

The proposed City of Hamilton Cat Licensing Program leaves me with more questions than answers.

The main question would be, “What are the outcomes and benefits of the program?”

The program documents state that four percent of cats going to HAS get returned to their owners. Many other jurisdictions have implemented cat licensing programs over the past several years. Has there been any improvement in the rate of cats returned to their owners? In other words, is there any proof that cat licensing works in this regard? The City of Barrie required cat licensing since 2010, yet a recent report showed that only 6.7% of dogs and cats picked up in 2014 were wearing Barrie license tags when impounded. The report doesn’t distinguish between dogs and cats, but we could assume that more of the impounded dogs were wearing tags than cats, as 4,337 dog licenses were issued, compared to 1,209 cat licenses. This represents an estimated 17% of dogs and 4.5% of the cats in the city. Barrie city staff recommended in 2015 that the mandatory licensing program be scrapped in favour of a one-time “Registration” program which is required for dogs and optional for cats.<sup>i</sup>

The documents posted online for this cat licensing program estimate that there are 130,000 owned cats in Hamilton and 133,000 unowned cats. There seems to be an expectation that approximately 10,000 cats will get licensed (based on \$200,000 in revenue / \$20 per license). This is a very small fraction of the total owned cat population, less than eight percent. The overall effect on the total population will be minimal, certainly in regards to the control of rabies.

Who will license the unowned cats? Surely no one will do this. This indicates that all unowned cats will be walking around without licenses, along with over 92% of the owned cats, some of which are allowed by their owners to go outside off-leash and unsupervised. There will be no way to distinguish between these two groups of cats.

What will HAS employees do when they see a cat wandering the streets with no license tag? Will they pick it up and take it back to HAS to check it for a microchip? If they find a microchip, will they then hold the cat ransom, demanding that the owner come and pay the license fee in order to get their cat back? While this could generate some revenue, it would certainly upset the taxpayers of the City of Hamilton, so this is (hopefully) an unlikely outcome. If no microchip is found and the cat is held at HAS, we will be reverting to the old days, when thousands of cats were processed at HAS every year and a very large percentage of them were euthanized. Surely this is not the desired outcome. Therefore, it seems likely that HAS will continue with their policy of only bringing sick or injured cats in to the shelter, and leaving “lost” cats on the street as they have been doing for the past few years.

This begs the question: What changes will HAS make as a result of the licensing of cats in Hamilton? If there is no change, then what are the benefits of the licensing program? The “Program Benefits” listed in Appendix A to Report PED16208 consist mostly of discounted rates, exclusions and exemptions, and are not truly benefits. The main benefit listed is that “A lost cat wearing a City-issued license tag is provided a free ride home”. Surely this is a joke. How does anyone know that the cat is “lost”? The public has been told not to bring cats to the shelter that they think are lost. HAS employees don’t pick up cats that they think may be lost. If they did, the shelter would be overrun as it was several years ago, with thousands of cats being euthanized. The only other true benefit listed is that “Revenue generated

through cat licensing will support cat-related programs such as population prevention and community-based programs.” It would be nice to see some further details on how this will be done. It is questionable whether HAS is the proper avenue to deliver these programs, as their mandate is not to protect the animals’ welfare, but to protect the welfare of the human inhabitants of the City of Hamilton.

In order to get the support of the citizens of the City of Hamilton, it will be necessary to show that this program can bring some real benefits to the people and the cats. Without concrete benefits, this will be seen simply as a new tax on pet owners.

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<http://www.barrie.ca/City%20Hall/ByLaws/GeneralDocuments/Staff-Report-Pet-Licensing-Review-Oct2015.pdf>