Gratiot and Montcalm counties may forge dual effort

By Rosemary Horvath
Staff Writer
Gratiot County Commissioners on Tuesday were expected to consider providing limited animal control services to Montcalm County for at least six months. The proposed agenda listed a tentative agreement drafted between Gratiot’s administrator Tracey Cordes and Montcalm’s controller-administrator Bob Clingenpeel.

Clingenpeel had first contacted animal control director Tom Clark to ask for assistance.

At their Nov. 7 board meeting, commissioner Sam Smith questioned the practicality of handling dog calls for a county twice the population and in the northern part twice the size of Gratiot. Cordes clarified not all services would be offered.

The proposal states dangerous animals or animals requiring quarantine will be delivered to the Humane Society Shelter in Stanton. That volunteer group took over Montcalm’s animal shelter although it is not staffed to pick up animals.

Gratiot would also investigate complaints related to state dog laws. Gratiot will not perform euthanizations, respond to calls to pick up stray or feral animals, assist with corralled animals or respond to calls about animals being struck on roadways.

The proposal also states Gratiot will prioritize calls based on its own staffing levels.

A fee of $40 an hour will be charged along with mileage and any other service not listed. The agreement would be in effect as of Nov. 22 pending approval by the two county boards.

Cordes assured commissioners that Clark “has been clear Gratiot County citizens come first.”

“We can’t do this forever,” she added. “This is while they consider other options.”

Montcalm may turn to other adjoining counties where animal control services are better staffed.

But, for now, Cordes supports reaching out to share government services “and assist where we can for as long as we can.”

She opened the door to another possible service sharing.

Montcalm has a full-time building department. Gratiot for several months has relied on a limited schedule managed by a part-time person who is temporary. The county’s full-time employee took another job.
Even though the county has advertised the position for several months, no one qualified with the required certifications has applied. Engineering firms also have not shown interest, she said.

“We might put together a regional group,” Cordes speculated. “We are all fighting for a resource that is hard to come by.”

Isabella County has shown interest in partnering.

Cordes also reported looking into solar array opportunities. She envisions having a system set up at the county landfill and to find “a way to generate revenue.”

Board chairman George Bailey noted cost to the county is $60,000 annually to maintain the former landfill.

Greater Gratiot Development is helping locate companies that set up solar arrays on brownfields. Grand Rapids has experimented with the technology. The city of Traverse City in October opened the M-72 Solar Project, a step toward powering 100 percent of city operations with clean energy.

Traverse City Light & Power and the city worked together to make the project a reality.

Commissioners also discussed options to improve and speed up the medical examiner process. This licensed physician is responsible for investigating sudden or violent deaths and for providing accurate determinations of the causes of these deaths.

Autopsies are performed at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing. Commissioners agreed to bring all the parties together such as sheriff, prosecutor, chief medical examiner Kurt Anderson, MMR and MidMichigan Health to brainstorm ideas.

Among other matters, the board unanimously adopted a resolution supporting continued funding of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Michigan’s Republic and Democrat congressmen and senators have voiced support.

GLRI projects restore and protect the Great Lakes but may fall victim to federal budget reductions that would severely impact progress.

Chairman Bailey said this should not be a partisan issue because the Great Lakes represents one-third of the world’s freshwater bodies and the economies of the Great Lakes states rely on fish and wildlife habitat and recreation.