

Added Item 5.1(f)



November 29, 2019

Members of the Public Works Committee
Hamilton City Hall
2nd Floor- 71 Main Street West
Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

Dear Councillors,

The following is in support of an exotic bird sanctuary in the Hamilton community. The Hamilton Aviary provides a sanctuary for exotic birds in need of a home and/or healing due to no fault of their own. The Friends of the Aviary are more than volunteers who run the Aviary. We are stewards preserving the beauty of aviculture for generations to come. Our activities inspire visitors to develop a deeper connection with nature and form a community of compassionate caretakers.

Our Mission is to advocate for exotic birds; rehabilitate and retrain; educate and foster academics; focus on the health and wellness of people and birds; and create a beautiful attraction and destination. We seek to use the Aviary and our flock as an educational tool to improve awareness of nature, conservation, and the many aspects of responsible care required by exotic birds.

Our Vision: Healing Hamilton with humanity, compassion, and feathered friends. For our community. For the love of birds.

A decision to close the Aviary is not in the best interest of the flock and will only add to a nationwide problem. Exotic animals are vulnerable to abuse, backyard breeders, and inadequate care. Many parrots end up rehomed multiple times in their lifespan due to a variety of reasons. Exotic birds are companion animals, they are wild, and they are not pets. They have not been domesticated over the course of centuries like dogs and cats. Parrots, much like our flock, tend to be 1-3 generations removed from their wild habitat and instincts, or were themselves wild-caught as fledglings by poachers. You inherited "the bird business" by decisions made almost a century ago by your predecessors. You have a responsibility to the human and avian residents of Hamilton.

Ontario's Ministry of the Solicitor General, Animal Welfare Task Force Report in October 2012 referred to the "One Health" concept, which recognizes the increasing convergence of animal, human and ecosystem health, and emphasizes that maintaining animal health is integral to maintaining the health of humans.

CTV Ottawa reported on "Canada's parrot problem" published on Friday, August 14, 2015. The article discusses the work done by Parrot Partners, a charity based in Smiths Falls, Ontario providing sanctuary and training for abandoned parrots.

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CBC News reported on “‘We thought we’d will her to our son’: Bird ownership proves tough commitment” published on October 18, 2016. ‘Rare is the parrot who does have a forever home,’ stated by aviculturalist Melanie Shura. The article discusses Greyhaven Exotic Bird Sanctuary in B.C. caring for approximately 600 homeless birds. The author also states “There is no reliable information on parrot ownership in Canada, but the American Pet Products Association conducted a survey in 2015 that suggested there are 14 million birds living in homes across the U.S.”

Melissa Matlow, Senior Wildlife Campaign Manager with World Animal Protection stated in a media release dated Dec 18, 2018 "Whether they are sourced from the wild or bred in captivity, many wild animals suffer and die when crudely transported, handled and kept as pets in inappropriate conditions that can't meet their complex needs. Exotic pets are often an impulse buy and we know people are pressed to make quick decisions over the holidays. We urge people to take time to consider what is needed to care for these animals properly. Once they are informed, we believe they will understand why wild animals are not appropriate gifts or pets."

The Hamilton Aviary often receives requests to take in new birds when parrot owners decide that their companion bird is no longer a good fit for them; they no longer have the time for a parrot; or they are unable to cope with behavioural concerns. The general public do not realize that parrots are by nature vocally loud, destructive, time consuming, and expensive. They also do not always take in to consideration the lifespan of up to 80 years for large parrots, up to 40-60 years for medium parrots, and up to 20-30 years for small parrots; as their owners pass away these parrots find themselves homeless. Parrots require commitment and future planning. The Aviary's mission is to advocate for exotic birds and educate the community on what responsible ownership of companion birds entails. By doing so, we are taking an upstream approach to mitigate future animal health and welfare concerns that burden government funding.

A sanctuary in Hamilton, Ontario with a purpose-built facility would provide access to services to the residents of Southern Ontario whom are unable to travel far distance to reputable organizations such as Parrot Partners or Greyhaven. It would reduce the strain on government animal welfare services. We were recently recognized as Hamilton's top tourist attraction- we will continue to add to tourism. It is known that there is an offer for a significant donation on your table. At the time the letter from the donor's representatives was written to you, they did not know that the Hamilton Aviary was operated by a charitable organization, Friends of the Aviary; they assumed it was a City of Hamilton program. **I would like to request that any action regarding the Hamilton Aviary be tabled so that stakeholders can have a conversation about the future of the Aviary.**

Our business case presented to you in February 2019 was difficult to produce due to a lack of transparency from the City of Hamilton. The annual Horticulture budget for the Aviary was unknown to us and we presented other barriers. In our meeting with the City in August 2019, we questioned the last 4-year average for the care and maintenance of the birds and building being \$46,000. We also did not receive clarity on whether or not “maintenance” costs included just the Aviary building or the contents of Churchill Park in general (ie. the entire grounds or the problem-prone gate which is shared with the

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teaching gardens) or how maintenance billing was coded separately. We did not receive clarity on the cost of \$1,471,500 in improvements to the current Aviary structure at 85 Oak Knoll Drive.

The Hamilton Aviary has been a cultural institution in Hamilton since 1927. It is my hope that the Friends of the Aviary and the City of Hamilton can partner together to find a resolution to keep the Hamilton Aviary in operation.

Sincerely,

Tom Priestly RN, BSc, BScN
President
Friends of the Aviary

cc: Maureen Wilson, Ward 1 Councillor

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