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Willard to hand over strays

Springfield likely to take in extra animals at shelter, for a fee.

By **Nina Rao**
News-Leader

Willard will soon start leaving its stray dogs and cats in Springfield.

Under a contract that will be voted on during tonight's City Council meeting, Springfield will house and euthanize Willard's animals for a fee.

That solution helps Willard, which doesn't have an animal shelter. It helps Springfield, which often ends up dealing with stray and castaway animals from surrounding areas anyway. And it helps address the increasing pet overpopulation problem as Springfield and its surrounding communities grow.

But it also highlights the fate of those animals once they reach Springfield's animal shelter.

Nearly half are euthanized. Some are reclaimed by their owners. The others are rescued by Melissa Sartin, director of Castaway Animal Rescue Effort, or C.A.R.E.

Last week, for example, Sartin rescued six cats and 12 dogs from the pound. Those animals are destined for C.A.R.E.'s adoption center.

Sartin left behind a gray cat that hissed at her, a massive Rottweiler, a puppy with a skin disorder, a shy dog, an old dog and a black cat.

In all, she left behind three cats and 23 dogs. Those animals will be euthanized within five days.

"It's so sad when you can't take them," she said. "... There's times when I go in and I leave the majority of the (animals), even adoptable ones."

Like during the summer, when the pound houses as many as 100 cats and dogs at a time. Last year, Sartin rescued an average of 19 animals each week, a total of 1,008 during the fiscal year, according to animal shelter records.

How many Sartin rescues depends mainly on how many have been adopted the preceding week.



Melissa Sartin, director of C.A.R.E., searches for adoptable cats at Springfield's animal shelter.
Bob Linder / News-Leader



A dog in the Springfield Animal Shelter is passed over by Sartin as she looks for adoptable pets.
Bob Linder / News-Leader



A cat at the Springfield Animal Shelter waits to be examined by C.A.R.E. director Melissa Sartin as she looks for adoptable animals.
Bob Linder News-Leader

"I'm taking the maximum number of animals that I possibly can," she said.

The contract with Willard will add less than 10 animals per month, according to Willard city administrator Carl Carlson. Willard will pay Springfield \$40 per dog and \$25 per cat.

Until now, Willard has been holding strays at a veterinary clinic for the mandatory five days and then dropping them off at the Humane Society in Springfield to be euthanized.

"But as we grow, there are unfortunately more calls and reports of animals," Carlson said, and Willard has run into problems.

Willard's public works department has picked up animals late at night or on a weekend when the veterinarian was closed. The Humane Society shelter has been full when the city tried to drop animals off.

So Willard needs a more stable solution, Carlson said.

"It seemed to make sense to work with another municipality," Carlson said. "... It just didn't seem to make sense (to build a shelter in Willard) when we can piggyback on Springfield, if you will."

Willard is informing its residents of the arrangement through a newsletter that is mailed to all utility users.

Springfield's shelter can handle the extra load, said Ron Boyer, assistant director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department where he oversees animal control.

"We think we can accommodate this small number," he said. "... I think the benefit to the city is better utilization of our shelter and our employees."

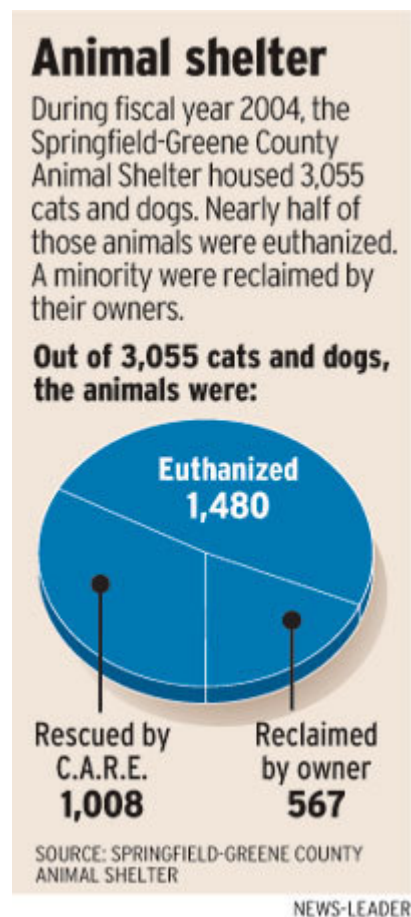
But extra animals from Willard almost certainly means that more animals will be euthanized. Sartin already rescues all she can, and Boyer doubts Willard residents will be more likely to reclaim their pets than Springfield residents.

Only 19 percent of the animals that arrive at the pound are picked up by their owners, according to animal shelter records.

One deterrent, Boyer says, is the cost. Owners must pay shelter fees, stray-dog tickets and sometimes tagless-dog tickets. Those costs can add up to almost \$200 per animal.

Some owners avoid that fee by abandoning their pet, Boyer said.

But many people complain the fees are too high, local animal activists say. Other pet owners



complain about the shelter's hours. It is open three hours each day, including weekends. And some people complain that animal control officers are too quick to pick animals up.

Still, it's easy to point fingers, Sartin said.

"Everybody wants to be mad at the 'bad guys' — the animal control officers, the people who euthanize — but they're doing a public service," she said. "... I'm so conflicted about who's at fault. Every time I leave the pound, I think of all those animals I couldn't rescue and I see irresponsible owners behind each one."