

BYLAW 21244 - Animal Care and Control Bylaw

Recommendation

That Community and Public Services Committee recommend to City Council:

That Bylaw 21244 be given the appropriate readings.

Purpose

To replace the Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw 13145 with the Animal Care and Control Bylaw 21244.

Readings

Bylaw 21244 is ready for three readings.

A majority vote of City Council on all three readings is required for passage.

If Council wishes to give three readings during a single meeting, then prior to moving to third reading, Council must unanimously agree “That Bylaw 21244 be considered for third reading.”

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the June 2, 2025, Community and Public Services Committee, the following motion was passed:

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.

REPORT

At the June 2, 2025, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, Administration presented a policy report outlining the significant changes to the Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw 13145. The Administration-initiated report, Community Services report CS02833, Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw Renewal, served as an outline providing Committee members with important highlights and information necessary to understand the scope and implications of the proposed bylaw. That report communicated the key policy changes, ensuring that the Committee had the opportunity to provide feedback prior to Administration presenting the new Animal Care and Control Bylaw 21244 (Attachment 1).

BYLAW 21244 - Animal Care and Control Bylaw

Overview of Work Completed

The Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw renewal initiative spanned two years of community consultation and involved extensive public opinion research and engagement. Two distinct phases (May to November 2023 and July to August 2024) gathered more than 18,400 responses from Edmontonians, interested parties and experts. Through analysis and decision mapping, key policy directions were developed.

The bylaw development involved incorporating results from public engagement, examining directions through a GBA+ lens and including demographic considerations such as dwelling type, access to green space, home ownership status, age, gender, family status, race and income. People impacted by the bylaw include pet owners and non-pet owners, including those on income assistance and senior pet owners because of income constraints affecting ability to afford relevant fees.

The GBA+ analysis conducted allowed Administration to examine directions that include:

- considering legal and operational constraints,
- aligning with the wider policy and legislative environment concerning animals,
- reinforcing veterinary and research best practices, and
- incorporating insights from other municipalities through jurisdictional scans and interviews.

Equity measures were advanced based on considerations for implementation, cost, and municipal authority. These include enhancing the accessibility and affordability of pet licensing through new subsidy programs, and the implementation of a return-to-field program for cats.

The policy directions were shared with the Community and Public Services Committee on June 2, 2025 (CS02833), which passed a motion to return with a new bylaw, as proposed. The detailed best practices, public engagement and jurisdictional scan considerations that support the new bylaw recommendations can be found in Attachment 2.

New Bylaw Recommendations

Animal Welfare

Consistent with findings gathered through public engagement, Administration recommends incorporating select animal welfare offences. These animal welfare offences will address abandoned animals and unattended animals in health-threatening situations, such as exposure to severe temperatures and unsecured transport outside a vehicle.

Dog Regulations

The new bylaw proposes enhanced dog regulations that prioritize public safety. It includes a tiered-enforcement dog attack offence structure with more serious consequences to respond to significant increases in complaints. Public opinion research results from across all audiences indicated support for greater fines for serious dog attacks. An in-depth jurisdictional scan and best practices review informed the final recommendations.

BYLAW 21244 - Animal Care and Control Bylaw

The seriousness of injuries will be evaluated in relation to the wound pathology measured on the Dunbar Dog Bite Scale¹. The Dunbar Dog Bite Scale is considered the standard for assessing the severity of dog bites in enforcement agencies, veterinary practices and animal shelters. The proposed requirement to report attacks helps to identify opportunities for education and early intervention to prevent future incidents. Furthermore, this mechanism helps monitor public health risks from rabies and is a common standard in other jurisdictions.

These regulations also include enhanced licensing requirements for vicious² dogs, such as behavioural training, property signage and mandatory microchipping, as well as revised control measures on and off the owner's property. These measures include removing the option for the dog to be tethered on the owner's property and adding the requirement for a two-point-of-contact leash in addition to a harness and muzzle while outdoors. These changes align with animal welfare best practices.

The ability to review the vicious dog licence category supports best practices in behaviour modification training. This approach emphasizes the importance of periodic re-evaluation to reclassify the licence category only where it is in the public interest to do so, and subject to the owner's full compliance with the applicable requirements.

To address excessive barking complaints and align with public engagement, the bylaw clarifies that excessive barking may be determined by intermittent animal noise lasting over ten minutes within a thirty-minute period. The licence category for nuisance dogs has been revised from the previous bylaw to require only two convictions instead of three in a three-year period, to better respond to community concerns and promote more responsible pet ownership.

Cat Regulations

Enabling better management options, clear definitions and exemptions have been incorporated into the bylaw to appropriately distinguish between unowned and feral cats. These changes are built on research best practices and will develop a foundation for advancing trap-neuter-return and return-to-field programs. This direction will enable the establishment of partnerships to address the feral cat population by strategically combining resources, knowledge and funding.

An offence section prohibits owned cats from roaming on private property while allowing them to roam freely on public property, creating a balance between best practices and public interest. This restriction on private property reflects the desires of most Edmontonians. In practical terms, the owners of cats could be charged with this offence should their cats be trapped on private

¹ The Dunbar Dog Bite Scale gives an objective way to categorize a dog bite based on the wounds inflicted. The scale was developed by Ian Dunbar, a veterinarian and animal behaviourist and is a generally accepted model for use by medical and legal professionals.

