



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Planning Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	June 18, 2019
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Hamilton Community Cat Network (HCCN) (PED19123) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

The purpose of this Report is to advise Council of the progress of the Hamilton Community Cat Network (HCCN) and the City of Hamilton's Animal Services commitment as one of the founding members.

INFORMATION

Hamilton is one of many communities across Canada that has a concern with overpopulation of cats. The impacts of cat overpopulation are serious for both the cats and the communities. An unaltered female can give birth to approximately 15 kittens a year. Kittens born to the street with no socialization grow to be feral cats. Feral and community cats are responsible for 80 percent of kittens born each year and are the largest contributing source of cat overpopulation¹.

Community cats are unowned cats living in Hamilton neighbourhoods often in groups called colonies. Community cats include:

- Stray/homeless cats: lost or abandoned pets who may be suitable for a home; and,

¹ Levy, J.K. and P.C. Crawford, Humane strategies for controlling feral cat populations. J Am Vet Med Assoc, 2004. 225(9): p. 1354-60].

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

- Feral cats: cats with little or no socialization with people, are fearful and generally unsuitable for a home.

In November 2016, community wide discussions commenced with a focus on collaboration for action strategies for community cats. In September 2017 the HCCN was formed.

The Hamilton Community Cat Network (HCCN)

The HCCN is a community based voluntary association of key stakeholders focused on strategies to reduce the community cat population in Hamilton. The founding members include:

- City of Hamilton Animal Services;
- City of Hamilton Public Health;
- Hamilton/Burlington SPCA;
- Hamilton Street Cats;
- Veterinary Community - Dr. Elizabeth O'Brien and Dr. Alyssa Libstug; and,
- Community volunteer member representatives.

The purpose of the network is to:

- Create a healthier Hamilton for people and cats;
- Reduce the population of community cats; and,
- Enhance knowledge and understanding about Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) and spay/neuter for all cats.

A formal 12 month development phase started in March 2018. The review period permitted the group to understand each member's different skill sets, interests and ideas and what they bring to the HCCN. The HCCN 12 Month Development Phase Review is attached as Appendix "A" to this Report.

Network Members Interests

In 2018, only 5% of stray cats brought in and cared for by Hamilton Animal Services were claimed by owners. Unclaimed cats that are adoptable, enter the city adoption program stream or are transferred to rescue partners. Feral cats that enter the City shelter are not adoption candidates nor is there an owner looking for them. The number of cats euthanized in the City shelter has steadily and significantly declined because of successful implementation of progressive best practices. This includes not removing healthy feral cats from the street to house and euthanize.

Statistics show that this past practice of removing cats from an area does not work to control cat population.

Hamilton Animal Services provides 24/7 response for service calls to deceased and sick or injured stray cats. When veterinary attention is required for illness or medical issues, care is provided by and paid for by Hamilton Animal Services. In 2018, Officers picked up 726 deceased stray cats and responded to 464 sick or injured stray cats on public right of way. The majority of these cats had no owner and were intact; not spayed or neutered.

The City also receives calls related to nuisance behaviours including fighting, roaming and cats spraying and defecating on private property. These are all issues related to community cats.

Hamilton Public Health has identified free roaming cats as a concern for the spread of rabies. Hamilton is currently a rabies epicentre. Free roaming community cats are at a higher risk of mixing with rabies vector species such as raccoons, skunks and bats.

The City is also responsible for the enforcement of the by-law regarding the feeding of stray cats. The feeding of cats is prohibited unless the feeder is an approved, registered caregiver of the Hamilton-Burlington Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (HBSPCA) Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) program. The cats are humanely trapped by volunteers, spayed/neutered, vaccinated, microchipped and the left ear is tipped to visually identify them. The cats are then returned to their original territory. A registered caregiver then oversees and manages the colony and adheres to best practices for healthy cats. TNVR helps to reduce the number of cats in the area while also vaccinating them against rabies. Properly delivered TNVR can improve the health of community cats, address community concerns, reduce complaints about cats, and reduce population.

