

The Daily News

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Humane Society of Mid Michigan reaching out to municipalities for funding



On Monday evening, members of the Eureka Township Board discussed providing funding to the Humane Society of Mid Michigan in order for township residents to receive services from the organization in lieu of the Montcalm County Animal Shelter, which will cease to exist Oct. 1.

EUREKA TOWNSHIP — In a perfect world, Montcalm County Animal Control — which was named animal shelter of the year in 2016 — would be around for years to come.

But with Montcalm County facing a second consecutive year of budget cuts estimated at \$625,000 (following last year's budget cuts of \$1.7 million), the county's animal shelter is being taken over by the newly created Humane Society of Mid Michigan, headed by current Animal Control Director Angela Hollinshead and current Animal Control Officer Autumn DeVries effective Oct. 1.

While many details are not yet finalized, the volunteer-based Humane Society will care for the 900 to 1,200 animals the county animal shelter historically takes in each year. As far as local Animal Control, county officials are in the process of hiring an individual to conduct a dog census and respond to dog bites and other animal complaints in the county. That new Animal Control officer will be based in the Montcalm County Treasurer's Office.



Angela Hollinshead, board president and executive director of the Humane Society of Mid Michigan, requests funding during Monday's Eureka Township Board meeting.

Hollinshead was invited by Eureka Township Supervisor Rod Roy to deliver a presentation Monday evening after the township board considered a funding request from the Humane Society last month.

"We knew this (budget cuts and animal shelter changes) might be coming down the pipe since last year, so we created the (new organization)," Hollinshead said. "We're planning on taking in everything that will come through the door. Because we are no longer funded by the county at all, we are donation based only at this point. If we are to take in all of the strays from the surrounding area in the county, we do need some financial stability to do that."

According to Hollinshead, letters were sent to every township, village and city within the county offering a proposal of services, including housing, feeding and caring for any and all stray, lost and discarded animals picked up or delivered from municipalities from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Hollinshead is asking that each interested municipality provide a financial contribution based on the number of households within each municipality.

Originally, Eureka Township's agreement requested a rate of \$5 per household, based on the 2010 census. With 1,529 households in the township, the figure of \$7,645 was derived. However, on Monday, Hollinshead reduced that figure to \$3 per household, resulting in a new estimate of \$4,587.

“We don’t ever want to make it a money issue, but it is something that we have to keep in mind,” Hollinshead said. “If we take in all of these animals, we have to be able to afford to care for them.”

If all 29 municipalities in Montcalm County were to participate at the rate of \$3 per household (a total of 28,221 households), the Humane Society would receive \$84,663 in total.

By comparison, Montcalm County Animal Control would have operated in the upcoming fiscal year with an estimated annual budget of \$70,000, had it not been placed on the chopping block of proposed budget cuts. In 2016, Hollinshead worked to reduce approximately \$33,000 from the department through additional cuts.

“It costs us roughly \$105 a dog that we receive, which pays for average care and food,” she said. “We’ve also had to factor in the cost of a vehicle and employees.”

Staff and volunteers at the Humane Society are taking things one step further, going without salaries for at least the first six months.



Eureka Township Clerk Linda Ruwersma reviews budget details Monday evening as the township board discussed providing funding to the Humane Society of Mid Michigan.

“I’m doing this on a volunteer basis, we’re all starting on a volunteer basis,” Hollinshead said. “It will be a labor of love.”

Eventually, the department will need funding to pay for its three employees. Combined with additional operating costs — as the Humane Society will lease the current animal shelter facility from the county — Hollinshead said funding for the 501-C3 organization, aside from private donations, will be needed.

“There really aren’t any grants available for operational costs,” she said. “We are hoping to be successful and build a new organization. This was really a creation out of need. We have a lot of good programs and it will be something that I think our community can benefit from as well.”

Eureka Township Board members decided to wait until the next regular board meeting Oct. 9 to make a decision, citing the board’s upcoming work on the township’s upcoming fiscal year budget.

“Maybe we need to know if the majority (of municipalities) want to participate in this before we (make a decision),” Trustee Elaine Pendrick said. “What about if we considered it for one year, to see what happens?”

According to Clerk Linda Ruwersma, the township is currently looking at a deficit budget, with the estimated expenditures over revenues at \$55,000 — including Hollinshead’s request — due to a lot of road improvements.

Trustee Marty Posekany said he couldn’t commit any financial contribution until he had a chance to properly review the budget.

“We need to keep a close eye on that because we have yet to transfer some funds,” he said. “The upcoming budget is very tight.”

Roy told Hollinshead the township would “definitely be getting back” to her on her request in October.

With the county budget crisis responsible for the closing of the animal shelter, Montcalm County Commissioner Tom Lindeman offered an apology during Monday evening’s meeting.

“I want to apologize to Angela about the treatment she got from the county,” he said. “The budget is a disaster. It hasn’t been voted on yet, but it’s a disaster. The saga continues.”

Township resident Brad Klosner said he was disappointed in the county not using potential licensing fees to contribute funding to the Humane Society.

“The little guys seem to be shouldering the burden ... is there any talk of giving any money to the Humane Society?” he asked. “As far as I know, whatever fees you collect, it goes into the (county) general fund.”

“No ... because we don’t have any (funds) to spare,” Lindeman responded.

Montcalm County commissioners have approached the upcoming budget with a mentality that non-state-mandated programs, such as an animal shelter, will not receive any funding in order to restore the budget through a five-year recovery plan. The Montcalm County Board of Commissioners will vote on the new fiscal year budget at 6 p.m. Sept. 25 following a public hearing on the proposed budget (the time of the public hearing is yet to be determined).

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