



# THE DAILY NEWS

Greenville, Belding and Montcalm County, Michigan

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## Animal shelter foes: "Here we are"

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A standing-room-only crowd spills out of the Jack Van Harn room as Sandra Carlton addresses the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners on Monday. (Daily News/Greg DeKraker)



Mike Urbanski of Coral is surrounded by animal supporters as he tells the commissioners about concerns he has with Montcalm County's contract with R&R Research in Howard City. (Daily News/Greg DeKraker)

"You say you want to hear from the people. Well, here we are," said Rhonda Waldorf of Sheridan, gesturing at the standing-room-only crowd. "We're showing you we don't want

**STANTON** - The fate of the Montcalm County Animal Shelter's controversial contract with R&R Research remains in the balance after the County Board of Commissioners spent four hours Monday listening to opinions on the deal and deferred a definitive vote on the issue.

Instead, a "blue ribbon panel" of seven to nine people will be appointed to debate the issue further and make a recommendation to the commissioners. The R&R Research contract, which allows the Howard City company to "barter" for live animals from the shelter to sell for research in exchange for taking carcasses of euthanized animals, will continue for six months while the new committee does its work.

### Packed meeting

An overflow crowd of more than 150 people spilled outside the Jack Van Harn Board of Commissioners room in Stanton on Monday, mostly imploring the commissioners not to extend the R&R Research contract when it runs out in two weeks.

More than 35 people, some driving from as far away as New York, addressed the commissioners.

Many of the more than 150 people at Monday's Montcalm County Board of Commissioners meeting colorfully and emotionally expressed their feelings on the County Animal Shelter's contract with R&R Research in Howard City. Their comments included:

- "Our shelter has become the poster child for bad shelters across the nation. It is time for this board to change that. Shame on you if you don't. Shame on us if we fail to continue to stand up for this injustice being committed against our animals and our people." - Sandra Carlton, Greenville.
- "This six-month (special committee) is a cop-out. I think you did a real good job of razzle-dazzle and I congratulate you for that. I don't think there's any way someone from the animal shelter is going to be appointed to this panel." - Carlton, who submitted a proposal to commissioners two weeks ago calling for establishing an animal control advisory committee, among other things.
- "When I look into the eyes of my dogs at home I see the love they provide me. How can you do that and sign that contract with R&R Research? Think about that when you go home and look in your dog's eyes." - Diane Horner, Sheridan.
- "I don't believe any animal should be subjected to the fear, terror and torture they experience going to research." - Susan Maguire, Edmore.
- "I just hope Montcalm County becomes a compassionate county." - Beth Contreras, East Lansing.
- The animals "are going (to research) as

our pets bartered with research."

The emotional meeting turned testy at times. Board Chairman and District 7 Commissioner Patrick Q. Carr threatened to end public comment and clear the meeting room at least twice when the audience became raucous.

### **"An embarrassment"**

Mike Borman, who recently moved to Langston, said he was shocked to find out the county is one of only four in Michigan that allows a Class B animal dealer such as R&R Research to take animals and resell them to research institutions.

"I'm amazed that Montcalm County is in such a minority. I think it's an embarrassment," he said. "The tide is turning. Let's make some drastic changes and fix the problems so Montcalm County doesn't make headlines around the nation and around the world for the wrong reasons."

Greenville veterinarian Dr. Randy Carpenter said he advises his clients to avoid the shelter due to long-standing concerns about the health and welfare of animals housed there.

"I view Montcalm County Animal Control as our Guantanamo Bay prison camp. It is a black eye for our county," Carpenter said. "I have avoided that facility like the plague. For 30 years (the R&R Research deal) has been going on and nothing has changed. Today is the time to change. Make your people happy. If you are serious about voting your constituents' minds you won't even consider voting for this contract."

He called for establishing the "blue ribbon panel" to study the problems further and develop possible solutions for the commissioners to consider, including alternatives to the R&R Research contract.

"A committee could look at other sources of funding and bring options to you for your consideration," Carpenter said. "Unless we explore other options we're missing the boat and I don't believe anything will change unless we come up with some alternatives. You folks are too busy to research that."

### **Late proposal**

Carr said he appreciated the idea of forming the committee but wished it had come earlier in the process.

"We've been discussing this issue for the last six months and nobody has come forward with any proposals," he said. "To wait until the meeting before the contract expires, isn't it kind of late to start inventing the wheel?"

District 1 Commissioner Ron Blanding hastily developed a framework for the committee after public comments ended. He called for a five- to seven-member panel, which later was increased to include seven to nine members.

Blanding named Carpenter, Greenville resident Frances Schuleit and another commissioner to serve on the committee. Carr will select the remaining members, hoping to strike a balance of people for and against the R&R Research contract.

### **Need to be balanced**

"Most of the public comment today is, we need to start out with doing away with the contract with R&R and then we'll start making concessions," Carr said. "It would seem to me that for this blue ribbon commission to have an effect that it would need representation from all sides who are in favor of finding a middle road.

"I'm going to choose people I know are for it and against it," he said. "And for the odd number person I'm going to choose someone I know doesn't have an interest, like (County Controller-Administrator) Chris Hyzer."

Carr said committee members need to come prepared to negotiate openly and honestly.

unwilling participants. We are here to be their voice." - Barbara Olsen, Dorr.

• "You wouldn't want to be researched on and I don't think you should want your animals to be researched on either." - Pam Allen, Sheridan.

• "Please listen to the citizens of Montcalm County. It is time to stop living in the past and start living in the 21st century." - Mike Urbanski, Coral.

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"I'd like to caution anyone interested in being on that committee that it needs to have some give and take," he said. "We're going to need a group of people willing to work together in a civil manner."

The committee will report back to the commissioners at least every three months and will issue its final recommendations after six months.

R&R Research owner Jim Woudenberg said after the meeting that he hadn't made a final determination on whether he would agree to the six-month extension.

"I'm open to it and will consider it," he said. "I'm going to think about it. I've got a lot of questions that I will contact them about."

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