



NARRATIVE
RESEARCH

Animal Licensing & Control Bylaw Renewal

Edmonton

Prepared for:
The City of Edmonton

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Project Overview

Background

The City of Edmonton is currently undertaking an in-depth review of its Animal Licensing & Control bylaw, with the goal of making the bylaw more modern, promoting responsible pet ownership, as well as a safe and healthy Edmonton. The current iteration of the bylaw is over 20 years old, and in recent years there have been notable shifts related to pet ownership in the City, including changing expectations and trends with companion animals, growth of urban agriculture, and dramatic population growth in the number and type of animals residents have in Edmonton. Based on previous pet licensing research conducted in 2020 concerning pet licensing in the City, it is estimated that approximately 30,000 licensed cats and 60,000 licensed dogs live in Edmonton; however, there are many more unlicensed. In addition, changing trends have been noted whereby more residents are keeping bees, chickens and livestock as pets at their homes and on their property.

To help inform the bylaw refresh, the City of Edmonton commissioned Narrative Research to undertake a multi-phased research study aimed to better understand the opinions and attitudes of the public on topics related to the existing Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw and evaluate potential changes.

Project Methodology

Given the scope of bylaw refresh, the value of obtaining exploratory research to better understand nuances of opinions, and the need for obtaining the measured opinions of a large number of residents, a multi-phased research study was conducted, involving both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Specifically, online focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted, followed by an internal brainstorming session and an online survey.

The first phase of the study included a series of online focus groups and in-depth interviews with internal and external stakeholders. More specifically, this included a series of 15 online focus groups (13 with members of the general public, including various pet owner types; 2 groups with City officials) and eight (8) in-depth interviews (3 with bee owners, 3 with external subject matter experts, and 2 with City employees).

The second part of the pre-refresh review included an online survey with residents, with the survey distributed to the City's Insight Community and made available through the City's social media channels. A total of 8,094 surveys were completed, and results were assessed across a variety of factors, including cat ownership, dog ownership, non-pet owners and survey respondents overall.

Summary of Results

Results of the **2023 Animal Licensing & Control Bylaw Renewal Study** reveal several areas in need of improvement as part of the bylaw refresh, particularly in relation to the need for greater clarity in the rules, restrictions, and consequences that are in place to deter serious offences.



The content within the bylaw is seen as overly vague, limiting the bylaw's effectiveness, and leaving too much room for interpretation. Moreover, results show that while residents are largely supportive of licensing generally, including having limits on the number of pets/animals allowed, several specific areas for potential improvement are noted.

While residents are largely aware that pets need to be licensed in the City and agree that many animal/pet types should be licensed, they have limited awareness and understanding of the City's actual bylaw, the City's efforts related to enforcement, and how licensing fees and fines are used by the City to help create a safe and healthy environment for all Edmontonians. Findings confirm that residents tend to hold, at best, moderately positive views of the City's performance as it relates to licensing and controlling pets, although a notable portion are unable to offer any type of an assessment due to their lack of awareness and familiarity with the bylaw. Results highlight that there is a need for increased promotion and education of the bylaw overall, and a clear opportunity to improve and adjust the bylaw to better meet the changing needs and expectations of residents. Growth of pet ownership overall, including an increase in the number of residents with support animals, increased demand for pet-friendly environments/activities, and growing interest in urban agriculture, are just a few of the factors recognized as driving the need for this bylaw refresh.

The bylaw section specifically pertaining to dogs/general information, was considered problematic in terms of its lack of clarity. Internal stakeholders highlight several areas within this section in need of adjustment, concerning both language used (e.g., clarity on what constitutes 'excessive' barking) and content (e.g., clarification and expansion of the roles and responsibilities of Animal Control Peace Officers). Overall, residents are supportive of additional restrictions being put in place that focus specifically on pet safety. For example, there is clear and broad support for additional bylaw restrictions that would prevent the transportation of loose animals in the back of a truck.

While stakeholders also clearly see the need for revisions within the cat section of the bylaw, opinions on certain aspects of this section are somewhat polarized, especially when considering whether cats should be allowed to roam freely or not, and under what conditions. Views on such issues vary notably between cat owners and non-cat owners. At the same time, internal stakeholders noted the logistical challenges and impracticalities of trying to monitor and enforce roaming activities. However, when it comes to outdoor cats, residents are largely supportive of having a spay/neuter requirement in the bylaw.

On the issue of feral cats, there is a clear opportunity for increased public education. While many believe the City has a feral cat issue, results suggest that belief is not widespread across wards, and there is some confusion regarding the differences between stray cats, community cats and feral cats. Findings suggest residents are not widely informed of the consequences of a significant feral cat population on an urban

environment, and there is opportunity to build awareness of the City's Trap Neuter Return (TNR) program.

