Review: Ventura County Animal Services Commission

The 2024-2025 Ventura County Civil Grand Jury published a report titled “Ventura County Animal Services Commission.” While all responses to our findings complied with the Penal Code requirements, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors, along with Ventura County Animal Services Commission and Ventura County Animal Services, indicated that Recommendations 1 through 6 and 8 would be implemented in the future. (The Board of Supervisors reported it needed further analysis to address Recommendation 7.)

Recommendation 01 states:

R-01. The Ventura County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Animal Services Commission review, reevaluate and revise Commission by-laws to facilitate better communication and nurture stronger collaboration between the Ventura County Board of Supervisors, the Commission and VCAS. This needs to be completed by December 31, 2025.

The BOS, the Commission and VCAS responded as follows:

“Your Board and the County’s proposed response to the Grand Jury Report states that Recommendations R-01, R-02, R-05 and R-06 will be implemented with anticipated completion in 2026.”

Recommendation 02 states:

R-02. The Ventura County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Animal Services Commission enhance accountability by establishing a transparent process and structured procedure to fulfill its core advisory role with the Ventura County Board of Supervisors. This needs to be completed by December 31, 2025.

The BOS, the Commission and VCAS responded as follows:

“Your Board and the County’s proposed response to the Grand Jury Report states that Recommendations R-01, R-02, R-05 and R-06 will be implemented with anticipated completion in 2026.”

The Civil Grand Jury found that recommendations 01 and 02 have been addressed by way of a “Change of Culture.” The hiring of a new VCAS director and his direct approach to tackling communication and collaboration issues have resulted in better cooperation. Continued face-to-face contact with all the rescue shelters around the county could improve the ability for VCAS to address countywide issues and outline them for the BOS.

Recommendation 03 states:

R-03. The Ventura County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Animal Services Commission support Ventura County Animal Services in developing proactive strategies and implementing community-targeted spay/neuter, licensing, and micro-chipping programs. This needs to be completed by December 31, 2025.

Recommendation 04 states:

R-04. The Ventura County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Animal Services Commission support Ventura County Animal Services’ re-engagement with local rescue and foster groups and other effective and proven methods that lead to long-term decreases in shelter population. This needs to be completed by December 31, 2025.

The 2024-2025 Ventura County Civil Grand Jury did not receive a response to Recommendations 03 or 04

However, the purchase of a mobile medical unit in 2026, via grants, allows VCAS to go to places and communities traditionally seen as too far away to service. It delivers four full-time surgeons and technicians to whatever event or clinic it is directed. This unit is a large tow-along trailer, smartly wrapped in multiple languages to welcome everyone. This unit requires a truck, equipped with a generator to power everything, to tow it. It is one of two new mobile units. The second unit was donated to the County and is smaller, but self-contained. This second unit allows VCAS to visit remote “Feral Pack” locations and perform capture and spay/neuter services onsite. (Exhibits 1 to 4)

Recommendation 05 states:

R-05. The Ventura County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Board of Supervisors, Ventura County Animal Services Commission, and Ventura County Animal Services review, re-evaluate, and revise the Contract City Animal Services Agreements to better conform to 2025 Best Practices for animal welfare, control, shelter, and field services. This needs to be completed by December 31, 2025.

The BOS, the Commission and VCAS responded as follows:

“Your Board and the County’s proposed response to the Grand Jury Report states that Recommendations R-01, R-02, R-05 and R-06 will be implemented with anticipated completion in 2026.”

The 2025-2026 Ventura County Civil Grand Jury found that the VCAS Director decided to leave all contracts in place for the current year and possibly the next. The reasoning behind this was to better understand exactly where things stood and therefore better understand what new Contracts would need to address. If contracts were to be renewed based on current 120% capacity numbers, they would not reflect nor address the changes seen in, for example, an 80% capacity operation. This approach allows the VCAS to test varied solutions before settling on one way forward through a new binding Contract.

