

ANIMAL LICENSING AND CONTROL BYLAW RENEWAL

Recommendation

That Administration prepare a new Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw, in alignment with the policy directions outlined in Attachment 1 of the June 2, 2025, Community Services report CS02833.

Requested Action	Committee decision required		
Connect Edmonton’s Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	BELONG. LIVE. THRIVE.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council’s Strategic Priorities	Community safety and well-being
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bylaw 13145 - Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw Renewal Initiative 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bylaw 19121- to increase licensing fees to offset expenses for new Animal Protection Act enforcement responsibilities (2019) 		

Executive Summary

- This policy report summarizes proposed policy and regulatory provisions that would inform a new bylaw to replace Bylaw 13145 - Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw. The recommendations for the new bylaw are based on two years of research and community engagement with interested parties, experts and Edmontonians.

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- The new bylaw would increase animal welfare regulations by building on provincial legislation to protect abandoned animals, animals left unattended in health-threatening situations or exposure to extreme temperatures and the unsecured transportation of animals.
- Revised dog regulations focus on public safety and align with Edmontonians' calls for stricter regulations and higher fines for dog attacks.
- Additional conditions for restricted dogs include microchips, a classification review process and the ability to impose mandatory training requirements.
- The bylaw introduces definitions for feral cats, supports trap-neuter-return programs and distinguishes owned and unowned cats while maintaining existing roaming restrictions.
- Administration will return with a new Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw for discussion on August 11, 2025, if the Community and Public Services Committee approves these policy directions in principle.

REPORT

The existing Bylaw 13145 - Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw is more than 20 years old and does not reflect current practices in animal management. Establishing a new bylaw that reflects public views and best practices in animal welfare, as well as ensuring public safety and responsible pet ownership, enables opportunities to create a city where Edmontonians and companion animals can live, thrive and belong in harmony. The new bylaw will represent a modern interpretation of standards and best practices and is aligned with the values of Edmontonians expressed during engagement regarding their relationship with animals while considering the human-animal bond. The purpose of the new bylaw is to establish an updated system of licensing and control and promote responsible pet ownership.

This report provides recommendations based on public opinion, research and community engagement conducted over the past two years. Input from interested parties, experts and Edmontonians was critical in developing a holistic and up-to-date bylaw policy direction that links responsible pet ownership and animal welfare best practices as a foundational commitment to creating safe and healthy neighbourhoods. Public safety concerns arising from serious dog attacks demonstrate the critical need for the recommendations outlined in this report to address and reflect the severity of such incidents¹.

Although a complete review of Bylaw 13145 was conducted, four key themes are presented for consideration in this report:

1. Animal welfare
2. Dog attacks and bites
3. Restricted dog regulations
4. Cat regulations

¹ "News Release - Dog attack complaints increase sharply in Edmonton", City of Edmonton, publication October 27, 2023, <http://conta.cc/3FBwrz4>

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If the recommendations are approved, a new bylaw will be brought forward for consideration and will include additional and less significant changes such as revisions to pet licensing fees, pet limits and urban agriculture, to name a few.

Proposed Changes

Protecting Animal Welfare

Animal Welfare Offences

In 2019, the City became the first municipality to enforce the *Animal Protection Act*, working in partnership with other enforcement agencies to protect the welfare of animals suffering from neglect and abandonment. Although efforts during this period have been successful, they have also highlighted the need to respond to and address regulatory gaps in innovative ways, enhance municipal enforcement capabilities and ensure pet owners will be held accountable for endangering animals in their care.

Administration recommends adding select animal welfare offences that align with municipal bylaws in other jurisdictions and supplement existing provincial legislation. These include regulations to address abandoned animals and unattended animals in protection from health-threatening situations such as severe temperatures, and the unsecured transport of animals (Attachment 1). Engagement with Edmontonians and interest groups identified support for additional protections that align with best practices in these welfare-related focus areas.

