

Animal shelter project runs out of money

By Diana M. Alba Sun-News reporter

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For more information on Doña Ana County Animal Control , click [here](#).

LAS CRUCES - The good news?

Construction wrapped up two weeks ago on the first portion of a new Doña Ana County animal control building that will house dogs confiscated from animal fighting and abuse cases.

The bad news?

The project has run out of funding, leaving the facility unfinished and unusable, for now.

The 2,500-square-foot metal building, located near the intersection of East Griggs Avenue and Walnut Street in Las Cruces, is meant to make sure that seized dogs are kept properly as evidence - and personal property of their owners - until a court case is resolved, said Doña Ana County Sheriff Todd Garrison.

"It helps us because there's a chain of custody that has to be kept," he said. "We need to be able to keep track of them a little better than we're able to at the shelter."

Garrison noted it's not part of the animal shelter's mission to maintain evidence.

Also, the new building will eventually help free up space in the city-county animal shelter, eliminating a burden on that facility, said Curtis Childress, who heads Do-a Ana County animal control and codes enforcement.

Officials with the animal shelter, called the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, have complained that court-held animals take up space for long periods of time, forcing more potentially adoptable animals to be euthanized than otherwise would be necessary.

Construction on the new animal control building began about three months ago, Childress said, though formal planning and design started much earlier. The cost was about \$130,000; most funding was from a state appropriation, but the county pitched in some money, he said.

Why did the funding shortfall occur?

Childress said the county got word last year that the state was considering withdrawing already-appropriated capital outlay dollars that hadn't been spent. So county officials decided it would be better to spend the money they did have, knowing it wouldn't be enough to completely finish the building, to avoid having the dollars recalled.

Now, Childress said, the county is holding about 18 seized dogs at another site, and others are being held in the animal shelter.

In place are the walls, roof and floor, specially designed to be outfitted with 22 dog pens. But the electrical system, heating and cooling, ventilation and pens themselves are lacking.

Childress said he's estimating the building will require another \$150,000 to \$200,000 to complete. He said he's looking for other funding sources.

In addition, a plan exists for a second phase, a wing about half the size of the dog facility, to house cats.

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