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As a feline specialist, I would like to commend the City of Hamilton on deciding to put energy and resources into increasing the value of cats within our community by looking at humane methods to deal with our street cats and by promoting responsible cat ownership/guardianship. Much is already being done to make a difference for homeless cats in this community by the HBSPCA, rescue groups, veterinarians and volunteer citizens. I am encouraged that the City of Hamilton is looking to join forces with these organizations and individuals. Although I personally believe in licensing cats in order to promote identification, registration, vaccination and a safe return home, I cannot support this recommendation as it stands, because I have several concerns.

- The City of Hamilton's existing by-law is based on the restriction of numbers of allowed pets in a household and not based on responsible pet ownership. In order to license cats from multi-cat/pet households, the city needs to change our existing by-law to create responsible pet ownership by-laws.
- Licensing unaltered cats is not acceptable. Although this occurs for dogs, "CATS ARE NOT SMALL DOGS". Unaltered cats roam, fight, spray and reproduce. Unaltered cats (unless from a licensed cattery) represent irresponsible cat ownership and are the root of the "Cat Problem". With an affordable spay/neuter program, which currently is offered by the HBSPCA, an unaltered cat could be spayed and neutered for the cost of a license. The license should be for spayed/neutered and rabies protected cats only and used for identification to have this well cared for cat returned safely home if it gets lost and to identify the cat as owned and not homeless.
- Licensing is really a form of identification; it creates a safe trip home. Although I personally am a fan of both visual identification (collar and tag) and microchip, the report to committee put too much emphasis on the license and a collar and tag. Unlike dogs, cats lose collars and tags on a regular basis. The city will need to be prepared to replace those tags frequently at no additional fee. Microchips are the international standard for cat identification and collars and tags are a visual addition to identification. A cat's microchip is like our passport. Microchips are ISO regulated and each company has a registry that is easily accessed. Additionally, several rabies vaccinations include a registered tag. I question whether a City of Hamilton registry is required and it may even complicate an effective system that is already in place.
- Responsible cat owners already have their cat microchipped, their contact information is up to date and their cats are protected from infectious diseases including rabies – how will licensing benefit them?
- 100 percent of the licensing fees need to go directly towards programs that will help the cats in this community such as TNR, accessible spay/neuter, accessible microchip clinics, rabies clinics and education programs about responsible cat ownership and care. There needs to be a specific plan in place that is created by a Community Cat Committee as to the best use of the funds before this discussion moves any further. This committee should be inclusive of individuals and groups already actively doing their part to help the cats in the City of Hamilton as well as representatives from the HBSPCA, animal services, public health and the lead City of Hamilton staff member. These funds should NOT under any circumstance go to the City Levy. In order to support the city in this endeavour, I would like to see this Community Cat Committee guide the city towards an effective and fair licensing/identification program for cats before any further recommendations are made.

Sincerely, Liz O'Brien DVM, DABVP (feline practice)