Recommendation 06 states:

R-06. The Ventura County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Board of Supervisors and Ventura County Animal Services implement mental health programs specifically targeted to address the effects of compassion fatigue on the staff and volunteers working at Ventura County Animal Services. This needs to be completed by December 31, 2025.

The BOS, the Commission and VCAS responded as follows:

Your Board and the County’s proposed response to the Grand Jury Report states that Recommendations R-01, R-02, R-05 and R-06 will be implemented with anticipated completion in 2026.

The 2025-2026 Ventura County Civil Grand Jury found that while no new programs to address Compassion Fatigue had been currently implemented, the changes in Culture and Public Contact Practices, aimed at a community supported animal population reduction, will also reduce the pressure felt by staff when faced with overwhelming numbers of housed Animals. This is one major contributor to Compassion Fatigue: feeling

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overwhelmed and unable to provide proper care and comfort to housed animals. Here again, better communication from the counties Rescue Shelters would greatly enhance the overall functionality of the VCAS.

Recommendation 08 states:

R-08. The Ventura County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Animal Services Commission assist Ventura County Animal Services in securing grants for special care, education, and training programs not covered in the Ventura County Animal Services annual budget. This needs to be completed by December 31, 2025.

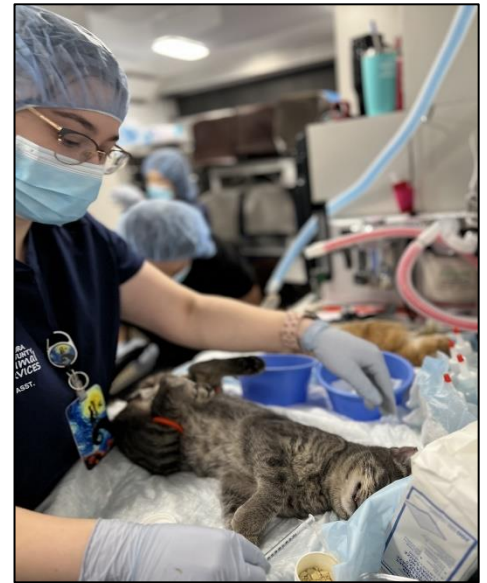
The 2025-2026 Ventura County Civil Grand Jury finds that VCAS has pursued and secured numerous grants:

- In April 2025, Animal Services Foundation of Ventura County awarded \$1,700,000 to cover three years of staffing for the Mobile Vet Clinic, and an additional \$201,000 for purchasing the unit. (Exhibits 1 to 4)
- In December 2025, Ventura County Community Foundation contributed \$125,000 to help fund the spay, neuter, and vaccine clinics.
- Also in December 2025, Wings of Rescue provided \$10,000 to support spay/neuter services, and a private donor generously contributed \$21,000 to assist with spay, neuter, and vaccine clinics.
- In February 2025, Animal Services Foundation of Ventura County provided another grant of \$1,350,000 to help the VCAS add six additional staff members.
- VCAS also retained and has been able to spend down the remaining \$180,000 from Humane World, which was allocated to VCAS for our Pets for Life Program.
- Altogether they have raised a total of \$3,587,000 to be used over the next two years to support ongoing programs and strengthen their community.



Exhibits 1-4

Exhibit 1: Mobile Vet Clinic (Photos provided by Ventura County Animal Services 3/4/2026)



Exhibits 2, 3, and 4: Interior of Mobile Vet Clinic

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Compliance Review: County of Ventura Auditor-Controller

The 2024-2025 Ventura County Civil Grand Jury published a report titled "Addressing Refund Delays in the Property Tax Assessment and Collection System." While all responses to our findings complied with the Penal Code requirements, the Auditor-Controller indicated that Recommendations 2 and 4 would be implemented in the future.

Recommendation 02 states:

R-02. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that by October 2025, the Ventura County Information Technology Services Department (ITSD), in collaboration with the Assessor, the Auditor-Controller, and the Treasurer-Tax Collector, create a monthly public-facing portal, based upon the data driving management's internal dashboard, that tracks the status of refunds. Care should be taken to maintain required confidentiality.