Dog Regulations

Dog Attacks and Bites

Administration is recommending updates to reporting requirements, the regulations for dog attacks and bites and the related fine structure. Dog bite and attack complaints have increased almost 15 per cent over the last few years. Research found Edmonton's fines fell below that of other major Canadian cities from minor to serious offences (Attachment 2). The proposed range of fines will increase based on the severity of physical injuries caused by the attacks. This new range enables the level of severity of the physical injury and the type of victim to be addressed with appropriate fines. The proposed offence structure is aligned with the Dunbar Dog Bite Scale, an objective way to categorize the severity of a dog bite based on the wounds inflicted which helps to differentiate where a restricted dog classification is most appropriate. The scale was developed by Dr. Ian Dunbar, a veterinarian and animal behaviourist, and is a generally accepted model for use by medical and legal professionals.

Dog Attack Investigations				
Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Investigations	853	855	1,018	980

Public opinion research results from all audiences the City engaged with indicated support for a tiered attack and fine structure with more serious consequences. Fines relating to subsequent offences will double and begin at a higher rate for dogs convicted in previous serious incidents to encourage a change in owner behaviour and reduce dog attacks. Similar to other jurisdictions, when

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a dog bites another domesticated animal or human, the owner of the attacking dog will be required to report the incident in a timely manner with all relevant information to a Peace Officer or 311. Updating this section of the bylaw provides an opportunity for alignment with other municipalities and adjusts the fine structure to reflect the seriousness of these offences.

Restricted Dogs

At the October 17, 2012, City Council meeting, Community Services report 2012CST018, Bylaw 16296 - A Bylaw to Amend the Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw 13145 was approved. Bylaw 16296 removed the breed-specific classification for restricted dogs, which is in line with best practices. The restricted dog classification is now based only on the result of a conviction under Bylaw 13145 for dog attack offences or the *Provincial Dangerous Dogs Act*² and is not connected to breed.

Currently, a restricted dog classification is permanent. Owners of dogs deemed restricted must obtain a restricted dog licence and adhere to additional public safety requirements. These requirements include liability insurance, control measures for both on and off-property and increased fines for serious offences. Administration recommends several changes to the regulations for restricted dogs. The new regulations will mandate microchipping, adjust the classification criteria and impose training requirements when deemed necessary. In addition, a review process would be added to reconsider the lifelong restricted dog classification. Requirements to qualify for the review will include completing training, remaining licensed and having no bylaw offences for at least three years.

These regulations are in line with other municipalities and support a responsible update to restricted dog regulations in the interest of public safety. Overall, most Edmontonians supported introducing new regulations on restricted dogs where there are public safety concerns.

Cat Regulations

Administration recommends incorporating clear definitions and exemptions into the bylaw to appropriately categorize cats as owned, unowned or feral, enabling better management.

Feral Cats

An estimated 70,000 feral cats live in Edmonton, with up to 600 feral cats entering the Animal Care & Control Centre annually. Unsocialized and extremely fearful of humans, feral cats live outdoors and cannot be rehabilitated or adopted into a home. If left unchecked, the feral cat population will continue to grow in direct proportion to food and water sources and available shelter. This can negatively impact native wildlife species and local bird populations.

Trap-neuter-return programs have proven to be an effective and humane method for managing and reducing feral cat populations over time. These programs allow feral cats to be humanely trapped, spayed or neutered, microchipped, provided with vaccinations and other preventative care and returned to their original location, typically a feral cat colony. Feral cat "caretakers" may manage these colonies by monitoring their well-being and watching for newcomers.

The proposed new definitions and provisions allow caretakers who currently practice trap-neuter-return to continue managing these colonies. The changes will allow them to do so

² Dangerous Dogs Act. (2002, January 1). King's Printer <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/d03>

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legitimately within the parameters of the bylaw, exempting them from requirements like roaming on private property and licensing. This change aligns with public support for trap-neuter-return programs that promote balanced coexistence between humans and cats.

