Lancaster dog-control operations face changes after death of chief

By Karen Robinson | *News Staff Reporter*
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The Town of Lancaster's dog-control operations may face an overhaul in the aftermath of the Jan. 7 death of longtime chief dog catcher David R. Horn.

Supervisor Dino J. Fudoli said the town may consider sharing services with another municipality, such as Clarence, to save money and streamline operations -- or at least consider doing a cost-benefit analysis to determine what is best for the long term. The Town of Alden also has reached out to Lancaster, he added.

Lancaster's dog-control operations are budgeted at $104,701 for 2014, with the town taking in roughly $50,000 yearly in licensing fees/revenues. The full-time dog catcher is assisted by five part-timers who are on call. Horn earned $47,577 a year. The coverage area also includes the Village of Lancaster and the section of Depew within the town.

Regardless of what officials decide, the town is interested in selling its run-down dog shelter on Walden Avenue, adjacent to the Erie County Sewer Authority offices.

"There are options for us," Fudoli said Tuesday. "Unfortunately, it's not the way we want to move the ball forward. But ... we must look at the cost and benefit to taxpayers."

Councilwoman Donna M. Stempniak said she wants the town to view its operations before making a decision.

"Right now, our record-keeping is not in the best shape. I would like to straighten up our own house before we decide what to do," she said last week.

Town officials have been considering moving kennel operations to the town's Pavement Road complex, where some offices are located.

A cost-benefit analysis could be conducted on whether the town should keep its own dog-control operations or share its services with other municipalities. Clarence and Alden reached out to Fudoli after learning of Horn's death.

Clarence's offer to craft an agreement in which Lancaster would use its kennel could be appealing to some. Clarence's supervisor, David C. Hartzell Jr., and Fudoli know each other well, and the towns have successfully shared their assessor, Christine A. Fusco.

"If there's an opportunity to share, we'd like it," Hartzell said. "Both towns saved money with sharing an assessor."

Hartzell said that he spoke with his Town Board and animal-control officer Jerome P. Schuler recently and that they are waiting for Lancaster officials to study the issue.

"It's preliminary," Hartzell said.

Another scenario would have each town's assistant dog-control officers do the bulk of work in their respective communities, with Schuler splitting his work week between Lancaster and Clarence. Clarence's kennel is relatively new and described as "state of the art."

If Lancaster decides to use another town's kennel, Councilman John M. Abraham Jr. said, it would have to be a "no-kill" facility, like the town's current one.

Still, others are inclined to leave things as they are, at least for this fiscal year.

"We should continue to have our own department," said Councilman Mark S. Aquino. "It's a good service to provide for the community."

For now, assistant dog-control officer William M. Gummo Sr., a retired Depew police officer, is temporarily filling in on a full-time basis for Lancaster. In the meantime, assistant dog-control officers Brian J. Kintzel, Dawn M. DelPrince and Penny Prestia have each asked the town to consider hiring them to succeed Horn.

Lancaster Town Board members met behind closed doors on the issue in an executive session last week.

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