

Commission hears animal shelter complaints

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By Dee Morrison

STANTON, Mich. (WOOD) -- The director of the Montcalm County Animal Shelter has resigned amid allegations he was abusing dogs.

About 40 residents still upset at what is going on at the shelter took their complaints to the county commission Monday.

They say they are concerned about how the shelter is being run, and say the rules change moment to moment in the absence of a permanent director.

There is no written policy for how long animals are available for adoption, who gets first dibs, and how the animals are tracked.

"Instead of sheltering animals that have been abandoned there, we are in essence nothing but a holding tank for animals waiting to be euthanized or given up for research," said one of the residents at the meeting.

Pat Carr, the chairman of the county commission, asked patience from those concerned at the meeting. He said hiring a new director is the key to handling the other problems.

"The commissioners are committed to all of those changes, and as soon as we get a new director in place I'm confident a lot of those concerns will be addressed," said Carr.

A major issue that won't be addressed right away deals with R&R Research, a company owned by Jim Woudenberg. He is a Class B dealer operating out of a facility near Howard City. His contract with the county allows him to remove all dead animals from the shelter in exchange for taking those he wants to sell to animal research firms.

Many object to the practice, pointing out Montcalm is one of only a handful of counties still allowing what they call an "outdated practice" and objecting to the methods R&R Research uses.

Carr stands by the company.

"I think R&R Research, to my knowledge, has never violated any condition of the contract with the county. So if there's any fault with the contract, it's my belief it falls back on the county."

Carr said the contract with R&R Research runs through February 2009. The commission will then consider whether to renew it or go with other options.