Montcalm County looking to contract with Gratiot County for animal control

BY ELIZABETH WALDON
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STANTON — Montcalm County
is preparing to repeal its dog ordi-
nance and to contract with another
county for animal control, at least
for the near future.
During Tuesday’s Law
Enforcement & Courts Committee,
Controller-Administrator Bob
Clingenpeel said he has been in
contact with Gratiot County
Animal Control Administrator
Tom Clark.
“He is OK with our situation
and is ready to stand in if needed,”
Clingenpeel said.
Montcalm County eliminated its
animal shelter as part of recent
budget cuts and is leasing the for-
mer animal shelter building to the
Humane Society of Mid Michigan.

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Montcalm County Controller-Administrator Bob Clingenpeel visited the Humane Society of Mid Michigan (former county animal shelter) on Thursday afternoon to speak with Angela Hollinshed (the former county Animal Control director) about the Humane Society’s shelter license status with the state of Michigan.

HOW MONTCALM COUNTY SHERIFF’S DEPUTYS WILL RESPOND TO ANIMAL COMPLAINTS

Sheriff’s Animal Control Unit
Montcalm County Sheriff Mike Williams issues an Oct. 4 “special order” memo to his department detailing how officers should respond to animal-related complaints in wake of county budget cuts, shutting down the county’s animal shelter with the future of animal control currently unknown.
The memo provides guidelines for deputies who deal with and/or respond to “calls involving domesticated animals and calls traditionally han-
dled by an animal control officer,” as follows:
• If the animal is not a threat to the location if the event is still active in order to help prevent further activity or if the owner of the dog is not known to the victim, assistance is needed in locating/determining the owner.
The victim will be encouraged to contact the Montcalm County Treasurer’s Office at (800) 937-7334, which will be able to provide information regarding the status of a given dog’s vaccination history. Additionally, the victim is encouraged to contact the Montcalm County Animal Control
Department at (999) 831-5237, which tracks such cases and works with dog owners regarding quar-
tantining. Deputies will not transport dogs nor coordinate the quarantine of dogs. Where approp-
riate, citations may be issued for law/enforcement
violations.
• Stray aggressive dogs: Law enforcement service deputies will respond to calls for service
involving stray aggressive dogs. The deputy’s
actions will be limited to attempting to locate the
owner of the dog, as well as to keep people away
from the dog, in the event the owner cannot be
located, the dog will be left where it is found.

WHERE appropriate, citations may be issued for law/enforcement violations.
• Animal cruelty: Law enforcement services deputies may encounter dogs during the commission of an
affray. If an affray is in progress, the victim is encouraged to make arrangements for the dog to be
left alone and restricted in the home. If the affray is
on the road (such as a traffic stop or crash site),
the victim is encouraged to contact someone to
relocate the dog at the time of the arrest.
If no such arrangements can be made, the victim has
the option of leaving the dog in the vehicle, pro-
viding that the dog can be done so as not to be
a threat to the animal.
• Transports: Law enforcement deputies will not transport aggressive dogs or dogs that are
involved in a bite or attack situation. Law enforce-
ment deputies will not respond to or transport stray
dogs.
• Miscellaneous: Law enforcement deputies will not respond to reports of dogs causing prop-
erty damage, but rather the complainant will be
given suggestions as to the process for a civil
remedy. The shooting/killing of dogs by deputies is
disheartened and only permitted as an act of last
despair in order to protect citizens or the de-
puty from injury or death. Deputies will not respond
to any animal-related matters as described above
outside of their assigned patrol area except in
matters of emergencies in order to protect indi-
viduals from injury or death of an activity aggra-
vating dog. Reports of livestock in the roadway will
be responded to with an emphasis of locating the
owner or shaming the beast away from the roads.
ANIMAL CONTROL

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which is led by Angela Hollinshead who was recently laid off as Montcalm County’s Animal Control director. The Montcalm County Treasurer’s Office is conducting a dog license census (see accompanying story), but an Animal Control officer has not yet been hired by the county to respond to dog complaints, in part because the Humane Society was only recently approved as a licensed shelter by the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development.

Montcalm County will be the official holder of the Humane Society’s shelter license and the county will recognize the Humane Society as the official organization operating the shelter under the county’s license, Clingenpeel said this arrangement is similar to arrangements in Allegan and Isabella counties.

The Law Enforcement & Courts Committee voted Tuesday to recommend the full Board of Commissioners repeal the county’s existing dog license and to begin work on creating a “bare bones” dog ordinance. The full board will next meet at 6 p.m. Oct. 23.

Clingenpeel told The Daily News the county still plans on employing an Animal Control officer, but it’s not yet known whether the county will hire someone or contract with someone for the job.

“As we find out the appropriate role Gratiot County will be taking with us, I will be making further recommendations,” Clingenpeel told commissioners.

Gratiot County Animal Control is based in Ithaca and serves a population of about 42,000 people, compared to Montcalm County’s population of about 63,000 people.

Clark told The Daily News talks between the two counties are ongoing, but that Montcalm County could expect to pay a fee of $40 per dog for impoundment or quarantine cases only — Gratiot County would not accept any stray dogs. Clark said if Montcalm County agrees to contract with Gratiot County, he would likely do 90 percent of the work of transporting dogs.

“Bob had given me and (Gratiot County Administrator) Tracy (Cordes) a call and wanted to know if we could be in partnership with Montcalm County for a little bit until they get things figured out,” Clark said. “Bob was asking if we could help run some of the impoundments that they have. I only see this as a short-term service. I don’t see having to be called out there a whole lot, but I see us helping to fill that gap until they fill that personnel position. They definitely need some help.”

Hollinshead told The Daily News she applied for a shelter license with the state about six months ago and the state did an initial inspection of the former shelter in September when it was still a county facility. Hollinshead said the state asked her to seal the floor in the garage area, which she has done, and to fix a hole in the roof near the furnace in the kennel room.

The state went on to deny Hollinshead’s shelter license application based on what Hollinshead believes is a combination of the state not yet conducting a second inspection to see the improvements and the state requiring a copy of the county’s agreement to lease the former shelter building to the Humane Society.

However, these factors seemed to be resolved Thursday with the county holding the shelter license.

Pending the county’s hire of an Animal Control officer, the Humane Society has been referring calls about animal cruelty or dangerous animals to the Montcalm County Sheriff’s Office.

Sheriff Mike Williams told The Daily News his office does have a protocol in place for responding to these calls (see info box above).

“We will be responding to the extent of what’s mandated by state law,” he said. “Unfortunately, because the sheriff’s law enforcement services were decimated in the past year, we’re not responding outside of covered townships (townships that have contracts with the sheriff’s office) unless there’s an imminent threat of injury. Those areas covered by the Michigan State Police or local police agencies.”

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