Roaming Cats

Administration recommends a distinction be made between owned and unowned cats. This distinction will restrict cats from roaming on private property without permission, holding pet owners accountable while finding a balance for unowned cats through return-to-field practices. This aligns with Edmontonians' views on roaming on private property while promoting best practices for managing the unowned cat population.

Most roaming cats brought to shelters are not lost and returning them to their home location is the ideal solution. Many people from marginalized communities face barriers when trying to reclaim their cats from shelters. These barriers include a lack of resources, transportation and knowledge, which can break the bond between the family or caretaker and the animal. Return-to-field programs can help close this gap, as 97 per cent of people in underserved communities get their pets from sources other than shelters³.

The practice of return-to-field or return-to-home is based on the idea that unowned cats, which are friendly, mature, thriving, healthy and fill a niche in their community, are better served by being returned to where they belong after being sterilized. For most healthy unowned cats, sterilizing, vaccinating, marking and returning them to where they were found is a better tactic for long-term management and preventing population growth. Returning the cat to its original location maintains the human-animal bond formed with one or more community members.

By supporting responsible pet ownership and humanely managing unowned cats, positive outcomes can be created for both cats and their caretakers.

Next Steps

If the recommendation is approved, Administration will return to the Community and Public Services Committee with a new Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw on August 11, 2025, based on any direction received from this report. Any additional updates and minor adjustments will be included in the bylaw with supporting documentation. A comprehensive communication campaign will be developed to educate the public on the anticipated changes.

Budget/Financial Implications

Administration proposes a series of escalating penalties for serious violations that align with the public interest and will not require additional funds to implement. These would include increased fines for all such violations and doubled fines for repeat infractions within the same violation category. Doubling fines would be reserved for the most serious offences, such as dog attacks, to reflect the increased risk to public safety and well-being. Fines represent a small portion of financial contributions and are not used as a revenue tool.

³ National Animal Care & Control Association. (2021, March 22). *Animal control intake of free-roaming cats*. <https://www.nacanet.org/animal-control-intake-of-free-roaming-cats/>

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The new bylaw will also revisit the pet licensing fee structure, introduce fees for new licensing categories and propose an increase in shelter fees. Analysis to support other fine changes and fees will be provided when the bylaw is brought forward in August 2025.

Legal Implications

Animal welfare is under provincial jurisdiction. However, Section 7(h) of the *Municipal Government Act* authorizes Council to establish bylaws for municipal purposes concerning wild and domestic animals. Additionally, Section 8 of the *Municipal Government Act* empowers Council, via its bylaw enactment authority, to regulate, prohibit and implement a system of licences, permits or approvals, which may include fees, and impose terms and conditions on any licence.

Following Council approval, the new Animal Licensing Bylaw will incorporate specific animal welfare provisions aimed at addressing identified gaps in provincial legislation in a minimal manner. The Bylaw will also create new licensing categories that are in line with current practices across municipalities.

Community Insight

A Community-Centered Approach

A multi-phased public opinion research and ‘advise-level’ engagement process⁴ was conducted to ensure this new bylaw reflects the values and priorities of Edmontonians and pet owners alike. Over 18,400 responses were received over both phases of the project.

Phase 1 (May-November 2023)

Phase 1 focused on understanding the public’s diverse perspectives on what’s working, what needs to be changed and what’s missing from the Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw. The public weighed in on various topics through the following:

- Public engagement was conducted using a variety of methods including five targeted interested party sessions, a virtual engagement session open to the public and four pop-ups held at City facilities and other businesses throughout Edmonton.
- Public opinion research included 15 online focus groups, consisting of internal and external interested parties and members of the public, eight in-depth interviews with subject matter experts and niche public participants and an internal brainstorming session.
- An online survey was available to Edmonton Insight Community members and the public. This survey was one of the most popular among the 100+ public surveys shared with Edmontonians in 2023, with 8,094 responses.