The HBSPCA, community partners and citizens have been coordinating and utilizing their resources to operate the TNVR program. Last year 500 community cats were serviced through the HBSPCA's TNVR program. Surgery is largely resourced through the HBSPCA, capture and transfer of cats for surgery is dependent on volunteers, and ongoing shelter and oversight of a colony is provided by the registered colony caregiver.

The HBSPCA coordinates colony applications, approvals and site inspections, all surgery appointments and some food provisions for colonies. Donations to the HBSPCA subsidize all TNVR for community cats at \$50 each, resulting in a lowered \$45 per cat fee which the registered caregiver covers. The HBSPCA also provides a range of options for affordable pet cat spay/neuter programming.

Hamilton Street Cats is a 100% volunteer run community based group that supports a significant number of colony caregivers through hands on mentoring, problem solving, cat trapping and transportation. Hamilton Street Cats provides neighborhood education and engagement. They financially assist caregivers who wish to participate but do not have the personal financing to complete a colony. They assist owners with intact pet cats without the finances to spay/neuter their pet. In 2018, Hamilton Street Cats assisted with co-pay and stopped the breeding cycle for 359 cats; 130 were serviced through the HBSPCA programming and 229 were identified as unowned adoption candidates and placed with rescue partners.

Veterinarian members hold the skill and expertise to inspire action among the greater veterinary community to contribute to population solutions for community cats as well as be the source for ensuring spay/neuter and preventative care is maintained with cat owners for optimal pet retention. Some local veterinarians also provide services at a reduced cost to individual colony caregivers and rescue groups

Community member's desire reduced cat populations on the streets for many reasons. Many volunteer their time, effort and finances to ensure cats that are not theirs, but living in their neighbourhoods are sterilized, vaccinated and managed and educate the neighbourhoods about solutions. There are also a number independent rescue groups and partners who assist in resolution for the prevention of pets abandoned to the street, and in-take friendly unowned street cats.

The HCCN has been working in collaboration to develop proper and consistent messaging to the public, safe policies and procedures for caregivers and a format to address public concerns and awareness regarding community cats. The HCCN Brochure is attached as Appendix "B" to this Report.

Progress Update

Communication and Education

- Common messaging on Network member websites;
- Educational brochure for public awareness; and,
- Co-developed interactive training and education workshops facilitated by Network members and trained volunteers held monthly throughout the City.

Access to TNVR

- HBSPCA increasing access to surgeries both on site and in coordination with member veterinarian off site.

Community Cat, Caregiver and Neighbourhood Safety

- Hamilton Animal Services and HBSPCA cooperation on colony caregiver approval processes and compliance requirements;

- Continued focus on rabies safety;
- Currently there are over 100 registered colony caregiver volunteers;
- March 2018 - March 2019: no complaints about registered colonies received by Hamilton Animal Services; and,
- Increased coordination of stakeholder and partner referral and communications.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Topical presentations at association and neighbourhood hub meetings; and,
- Network consultation with and learning from related parties e.g. cat rescue groups, Nature Canada.

Future Engagement

Community cat programs are considered as one component of a multi-pronged approach to cat issues in the community. A community wide cat strategy is within our collective grasp with a commitment to shared responsibility for cat populations. The HCCN is increasingly focused on measuring the reach and impact of strategies in place for healthy, safe and wanted cats. A series of public engagements and workshops have been scheduled for 2019.

Some of the challenges in search of solutions include:

- What revenue sources will sustain plans, strategies and actions?
- How can social media channels and community based engagement be optimized for education and best care for cats?
- What are the best ways to report back to the community the progress being made on cat overpopulation?

Community cats are a community challenge that requires community based solutions. No one entity holds the solutions. The HCCN draws upon the insight, experience and innovation among all members and beyond to increase cats' value in our community.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A": 12 Month Development Phase Review

Appendix "B": HCCN Brochure

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