Dog license fee hike may be coming

Fee increase would fund new animal control officer for Montcalm County

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STANTON — Montcalm County officials are considering increasing dog license fees in order to fund an animal control officer position.

The county's dog license amnesty program has been underway since Aug. 1, but officials still haven't figured out how to enforce a proposed dog census this autumn in the wake of the county's soon-to-be-defunct Animal Control.

A group of county officials met July 25 to discuss animal control procedures, including Sheriff Mike Williams, Prosecutor Andrea Krause and Treasurer JoAnne Vukin, as well as commissioners, police officers and health department officials. The group recommended the county hire an animal control officer who would be able to deal with nuisance and dangerous animals and to have that officer work out of the Treasurer's Office as dog license data and software are already located there. The group also hopes the officer would also be able to assist the Mid-Michigan District Health Department when an animal needs to be observed for rabies.

Funding for this theoretical officer would come from proposed fee increases in dog license revenue after the dog census is completed. Fees would be increased starting Oct. 1 as follows: $10 to $15 for a one-year unsexed dog, from $25 to $35 for a three-year unsexed dog, from $20 to $40 for a one-year spayed dog and from $40 to $100 for a three-year spayed dogs. Fees would be $10 for a one-year dog license for senior citizens 60 and older on a fixed income.

As part of the new process, Montcalm County would no longer do kennel inspections. Pet owners would need to get an inspection from the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development and bring proof of the inspection to the Montcalm County Treasurer's Office to obtain a license.

DOG LICENSE

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Controller-Administrator Bob Clingenpeel said local animal care and control can basically be summarized into three parts: Licensing (which is currently done by the Treasurer's Office), public safety and public health.

"There's a lot of answers, but most of those answers come with dollars," Clingenpeel said. "That's part of the problem. The solution is not as simple."

"We probably ought to take a look at our ordinance and eliminate various aspects of it that we can't enforce at this point," said Commissioner Betty Kellenberger of Carson City. "If we can't rescind it, we at least need to take a look at it and drop the parts that we can."

Clingenpeel said he will try to get a group of county officials together again for another meeting to try to clarify some of the proposed details.

The group of officials determined euthanasia, quarantines and specimen preparation should be done at the animal owner's expense with a fee structure yet to be determined. Montcalm County's newly formed Humane Society of Mid-Michigan is open to coordinating with an animal control officer for a fee for these functions as well. Angela Hollinshead, the county's outgoing Animal Control director and current Humane Society president, has sent letters to local municipalities offering them the option to contract with the Humane Society to take care of stray animals.

From October 2015 to September 2016, Montcalm County had 152 animal bite reports, euthanized or prepared specimens for 14 animals (12 bats, one dog and one raccoon) and euthanized 14 cats and dogs at the animal shelter. Of these complaints, the soon-to-be-defunct Montcalm County Animal Control handled 62 reports, while the health department handled 92 reports by telephone or mail.

Montcalm County's Law Enforcement & Courts Committee discussed the group's proposals during Monday morning's meeting, but didn't reach a consensus on anything.

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