The Auditor-Controller's Office initially responded

"An online portal is being created for taxpayers. The portal will initially be specific to refunds. A parcel number will be entered, and the system will provide a list of all refunds in process with their individual status by department. Implementation is planned to be completed by 10/31/2025."

Recommendation 04 states:

R-04. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that by October 2025, the Auditor-Controller and Treasurer-Tax Collector collaborate to develop manual processes that will document, calculate, confirm, and then authorize property tax refunds that cannot be automated.

The Auditor-Controller's Office initial response

“The system has a manual function designed into it, but it has not been fully tested or implemented. This functionality will allow Auditor-Controller staff to manually calculate the refund amount and then issue the related refund check. The system takes the manual data and updates various parts of the system, as necessary. This function will be fully tested and implemented by 12/31/2025.”

The Auditor-Controller's Office current responses

R-02. An online portal, housed on our department website (www.venturacounty.gov/auditor-controller), has been created for taxpayers whereby upon entering their parcel number, (taxpayers) will be provided with a refund status. However, the portal did not go live until December 11, 2025.

R-04. As of the date of this letter (dated April 17, 2026), County ITSD in collaboration with the system vendor Brainsharp Inc. (BSI) are still working on an acceptable process by which manual calculations can be entered into the system, generating an accurate report for that parcel. This won't be implemented until December of 2026.

Compliance Review: Santa Paula Prioritizing Best Practice Street Maintenance

The 2024-2025 Ventura County Civil Grand Jury published a report titled “Prioritizing Best Practice Street Maintenance.” While all responses to our findings complied with the Penal Code requirements, the City of Santa Paula did not respond directly to Recommendation 03.

Recommendation 03 states:

R-03. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that Santa Paula set a goal to reach best practice pavement conditions within 10 years and create a plan to accomplish that goal by December 2025.

While the Ventura County Civil Grand Jury did not receive a direct response from Santa Paula, we did find this “Mission Statement,” which addresses the recommendation.

Santa Paula Street Maintenance “Mission Statement” is as follows:

“The City’s Street Maintenance Program is designed to ensure City streets that are in good condition remain that way over a much longer period of time while significantly reducing the amount of costly pavement rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the future.

“Pavement maintenance and preservation can double the service life of City streets at half the cost of full pavement rehabilitation. The City Council's adopted 5-Year Pavement Management Plan (PMP) will have the city spending four years resurfacing and improving local streets.

“The fifth year of the program will entail pavement maintenance and preservation. Then, the PMP will repeat. This program will prevent costly street rehabilitations over the next 20 years. The city has an annual budget of

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\$1.5 million, which would cover the rehabilitation of one mile of street. Vehicle weight, traffic volume and climate conditions, such as excessive heat and moisture, contribute to the decay of our streets. The rate of decay exceeds the rate that the city can afford to reconstruct each year.

“The program that the city has developed uses preservation treatments and thin-lift overlays to preserve newer pavement and revitalize older pavement, minimizing the need for reconstruction.”

Compliance Review: Water Rates for the City of Ventura and the Underground Dam in Foster Park

The 2024-2025 Ventura County Civil Grand jury published a report titled “Water Rates for the City of Ventura and the Underground Dam in Foster Park.” While all responses to our findings complied with the Penal Code requirements, the City of Ventura indicated that Recommendations R-01, R-02 and R-03 will not be implemented in the future.

Recommendation 01 states:

R-01. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura conduct a feasibility study to complete the final 300 feet of the underground dam in Foster Park by December 31, 2025.

Recommendation 02 states:

R-02. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura complete construction of the underground dam in Foster Park, if it is determined to be feasible, by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 03 states:

R-03. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura repair the flood-damaged wells and water intake facilities in Foster Park by December 31, 2025.

The City of Ventura responded as follows:

Please see 14-page response in Attachment #1: ([Att-001](#))