Results suggest a need for expansion of the prohibited animals' section. Both internal and external stakeholders feel this section would benefit from greater clarity regarding which animals are allowed with special licensing and which ones are truly prohibited by the City, with a more comprehensive list of animals/pets provided. With respect to both bees and hens, results suggest that, while cumbersome, current license holders are generally satisfied with the relevant aspects of the City's licensing and approval process. Moreover, there is broad public support for having educational requirements for obtaining these types of licenses. At the same time, findings show broad public support for pigeon licensing requirements, with the bulk of residents endorsing having owned pigeons banded/tagged. That said, results suggest residents have very limited knowledge of the logistics and practices of pigeon ownership, with many questioning why the bylaw devotes a separate section to pigeons. Finally, the current restriction of 75 pigeons per license is considered excessive and unreasonable.

When it comes to licensing fees and fine amounts, opinions are mixed as to what amounts are appropriate and reasonable, with some believing the City should consider lowering/waiving licensing fees for certain audiences (e.g., rescue/foster dog owners, homeless, those who are of a lower socio-economic status). Moreover, findings suggest that lower fees may encourage more licensing, especially if there was increased public education on how fees are used by the City. Results reveal broad support for waiving fines for first-time offenders, and residents are clearly open to increasing fine amounts in an effort to deter repeat offenders. In the case of bites, there is broad support for having fines that are reflective of the severity of the injury. Of note, a lack of consistent enforcement was regularly mentioned as an issue both in terms of how infractions are managed (i.e., warnings offered for first-time offenders) and geographic presence.

Looking forward, when considering the bylaw refresh, results suggest that a range of edits are needed to support the City in its efforts to deal with animals/pets and pet ownership, with the ultimate goal of creating a safe, healthy and peaceful environment that everyone can enjoy. Specifically, there is a need for greater detail and clarity across all bylaw sections, and an opportunity to make the bylaw more preventative when it comes to animal protection and welfare. It is especially important to focus on aspects of the bylaw that are currently identified as overly problematic from an enforcement perspective (e.g., how excessive barking is defined, what constitutes consent when it comes to roaming on private property, etc.). Moreover, the City should consider additions to the bylaw that promote safety and encourage responsible pet ownership (e.g., prohibiting transportation of loose animals in the back of a truck bed, restrictions on the length of time pets can be tethered outside, giving Animal Peace Officers the authority to seize a dog involved in a serious attack, etc.). Current licensing fee/fine levels should also be revisited, including the waiving of fines for first-time offences, waiving/lowering fee amounts for specific audiences (e.g., homeless pet owners, those fostering pets, etc.), and introducing progressively higher fines for repeat bylaw offenders.

Once the revised bylaw is finalized, it will be important to focus on public awareness and education of these changes, the roles and responsibilities of pet owners and the City, and how licensing fees and fines are used by the City to encourage licensing and compliance.

Key Considerations for Refresh

The following provides an overview of proposed modifications and/or potential areas for adjustments for the City's consideration. These suggestions are based on findings from both phases of the research and have been organized by general feedback received and for each of the five sections of the current bylaw that were reviewed.

General

- Eliminate vague definitions and ambiguities, as information currently contained within the bylaw allows for multiple interpretations.
- Ensure the bylaw is written at an appropriate reading level, with a logical flow, to avoid confusion and misinterpretation.
- Look for opportunities to increase public awareness and education on animal licensing (e.g., Signs with QR codes at dog parks/off-leash areas about licensing), including directions on how to license and the need for renewal.
- Evaluate ways to streamline and improve the licensing process.
- Increase public awareness and education on the various activities the City is undertaking in promoting pet welfare and in monitoring and controlling the pet population within the City.
- Clarify terms for maximum number of cats/dogs allowed (i.e., limit pertains to those living on the property).
- Consider imposing limits on the maximum number of other animal types allowed (e.g., maximum number of rabbits, rodents, reptiles/amphibians, etc.).
- Adjust the maximum number of animals allowed based on square footage of home, rather than by household (e.g., lowering the maximum number of cats allowed for those living in an apartment or in a smaller sized dwelling).
- Consider a temporary license to allow for more than three dogs / six cats for those fostering such animals and/or those caring for rescue dogs/cats for limited periods of time.
- Given the City's diverse population, consider having summaries of the bylaw in multiple languages.
- Examine the possibility of having scheduled email reminders to licensees leading up to license renewal.

Section 1: General Information / Dogs

- Encourage more owners to neuter/spay their dog, provide additional financial incentive (e.g., having a greater price difference in licensing fees for dogs neutered/spayed versus those that are not).
- Have clearer definitions throughout. Greater clarity is needed when it comes to: What constitutes excessive barking – is it based on loudness of bark and/or length of time dog is barking? Define the type and size of pen/enclosure required for a nuisance dog.