Phase 2 (May-August 2024)

Phase 2 concentrated on specific areas of the bylaw that the public and interested parties identified in Phase 1 as needing improvement or modification. The public provided additional

⁴ The City's Public Engagement Spectrum has four roles the public can have when they participate in City of Edmonton public engagement activities. The four roles are advise, refine, create, decide. Moving along the spectrum towards decide involves an increasing level of public influence and commitment from the City and the public. At the advise level, the public is consulted by the City to share feedback and perspectives that are considered for policies, programs, projects, or services.

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insights on topics including pet licensing and limits, exemptions, roaming and feral cats, trap-neuter-return and return-to-field, dog attacks, restricted dog requirements and fines, rabbits, snakes, lizards, ducks and quail.

Emphasis was placed on reaching diverse perspectives through enhanced engagement activities in communities throughout the city, effectively reaching all 12 wards through the following:

- Feedback was gathered from 30 pop-up events in public spaces including City facilities, pet stores, off-leash parks, libraries and farmers markets, Engaged Edmonton discussion forums, an in-person event, six dog park speakerboards and five interested party interviews.
- Public opinion research included two focus groups, two in-depth interviews, a third-party online panel survey (sample size: 800) and an online survey made available to Edmonton Insight Community members as well as the broad public with 8,949 responses.

The What We Heard Reports and Public Opinion Research Summaries (Attachments 3, 4, 5 and 6) provide an overview of the research and public engagement process and resulting feedback that has informed this report and will inform the new Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw. Administration will continue with this community-centred approach in future steps of engagement and communication planning.

GBA+

A GBA+ process was used to better understand experiences and encourage an inclusive and diverse analysis of the issues and solutions to animal licensing and care. Demographic information included dwelling type, access to green space, home ownership versus renting, age, gender, family status, race and income.

Edmonton is a proudly diverse city. Many cultures view the suitability of pets and animals differently. This type of feedback is essential to ensure a modernized bylaw is created to represent the needs of all Edmonton residents.

The project team aimed to create spaces where participants felt safe and comfortable to express diverse perspectives. Pop-up events and in-person interested party sessions were held at locations that were easily accessible and at varying times to maximize participation. In an effort to reach and include a diverse population, a variety of inclusive approaches were used, such as pop-up events held at various locations including City of Edmonton facilities (recreation centres and the Edmonton Valley Zoo, various Edmonton Public Library branches), community events, dog parks, community farmers markets and pet stores. The project team made every effort to ensure that opportunities for engagement were accessible in all 12 city wards.

Engagement methods included pop-up events, virtual and in-person public events, the Engaged Edmonton website, speakerboard surveys and Insight surveys to reach a broad audience and encourage both pet owners and non-pet owners to participate. This was promoted on social media and news outlets, through signage (posters and road signs), by direct mail to pet owners through licensing notifications and by email to homeowner associations, community leagues and key interested parties.

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Environment and Climate Review

The recommendations and approach presented in this Council Report meet the direction provided in City Policy C512. The City of Edmonton's Environmental Policy reinforces the protection and preservation of Edmonton's natural environment. The responsibility is shared by municipal departments and branches, Edmonton's business community, other orders of government and Edmontonians.

Administration recommends measures to Council that would encourage collaboration with Edmontonians and businesses to protect Edmonton's natural environment due to changes in licensing, spay/neutering, animal intake, urban agriculture and pet population growth. New provisions will continue to support the management of the feral cat population in Edmonton to limit the impacts on local biodiversity and highlight public support for trap-neuter-return programs. Other ecological impacts from feral cats need to address the primary factor to facilitate a humane way forward, which promotes trap-neuter-return as a key approach and researched best practice.

Attachments

1. Recommended Policy Directions
2. Proposed Fines
3. What We Heard Report - Phase 1
4. Public Opinion Research Summary Phase 1
5. What We Heard Report - Phase 2
6. Public Opinion Research Summary Phase 2