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Dozens more complain about animal shelter

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STANTON - The Montcalm County Animal Shelter in Stanton is still a hot-button issue with local animal rights groups.

About 40 people read off a litany of complaints about the shelter to the County Board of Commissioners on Monday, discussing alleged inadequate policies, poor treatment by staff members, giving animals to a research dealer and the "inhumane" method of euthanizing dogs in a gas chamber.

"To say the shelter needs an overhaul is an understatement. We are basically nothing more than a holding facility for animals to be euthanized or sent to research," said Day Township resident Sue McGuire. "It has been a huge black eye in our community for years."

Montcalm County is one of five Michigan counties releasing animals for research. The commissioners are in the last year of a five-year contract with R&R Research Breeding in Howard City, which euthanizes animals and removes the carcasses in exchange for taking live animals to be sold for research.

Several people spoke out against the R&R contract. Greenville resident Sandy Carlton said only three animal research dealers remain in Michigan so the industry is declining since those services no longer are needed.

"We have to make a decision as a county, do we want to be the last stalwart county still doing pound release?" Carlton asked, saying animal research dealers "are not necessary. Maybe they save a few dollars here and there but they are not necessary."

"Do we want to be the last stronghold or do we want to want to jump the gun and get some policies in place before we behind the ball?" she said. "Let's not get it so bad that we won't work together."

R&R owner Jim Woudenberg of Howard City explained that research performed on animals benefits society with medical advancements such as hip replacement technology.

"You should look into the benefits derived from these dogs before you pass judgment on whether it is good," he said.

Woudenberg also said he keeps meticulous records of all live animals he takes from the Stanton shelter while rescue groups do not.

Representatives of the Safe Haven Humane Society in Ionia said the agency keeps good records and is a better option for animals.

Longtime county resident Eileen Berg complained about the lack of a meaningful volunteer program at the shelter, which she believes could lead to better service for residents and a better chance of animals being adopted.

"There are volunteers waiting to be contacted. This option is not being used in its full capacity," Berg said. "There are no good programs to ensure that all means to get animals adopted are being used before they are euthanized."

"I realize pets are going to have to be put down," McGuire said. "But given a chance more pets can be adopted."

Some people believe the problems are not all a result of poor animal control policies, blaming the general public for failing have their pets spayed or neutered, leading to animal overpopulation in the county.

The commissioners assured the residents that the new animal control director hired to succeed Kevin Weaver, who resigned in March, will be expected to bring changes but that they will take time to enact.