- Give Animal Control Peace Officers additional authority/responsibilities within the bylaw to deal with animal abandonment and animals being poorly treated (e.g., left in extreme heat/cold, improperly fed, housed), etc.
- Give Animal Control Peace Officers authority to seize any dog responsible for a serious attack.
- Consider provision of a temporary exception license which would allow individuals to have more than three dogs in certain situations (e.g., individuals fostering additional dogs for a specific amount of time; puppies awaiting new homes; senior dogs in need of urgent homing).
- Consider lowering/waiving licensing fees for foster/rescue dog owners, licensed businesses, and homeless individuals.
- Prohibit transportation of pets loose in the back of a pickup truck.

Section 2: Cats

- Consider lowering/waiving licensing fees for foster/rescue cat owners, licensed businesses, and homeless individuals.
- Examine the pros and cons of including additional requirements/restrictions for cats to be able to roam/be outdoors (e.g., requiring cats to be spayed/neutered, microchipped, up to date on vaccines, and/or tagged).
- Increase education on the benefits of licensing indoor cats.
- Clarify what is required to have consent for a cat to roam on private property.
- Increase public education on the issue and prevalence of feral cats, and how feral cats are defined.
- Increase public education on the TNR program, how it operates, and its benefits.

Section 3: Prohibited Animals

- Examine the 'pros and cons' of imposing licensing requirements on other animal/pet types.
- Provide additional clarity in defining which animals require special permits versus licenses, and which animals are completely prohibited (without exception).
- Provide a clearer definition of "a large animal" and reiterate that the 10kg limit does not apply to dogs.
- Consider changing 'poisonous' snake to 'venomous' snake, as there have been legal issues and technically the word 'poisonous' is wrong.
- Consider adding poisonous snakes to the list of exotic wild animals.
- Increased collaboration required with Border Patrol Services, Canadian Wildlife Services and other provincial and federal regulatory bodies to clarify oversight responsibilities where roles may overlap in areas related to licensing, enforcement, complaints, etc.

- Examine the pros and cons of implementing additional oversight of courses offered to future bee owners, including the potential incorporation of hands-on training, and standardization of the requirements for passing a course (e.g., requiring a course completion based on the outcome of a standardized test, rather than simple attendance).
- Consider course exceptions for residents with previous, similar experience.
- Clarify if/how a person with a serious allergy can petition to have a neighbour's bee license refused/cancelled.
- Consider including a requirement for bee owners to have a back-up plan for an aggressive hive or a back-up plan for where bee hives could be moved to if required.
- Revisit the limit on the number of bee hives in an area to determine if one or two hives is an appropriate number; consider giving bee owners an option for applying for one or two hives.
- Narrow the definition of the type of poultry permitted under the bylaw (i.e., hens only, while expressly prohibiting other poultry types).
- Examine opportunities to streamline the hen licensing process, while offering additional clarity and information on specific guidelines pertaining to hen ownership.
- Make coop plan design options available to potential hen owners.

Section 4: Pigeons

- Add information on the City's website concerning pigeon aviaries, including when there should be an evaluation conducted.
- Consider requiring all licensed pigeons to have identification tags/bands for tracing purposes.
- When issuing pigeon licenses, consideration should be given to the area/space that will be used, and whether the premises is a dwelling or a lot.
- Include a clearer definition of what an acceptable coop is.
- Explain restrictions as to when and where pigeons are allowed outside of their loft or aviary for supervised races or training flights.
- If the City wishes to eliminate pigeon licensing, consider grandfathering current licensees, with no new licenses being issued.

Section 5: Fines

- Put the fine amounts in the appendix, rather than right into the bylaw.
- Overall, participants (particularly external stakeholders) appear open to more severe consequences when it comes to those in violation of the bylaw (i.e., higher fine amounts), especially when it comes to animal attacks. That said, stakeholders in general (internal and external) are largely supportive of a verbal warning for a first time 'minor' offense. For example, waiving a fee for an unlicensed

animal/pet, provided the owner licenses within a specified amount of time (e.g., fine waived if owner licenses within a week).

- Use a tiered approach when it comes to fines related to bites (e.g., using the Dr. Ian Dunbar scale, mirror fine amounts to the severity of bite).
- Increase the fine amount for repeat offenders.
- Increase fine amount for abandonment (penalty for abandoning dog is currently only \$100 and should be increased).
- Consider the addition of an appeals process for dogs labelled as a 'restricted dog' due to a past incident, following a specified 'probationary' period.

Other Areas of Review

- Add a section to the bylaw specifically pertaining to animal/pet transportation that prohibits all animals from being transported in a truck bed (unless in a fully secured crate).
- Grant peace officers additional authorities under the bylaw to act in situations involving animal welfare concerns.
- Include restrictions on the length of time an animal can be tethered outside.
- Reexamine the usage of leash hooks in public areas.
- Reexamine opportunities to improve designated off-leash/dog park areas.

