



CITY OF HAMILTON
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Parking and By-law Services Division

TO:	Chair and Members Planning Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	November 15, 2016
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Cat Licensing (City Wide) (PED16208) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SUBMITTED BY:	Jason Thorne General Manager Planning and Economic Development Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the proposed City of Hamilton Cat Licensing Program, attached as Appendix “A” to Report PED16208, be approved and implemented for the urban area of the City of Hamilton, subject to approval of the following:
 - (i) That the annual licensing fees be established as follows:
 - (1) \$20 for an altered cat;
 - (2) \$45 for an unaltered cat;
 - (ii) That one (1) full-time employee (FTE) be approved to support the Cat Licensing Program, funded from Cat Licensing Revenue;
- (b) That a Licensing Reserve Account be established and the net surplus generated through cat licensing fees be directed into Reserve Account No. 108121 to fund cat management initiatives;
- (c) That the draft by-law attached as Appendix “B” to Report PED16208 to amend By-law 12-031 – For Responsible Animal Ownership, which has been prepared in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, be enacted;
- (d) That staff be directed to report back to Council in Q2 2017 on the proposed utilization of the net surplus from the Cat Licensing Program for cat management initiatives;

- (e) That the item respecting the Feasibility of Licensing Cats in the Urban Area be identified as complete and removed from the Outstanding Business List of the Planning Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report addresses two major issues currently facing the City relating to the cat population and the risk for the residents of the City to contract rabies if not controlled through the steps and recommendations outlined herein.

The best practices of most major municipalities across Canada are to provide pet licensing programs for their city. Pet licensing programs provide up-to-date and readily-accessible identification systems that allow for the prompt reunification of lost pets with their owners. Licensing revenues support much-needed programs such as low-cost spay / neuter programs for low-income pet owners, feral cat sterilization programs, adoption programs and responsible pet ownership education programs. All of these programs are vital in managing the cat population problems that every city faces.

It is recommended that a Cat Licensing Program be implemented for the urban area of the City of Hamilton in order to address concerns regarding the owned and unowned cat population. If approved, the revenue generated by the recommended Cat Licensing Program could be directed into a reserve account for managing community cat initiatives.

In addition, the City of Hamilton is currently facing a rabies crisis. The unowned cat population has been identified as a potential transmitter for the spread of the disease to humans. It is the responsibility of Animal Services to protect citizens from all animals. Therefore, it is imperative that all cats, owned and unowned, are vaccinated to prevent the spread of rabies. The Cat Licensing Program could ensure that all owned cats are vaccinated against rabies. In addition, the City can safeguard the public against the spread of the disease from unowned cats to humans by supporting and monitoring community cat management programs.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 8

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: The recommended \$20 license fee per altered cat could generate approximately \$200,000 annually. It is recommended that the net surplus revenue (actual revenues less actual expenses), estimated at \$115,000 annually, be directed into community cat management initiatives that assist in providing a healthy and safe community.

Staffing: One (1) additional FTE (at \$85,000) would be required to administer the Cat Licensing Program.

Legal: N/A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On March 11, 2015, Council approved Motion 7.1 with respect to “Proposed Cat Licensing Program”, which reads as follows:

- (a) That staff be directed to examine the feasibility of implementing a Cat Licensing Program in the urban area within By-law 12-031;
- (b) That staff be directed to examine any resources available to increase the microchipping registration of cats, and strategically manage the over-population of cats in Hamilton, thus resulting in responsible cat ownership, and report to the Planning Committee.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

N/A

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Municipalities across Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Hamilton Burlington Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (HBSPCA), Dr. Elizabeth O'Brien DVM, DABVP Cat Healthy, Hamilton Cat Strategy Working Group, Hamilton P.A.W.S., Public Health Services, Ontario Works and Corporate Services were consulted in preparation of this Report.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Cats make up over 60% of the domestic animals that Animal Services staff cares for annually. Any cat that is brought into the shelter is checked for a microchip, vaccinated, fed, cared for and held for a minimum of 72 hours in the event that the owner comes forward. After the 72-hour waiting period, a cat may go to one of our rescue partners for adoption, if healthy, or may be humanely euthanized. Owners typically do not start searching for their cat until a few days after it has not returned home as some cats can roam for days before returning home. Unfortunately, only 4% of these cats are returned to their owners as the majority of the cats that enter the shelter have no identification.

In the past, the topic of cat licensing has been widely debated. Staff reviewed the cat strategies and best practices from municipalities in Ontario and across Canada. Animal welfare agencies, veterinarians and municipalities understand the many benefits of registering and identifying a cat and, therefore, promote and support providing visible identification for cats. Licensing of cats is supported by the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, Cat Healthy, Dr. E. O'Brien and the Humane Society of the United States (Appendix “D” – Supporters of Licensing).

Licensing allows lost pets, and more specifically, cats, to be promptly reunited with their owner. Most major municipalities have utilized the revenue from cat licensing to provide cat management programs such as low cost spay / neuter programs, trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) programs, responsible pet ownership education, adoptions, rabies vaccination and microchipping clinics. All of these initiatives help in managing issues with the cat population.

