

Dear Chair and Members Planning Committee,

Unfortunately, due to my work schedule, I am unable to speak to you in person but would like to address the proposed City of Hamilton Cat Licensing Program

I am pleased to see in the report reference to the need to address cat management initiatives addressed. Now, this is something that could happen only if there was a surplus of revenue, and that is uncertain and of concern. Unfortunately, there are factors that would prevent people from licensing their cats, which in turn would greatly reduce projected revenue. One being the by-law limiting the number of pets people can own. I think in theory, members were led to believe that limiting pet ownership to 4 would reduce the instances of hoarding. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Hoarding is a mental illness which posing limits does not cure. Limits only send these hoarders further into hiding, and less likely to seek help; due to the fear that if the city found out, they would be severely penalized. This fear is also present in responsible pet owners who may be over the city's limit of four pets per household.

Another point I'd like to raise is increasing return home rates. The current return rate for cats reunited with their owners is very low in Hamilton. It has been quoted as being only 4% percent of the cats entering the city pound. Although this percentage is low, licensing cats will not likely improve the return rate, as many cats break away and lose their collars. The best proven way to insure an animal has the opportunity to be reunited with their owner quickly is through mandatory microchipping or tattoo. These methods are permanent features and owner information can be easily obtained. Hamilton Animal Services could benefit and raise revenue through microchip clinics throughout the city. As a person who has attended every HBSPCA's \$20 spay and neuter registrations this year, it's not that people don't want to sterilize their cat/s, it's just that they simply can't afford to. \$20 a year may not seem much to you, but to a family living at or below the poverty line, that could be a meal on the table. A onetime low cost fee is simply more feasible for those who want to be responsible, but simply cannot fit a yearly fee within their budget. If the city imposed mandatory licensing and provided lower cost options for microchipping, compliance rates would increase; thus resulting in less cats entering the pound, less cats being euthanized and more returning home.

City staff did meet with cat community partners at 2 meetings generously hosted by the HBSPCA to discuss concerns for managing the unwanted cat population in our City. As a member of a Trap Neuter and Release Program, I was involved in these meetings and, as stated in the report, 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.

I must agree that the final statement holds true. The City of Hamilton needs to become actively involved not only to assist with reducing the number of cats born on the streets but also to promote and educate the public on their options when they are faced with no feeding policies that the city has imposed. A collaboration has to be formed and the city needs to provide information on the current TNR Program at the HBSPCA as well as their low cost spay and neuter options. Unfortunately the city has failed in regards to educating the public and people are still unaware that there is help for them. Again, a threat of a fine will not help the residents of Hamilton help make this city a better place to live and raise a family, but will force them into hiding and not seek the necessary options to not only reduce the cat population, but reduce the number of cats entering the city pound.

Thank you,

Cindy Suffoletta
Hamilton Street Cats