



CITY OF HAMILTON

City Manager's Office
Human Resources

TO:	Chair and Members Audit, Finance and Administration Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	November 21, 2019
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Workplace Pet Policy and Procedure (HUR19023) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SUBMITTED BY:	Lora Fontana Executive Director Human Resources
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the Workplace Pet Policy attached as Appendix A to Report HUR19023 and the Workplace Pet Procedure attached as Appendix B to Report HUR19023, be approved.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a workplace wellness initiative for employees of the City of Hamilton and to further position the City as an employer of choice, staff is recommending that the City adopt the Workplace Pet Policy and Procedure that would allow for the inclusion of pets, specifically dogs and cats, in City workplaces where appropriate, supported and approved.

The policy and procedure provide criteria for determining the suitability of pets within the individual City workplaces as well as guidelines for implementing a City workplace program for ensuring that the needs of all City workplace parties and the public are met. A total of 27 City workplaces have been assessed and deemed as being suitable as potential sites for bringing pets to work.

Alternatives for Consideration –Not Applicable

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

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FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: None

Staffing: None

Legal: To avoid legal ramifications for the City of Hamilton that could arise from incidents involving pets in City workplaces, the City will require pet owners to provide proof of insurance, including liability coverage. In addition, pet owners participating in the program will be required to sign a waiver indicating that the pet owner accepts all responsibility for the actions of the pet, that they hold the City of Hamilton harmless from any property damage or bodily injury that may arise from the pet, and that the City is in no way responsible for any injuries or mishap that may arise from having their pet in a City workplace.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (Chronology of events)

The practice of permitting pets in some City of Hamilton workplaces has been in place informally since before 2003. Around this same time wherein the City assumed responsibilities for Animal Services, the practice of allowing employees to bring their dogs into the workplace had been established. This practice has continued, and since 2003, there have been very few issues reported. Any issue raised has been largely related to damage of personal items as a result of not following established rules. The environment of the shelter where Animal Services is located is conducive to the inclusion of personal pets, and as such, no additional challenges due to allergies or legislated restrictions have been identified.

In February 2017, the City began to explore the possibility of extending the workplace pet policy to other workplaces within the City of Hamilton. A Bring Your Dog to Work Program was launched at the Lister Block as a workplace wellness initiative and pilot project for staff working out of that building. Staff developed a procedure and documentation to outline rules and responsibilities for pet owners participating in the program. This included a requirement that agreement amongst the work teams had to be achieved prior to the program being implemented in a workplace. Since the program's implementation in 2017, feedback from staff at Lister Block, both dog owners and non-dog owners, has been overwhelmingly positive. The program has been modified over time to address issues that have arisen, including ensuring that any employee with animal-related allergies was not exposed to pets in the workplace. No negative impacts on operations have been identified. Employees have expressed their appreciation that the program is available at their workplace and have indicated that it has had a positive impact on their mental health and well-being. The program continues today, and the experience and lessons learned from the pilot in Lister Block has helped to inform the development of the corporate-wide policy and procedure.

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

The Workplace Pet Policy and Procedure specifically excludes areas where animals are legislatively barred, such as food preparation areas. Similarly, animals that are banned through by-law or provincial legislation are specifically excluded from participation in the program.

In drafting the policy and procedure, staff considered potential employee concerns that could arise through the implementation of the policy, including health and safety, allergies and fear of animals. To account for and address these concerns, language has been included in the policy to ensure that the workplace pet policy will not be approved for implementation in any work area where there is a bona fide concern expressed from any employee that cannot be satisfactorily addressed. Employees may express concern to their supervisor, or alternately, they can confidentially and anonymously disclose their concerns to the appropriate section with Human Resources. Concerns can be identified at any time, and leaders are responsible for checking in with employees to ensure that the implementation of the workplace pet policy continues to be supported by all team members. To address health and safety and other related concerns, staff have included direction in the policy and procedure to ensure that animals accepted into the workplace pet program are healthy, up to date on all vaccinations, and are kept under control at all times. Where an animal shows aggression of any kind or is disruptive to the work environment, they will be immediately removed.

Measures have also been included within the Workplace Pet Policy and Procedure to address potential concerns from citizens and/or visiting staff regarding the inclusion of pets within City workplaces. This includes ensuring that the primary location where pets are housed is not directly accessible to the public, and additionally, ensuring that if pets might be in areas that are open to the public and other visitors, such as reception areas and meeting and conference rooms, that there is clear signage identifying their presence and the opportunity for visitors to request that the pet be removed from the space. In addition, where citizens, outside contractors, and/or other City staff are expected to be in a City facility where pets are present, they are to be informed in advance and given the opportunity to identify concerns and request an alternate meeting location, if required.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Staff consulted with the Corporate Policy Review Group, Legal and Risk Management Services, and the Senior Leadership Team in the creation of this policy and procedure.

Staff also conducted a review of the practices of our municipal partners and found that while there are no other Ontario municipalities that currently have an approved workplace pet policy in place outside of service animals, there was great interest in pursuing this policy area. At present, the City of Greater Sudbury and the Town of Whitby advised that

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they are currently in the process of drafting workplace pet policies, and a number of municipalities identified informal practices that currently allow pets in the workplace.

A best practice review of relevant literature was conducted, and staff additionally reviewed policies from post-secondary institutions and private sector workplaces.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The inclusion of animals in the workplace has well documented benefits for employees and workplaces. Studies have shown that these programs have a positive impact on stress and anxiety levels of employees, including the pet owner and employees within the work area housing an animal (Pohherber & Matchock, 2014). In addition, the inclusion of pets in the workplace has been shown to enhance work-life balance, increase positive social interactions between employees, and has been reported to improve workplace culture and build camaraderie among team members (University of Southern California, 2017).

Studies have also shown that employers who have introduced programs to include pets in the workplace have experienced increased productivity and performance enhancements. (Foreman, Glenn, Meade & Worth, 2017). The implementation of a workplace pet program has also been shown to enhance employee retention and has been seen as a useful strategy in the recruitment of skilled staff (Kramer, 2018).

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION - Not Applicable

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Our People and Performance

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

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report HUR19023: Workplace Pet Policy

Appendix B to Report HUR19023: Workplace Pet Procedure