As part of this undertaking, staff reviewed the needs of the cats in our community to determine how the revenue generated through a Cat Licensing Program could be used to assist and manage the issues that face our community.

Staff met with cat community partners, which included representation from the HBSPCA, Hamilton P.A.W.S., rescue groups and veterinarians, to discuss the concerns for managing the unwanted cat population in our City. The following top five priorities were identified:

1. Active collaboration between community partners;
2. A pet identification program that works and is accurate and accessible;
3. Accessible spay / neuter programs that are accessible and affordable;
4. An education program for the public on Responsible Pet Ownership; and,
5. A common resource directory for community partners.

Community partners have been utilizing their resources to help manage the cat problems in our City. There have been concerns that the City of Hamilton's involvement has been minimal and that a collaborative effort is needed to manage the cat population problem.

If approved, the recommended Cat Licensing Program could provide funding to allow staff to collaborate with community partners to collectively address the cat overpopulation problem and provide safe and healthy communities.

The following sections outline the factors that were considered in formulating the recommendations contained in this Report:

Identification

Pet identification is an important part of being a responsible pet owner. A cat with a visible license tag and collar symbolizes an owned cat and signifies that the cat is someone's pet and not an unowned feral cat. In such cases, people are more inclined to provide assistance, should the cat be lost.

A breakaway collar and license tag, combined with a readable microchip, is an investment for returning a pet home if it should ever escape, stray from the home or become lost. Most municipalities provide a “free ride home” to any found cat that is wearing a license tag.

Some municipalities also reward responsible pet owners by providing a discount card with the purchase of a cat licence. The “Pet Rewards Card” engages and supports local businesses. The Revenue Generation Division will be contacting local businesses to determine if there is any interest in participating in this rewards incentive as part of the City of Hamilton Cat Licensing Program, should the recommendation to license cats be approved.

Cat owners would be educated on the benefits of licensing their cat and how their licensing fee would help the cat community. The Licensing Program could have a positive message such as, “My licence is my ticket home”, rather than an enforcement type approach of “it is the law”. The goal is to encourage responsible pet ownership through education and community engagement in cat management issues.

Animal Services has an existing voluntary cat registry. The registry costs \$13 for the lifetime of the cat and has been available to owners for the past ten years. To date, there are only 375 cats registered. Without a By-law requiring owners to license their cat, the number of owners participating would likely remain low. Any cat currently registered under this program would be “grandfathered” into the new Licensing Program.

Free Roaming Unowned Cats

It is estimated that there are over 130,000 owned cats in the City¹. This number does not include the unowned cat population roaming in the City. In 2015, a total of 2,197 live cats were brought into the City shelter by residents. The majority of cats that enter the shelter are unowned, free-roaming, abandoned or feral cats.

It is difficult to estimate the number of unowned cats living in the City as there is no fixed address. For the purpose of this Report, it is estimated that there are approximately 133,000 free-roaming unowned cats living in the urban city². Free-roaming cats can be a nuisance to residents. Last year, Animal Services staff responded to 109 nuisance cat complaints from neighbours. Common complaints included cats defecating in gardens, spraying on property such as windows and doors, howling and fighting and ripping apart garbage. These are some of the reasons free-roaming cats are brought into the shelter.

¹ City of Hamilton GRIDS Report, Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, Cats in Canada - A Comprehensive Report on the Cat Overpopulation Crisis

²Levy, J.K. and P.C. Crawford, *Humane strategies for controlling feral cat populations*. J Am Vet Med Assoc, 2004. 225(9): p. 1354-60

The free-roaming cat population generally consists of a mixture of feral cats and semi-socialized cats that are strays. Free-roaming cats are sometimes referred to as “community cats” and tend to gather together in colonies where there is a food source.

Feral cats are domestic cats that were never socialized by humans or have lived outdoors for so long that they have reverted to a wild state. Characteristically, feral cats cannot be handled and are not suitable for adoption. As a result, cats deemed feral are often euthanized once brought to the shelter. Stray cats are cats that were once owned but have been abandoned by their owner or have become lost. With time, these cats can be socialized and may become suitable for adoption.

Unowned cats are a major contributor to the cat overpopulation problem in cities. Unaltered cats can have litters of four to six kittens twice a year. The cat population can increase exponentially. Only 6% of the cats that enter shelters in Canada are altered³.

There would be no feral cats without the loss or abandonment of unaltered cats. A responsible pet ownership education program will put the focus on the root of the problem. Otherwise, the population cycle will continue.

For years, euthanasia was the solution to control the overpopulation of unwanted cats in many municipalities, including the City of Hamilton. Past practice within the City of Hamilton was to trap and euthanize any unowned cats. This practice did nothing to manage or control the expanding cat population. Studies show that the practice of trap and euthanize only creates a vacuum effect, i.e. when a cat is removed from an area, a new cat(s) shows up to take its place.

Euthanasia is no longer a socially-acceptable approach. Staff has received concerns from citizens that do not want their municipalities to continue this practice and are more accepting of allowing the free-roaming cats to live within the community.

Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) is a more humane and effective method of controlling the free-roaming cat population. Cats are humanely trapped, spayed / neutered, vaccinated against rabies, microchipped, ear cropped and returned to their area for release. The tip of the ear is cropped to identify it as a neutered, unowned free-roaming or feral cat. Any social cat is placed for adoption. Programs such as TNVR would help protect the unowned cat community against rabies.

Raccoon Strain Rabies

In December 2015, an outbreak of the Raccoon Rabies Virus was discovered in the central area of Hamilton and Stoney Creek. The area of concern has escalated to include all of the geographical area of Hamilton. Public Health Services has identified

³ Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, Cats in Canada - The State of Spay-Neuter in Canada by the Numbers

the need to control the spread of the deadly virus. The City's free-roaming unowned and feral cat population has been identified as a transmitter for the potential spread of the deadly disease.

Some residents are sympathetic to free-roaming cats and begin to care for them by feeding them and providing outdoor shelter. These community cats live in neighbourhoods throughout the City. As these cats are unowned, they have not received proper veterinary care such as being spayed / neutered or given proper vaccinations against disease. Although residents have good intentions with feeding the feral and stray cats, this also attracts wildlife such as raccoons and skunks to the neighbourhood.

Raccoon Strain Rabies is an issue in the City of Hamilton. The City is responsible for protecting the public against this deadly disease. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry advises that it may take three-to-five years or more to eliminate the Raccoon Strain Rabies from our area.

Rabies affects domestic and wild animals and is spread to people through bites or scratches, usually via saliva. Ontario Rabies Immunizations Regulation 567 under the *Health Protection and Promotions Act* requires that that any dog or cat over the age of three months be vaccinated against rabies.

Public Health Services has identified that free-roaming cats are a vector for the spread of the deadly rabies virus. Public Health Services has warned about the risk of contracting rabies through the handling and feeding of unvaccinated feral cats. Cats that have not been vaccinated can get rabies through using the same food bowls as rabid raccoons, as well as through contact, such as bite or scratch. If a feral or stray cat becomes rabid, it can be transferred to a human caregiver. Free-roaming cats are a serious concern as a vector for rabies, and for exposing the virus to the people that feed them. There is potential for humans to contract the disease if bitten or scratched by an infected cat. Public Health Services reported that there were 80 bites from stray cats in 2015.

Since 1992, the majority of rabid domestic animals in the United States have been cats.⁴ Dogs were the primary domestic concern for contracting rabies when they roamed freely through the community. However, through education and enforcement of municipal by-laws, the concern regarding dogs has diminished. Responsible dog owners license, vaccinate and do not allow their dogs to roam at large. In the opinion of staff, the same education and enforcement is needed for owned cats.

Responsible pet owners generally comply with this requirement and have their dog or cat vaccinated against rabies, as well as other animal-related diseases. However,

⁴ American Veterinary Medical Association, <https://www.avma.org/Events/pethealth/Pages/world-rabies-day.aspx>

some owners do not believe that it is necessary to have their cat vaccinated as it is an “indoor cat”. More than 40% of owned cats either have not been vaccinated in the last four years or have never been vaccinated at all.⁵ Cat owners need to be educated on the importance of rabies vaccines even for indoor cats. Bats in our area can also carry rabies and do find their way into homes often.

Cat licensing could help to protect the community against rabies by requiring that a cat must be vaccinated against rabies before a licence can be issued. When the license tag is visible, the community will know that cat has been vaccinated against the rabies virus.

Accessible Spay / Neuter

Accessible and affordable spaying / neutering of cats is one of the priorities identified by community partners. By assisting the community with spaying / neutering and vaccinating of pet cats, the City would be helping to stop the reproduction cycle and put an end to the unwanted litters of kittens and protect against the spread of rabies.

Community partners such as HBSPCA, Community Veterinarian Outreach (CVO) and Hamilton P.A.W.S. have programs to assist residents in need with accessing veterinary care for their pets. The revenue generated through cat licensing can be used to enhance community initiatives such as subsidized spay / neuter programs, rabies and microchip clinics for the City’s vulnerable citizens.

Summary

The number of owned lost cats entering our shelter would be reduced by the implementation of a mandatory Cat Licensing Program.

The recommended cat licensing user fee could support funding for one (1) FTE to administer the Cat Licensing Program. Also, it is recommended that the net surplus be placed in an approved account to be used to address the City’s cat issues through humane and effective community initiatives.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

Implement a mandatory Cat Licensing Program and direct the remaining surplus revenue (estimated at \$115k) to the City’s levy.

⁵ Perrin T. The Business of Urban Animals Survey: The facts and statistics on companion animals in Canada Can Vet J Jan 2009

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Community Engagement and Participation

Hamilton has an open, transparent and accessible approach to City government that engages with and empowers all citizens to be involved in their community.

Healthy and Safe Communities

Hamilton is a safe and supportive City where people are active, healthy and have a high quality of life.

Our People and Performance

Hamiltonians have a high level of trust and confidence in their City government.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A: Cat Licensing Program

Appendix B: Draft By-law Amendment to By-law 12-031 For Responsible Animal Ownership in the City of Hamilton

Appendix C: Supporters of Licensing and Municipalities with Licensing Programs

SR:KL:cab.