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MAIDENCREEK TOWNSHIP
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Recently, there has been much discussion in the community and in the Reading Eagle regarding the Township's relationship with the Animal Rescue League (ARL). The Animal Rescue League is a non-profit that currently provides the Township with animal control services for dogs and cats. These services include the intake of stray animals, animal cruelty investigations, and veterinary services as well as others. In return for these services, the Township made an annual contribution of $1,000.00 as recently as December of 2017.

In a letter from September of 2018, ARL wrote to inform the Township that they would no longer offer animal control services to the Township unless a contract was agreed to. As of today, there were two options available to us. The first was a fee for services model, which we projected to cost the Township approximately $9,000. The second option was a $2.00 per-capita charge, which was projected to cost approximately $18,200.00. Importantly, ARL shared that the per capita charge model would only be available for 2019 but going forward a municipality would need to engage in a multi-year fee for service contract.

At the time this notification was issued, the Township had been in the budget process for a few weeks. This created significant administrative hurdles to include these unforeseen expenses and added to ever-increasing costs for other vital municipal services such as police or roadwork. The Board of Supervisors directed staff to investigate the issue but made no commitments to enter into a contract with ARL. The Township sought clarity around several issues including the fee structure, the invoicing structure, the financial condition of ARL, the data being used to estimate anticipated fees, the scope of the services offered, as well as legal concerns around the proposed contract.

The Township's desire to seek clarity around these issues is consistent with our commitment to handle every resident's tax dollars responsibly. Unfortunately, where we sought clarity only more questions and concerns were brought to light. The Township identified significant issues with the proposed contract. Among them, ARL had proposed to charge on the basis of the zip code where an animal was brought from. However municipalities may have several zip codes and that zip code may not be where the animal is owned. This could incur costs on the Township for an animal that was found or is owned in another municipality.

These concerns have been raised to ARL. Unfortunately, they have not been responsive to requests for more information and have, in most cases, been unwilling to amend their proposed contracts for municipal concerns. While its possible these issues could be resolved, ARL has placed pressure on municipalities to comply with their desires in timeframes that have been unrealistic for the Township to work within. For these reasons, the Board of Supervisors has not signed a contract with ARL, because of this they will no longer provide residents with most animal control services.

ARL has promised to continue investigating claims of animal abuse without expense to the Township, which we are grateful for. However, if residents take animals to ARL's shelter, they will be turned away and forwarded to the Township. This transition will take place on January 31st, 2019.

In order to explore alternative methods to these services, the Township will participate in a search for another contract with the Berks County Cooperative Purchasing Council. The governing body has final say as to whether the Township will participate in another contract, but this search will offer more options for the Board of Supervisors to consider.

Other options for services can be provided by various local organizations. These include *No Nonsense Neutering*, which offers to safely neuter wild cats. There are Facebook groups, including *Berks Dog Search*, where lost pets may be posted, which oftentimes have good results. Dogs may also be brought to the Humane Society. The Humane Society asks that residents call before bringing any stray pet. They do not however take feral cats. If you encounter a vicious or rabid animal, please do not approach it and call 911. The police department and dog warden will be notified through proper channels.

This interruption of services is regrettable, and we are thankful for the work that the Animal Rescue League has done on behalf of our community. The path moving forward is not completely clear, but our interest is serving the Township residents in the best ways possible. We will continue to do that as we seek out more alternatives for these services.

Diane Hallenbach
manager