

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Report PW23062 – Management of the Aviary at 85 Oak Knoll Drive.

From: Tom Priestly

Sent: September 17, 2023 3:21 PM

To: Ward 1 Office <ward1@hamilton.ca>; Ward 2 <ward2@hamilton.ca>; Ward 4 <ward4@hamilton.ca>; Office of Ward 3 City Councillor Nrinder Nann <ward3@hamilton.ca>; Francis, Matt <Matt.Francis@hamilton.ca>; Jackson, Tom <Tom.Jackson@hamilton.ca>; Pauls, Esther <Esther.Pauls@hamilton.ca>; Ward 8 Office <ward8@hamilton.ca>; Clark, Brad <Brad.Clark@hamilton.ca>; Beattie, Jeff <Jeff.Beattie@hamilton.ca>; Tadeson, Mark <Mark.Tadeson@hamilton.ca>; Ward 12 Office <ward12@hamilton.ca>; Ward 13 <ward13@hamilton.ca>; Spadafora, Mike <Mike.Spadafora@hamilton.ca>; McMeekin, Ted <Ted.McMeekin@hamilton.ca>

Cc: Office of the Mayor <Officeofthe.Mayor@hamilton.ca>; clerk@hamilton.ca

Subject: RE: Report PW23062 – Management of the Aviary at 85 Oak Knoll Drive.

Attention: Public Works Committee

Dear Councillors,

I first started volunteering at the Hamilton Aviary in high school, 23 years ago, the Aviary helped prepare me for a career as a Registered Nurse. Living with autism it taught me responsibility to show up on time for shifts, and the delayed gratification of handling the birds after chores were done. Birds have a lot to teach humans. They teach us about being good listeners. When we learn to understand what a bird is telling us through body language, we're learning how to interpret nonverbal communication. Body language accounts for 90% of the communication between people. As flock animals, birds know the importance of getting along. Like us, birds are social animals, with defined roles within their flock. Also like us, they have distinct personalities and a wide range of emotional reactions – happy, sad, stubborn, defiant, loving. In order for the flock to survive, birds have to respect the roles of others and cooperate despite differences. When we work with birds we become part of the flock, and that means learning how to approach others with respect and awareness. Elevated feathers on the nape of the neck, pupils pinned, open beak, and fanned tail feathers --a bird gives a clear warning that personal space has been invaded. By asserting their boundaries while giving the offender a chance to walk away, birds set a good example of how we can stand up for ourselves while avoiding escalating conflict.

Macaws are known for their large, powerful beaks, it's understandable to find them intimidating or even frightening. Overcoming that initial fear and learning to handle a large parrot has been a great confidence builder for me. Confronting a fear and working through it can leave us feeling empowered and ready to take on other intimidating situations in life.

Birds are straightforward in their relationships. They don't judge, they don't blame and they won't tell your secrets (ok, some might). If you have a hard time opening up to others, birds can offer a non-judgemental relationship where you can practice building trust. Over time that experience can be applied to human relationships too. Hamilton is privileged to have this flock open to the public. Also, whether it's grooming, cleaning enclosures, feeding, or communicating cross-species, parrots require us to work hard. In an era of instant gratification, birds have a lot to teach us about the value of physical and mental effort. A useful lesson in all aspects of life.

I remember Jerry, an African Grey who passed away years ago. His outdoor flight was adjacent to a bench in the park. I used to visit him in the summer evenings, he would sit out there and whistle the Andy Griffith Show theme song and watch the neighborhood kids play. Jerry taught me to enjoy the little things. Those neighborhood kids are now grown up and bringing their families to visit the flock they loved growing up. A flock is a family.

Hamilton's parrots are not pets and most will not do well in a home. These birds are precious and vulnerable. They are in need of sanctuary. A decision to close the Aviary and rehome the birds 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 (health/diet/enrichment/habitat). 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 instincts, or were themselves wild-caught as fledglings by poachers.

CBC News reported on October 18, 2016, Greyhaven Exotic Bird Sanctuary in B.C. caring for approximately 600 homeless birds. The article 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...".

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. The general public do not realize that parrots are by nature 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, financial stability, enrichment, 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. We also educate the public about endangered species and environmental conservation both overseas and locally.

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 in Smith Falls, ON or Greyhaven in BC. It would reduce the strain on government animal services and animal shelters.

The flock has been a part of Hamilton since the 1920s and their existence as they know it is threatened. Most of them would not do well in a home as a pet. They require a group of knowledgeable guardians to be their voice. These individuals have complex social relationships in the flock and some would not do well separate from the others. These beautiful creatures have lived together for decades, and are bonded together and to their human caretakers. They belong in Hamilton as feathered citizens and belong together as a flock. For almost 100 years The Hamilton Aviary is part of our cultural heritage. For almost 30 years the Aviary has been part of Churchill Park's history.

Sincerely,

Tom Priestly RN, BScN, BSc
Board Director
The Hamilton Aviary