² "Vicious Dog" means any dog that has:

(i) chased, attacked or bitten any person or Animal on more than one occasion, causing physical injury, and resulting in separate convictions under section 14(1)(b) of this bylaw or section 15(1)(b) the Public Spaces Bylaw, Bylaw 20700;
(ii) attacked or bitten any Animal or person causing Serious Injury, or Animal causing death and resulting in a conviction under section 14(1)(c) or (d) of this bylaw or section 15(1)(c) or (d) of the Public Spaces Bylaw, Bylaw 20700; or
(iii) been made the subject of an order under the *Dangerous Dogs Act*;
but excludes a formerly Vicious Dog whose licence has been reclassified under section 22 of this bylaw.

BYLAW 21244 - Animal Care and Control Bylaw

property. It remains the position of Administration that cats should ideally be kept on the private property of their owner to ensure their safety and welfare and reduce their impact on the surrounding community.

Other Animals

The proposed bylaw maintains the prohibition of some animal species, such as venomous snakes, reptiles, and insects. It also provides restrictions on other animals, including large animals and poultry, excluding hens and bees kept in accordance with the bylaw.

During the public engagement activities, insights were collected relating to livestock, reptiles and exotic pets, birds, rabbits and poultry. Overall, the desire to include new livestock categories was low, with the exclusion of hens and bees. It was noted that clear definitions are needed for what constitutes a large animal. Feedback cautioned against regulating animals that are already included in other legislation and provincial acts. Based on the feedback collected, the proposed large animal definition explicitly excludes dogs, cats and rabbits weighing over 10 kg at their adult weight.

The feedback received was largely unfavourable towards the regulation of other species, except for rabbits. The majority of residents agree that appropriate enclosures should be provided for rabbits that are kept outdoors.

Pet Licensing

The proposed bylaw continues existing licensing requirements for dogs, cats and pigeons. It also formalizes existing pilot programs to create new licensing requirements through an urban livestock category for hens and bees.

Based on feedback received during public engagement, the proposed bylaw will lower licensing fees for seniors and Edmontonians receiving income assistance with more than one pet and waive licensing fees for not-for-profit animal rescue organizations. Administration recommends adjusting pet licensing fees with a marginal incremental increase over the next three years, while balancing community support through accessible pricing and waiving licensing fees for not-for-profit animal rescue organizations.

Licensing discounts for spayed and neutered dogs and cats establish reasonable pricing for pet owners. Seniors and those receiving income assistance will qualify for fee reductions on all spayed or neutered pets in the household.

New regulations will affirm licensing requirements for hens and bees by adding a separate licence category and fee. Public engagement feedback supported maintaining the existing requirements, with some modifications to allow for licences to be issued for non-residential properties. The recommended licensing fee is aligned with other municipalities (Attachment 3) and with other licensing requirements in the bylaw.

BYLAW 21244 - Animal Care and Control Bylaw

Animal Limits

Maintaining pet limits for cats and dogs is recommended, but new regulations grant the ability to issue temporary excess animal permits in special circumstances and for animal fosters under the direction of a not-for-profit or registered charitable animal rescue organization. This is aligned with the public interest considerations heard through the City's engagement and research, where the majority of respondents felt that the existing limits for dogs and cats should not be adjusted. There was clear support for exemptions to animal limits for animal fosters.

Additionally, limits for the number of hens or bee hives permitted will be consistent with current program requirements and are aligned with public interest and other municipalities included in the jurisdictional scan. The proposed bylaw includes a limit of up to four rabbits per household, with an enclosure requirement if kept outdoors.

Fees

The Animal Care and Control Bylaw proposes a new fee schedule for animal shelter care and pet licences. This updated schedule is based on a thorough analysis considering current pet licensing revenue, service costs and the impact of additional discounts, particularly for supporting income assisted residents and community groups. A modest one-dollar increase per year for three years presents a balance with licensing revenue, continues support for program services, encourages pet owner compliance and supports accessibility and affordability for Edmontonians. This provides three years of certainty for residents and creates a future opportunity to reassess fees.

Fines

Administration recommends continuing with the direction approved at the June 2, 2025, Community and Public Services Committee meeting to increase the fine structure for dog attacks and related violations. In addition, it is recommended that a new tiered system be implemented for subsequent fines, increasing penalties for repeated offences of irresponsible pet ownership. Feedback from public engagement indicated strong public support for increasing fines where there is a public safety risk; however, only some felt the licensing fines were reasonable, with the majority agreeing that a warning is appropriate for the first offence. A jurisdictional scan and consideration of the deterrent effect and public safety informed the complete fine appendix as reflected in the proposed bylaw.

Next Steps

If Council gives three readings to Bylaw 21244 as presented, the bylaw is proposed to come into effect on May 19, 2026. This allows sufficient time for internal processes, procedures and software workflow changes, along with staff training development and delivery for a smooth transition to the new bylaw. A robust communication campaign will educate, raise awareness and inform Edmontonians of the new regulations.

Community Insight

A Community-Centred Approach

A multi-phased public opinion research and 'advise-level' engagement process was conducted to ensure this new bylaw reflects the values and priorities of Edmontonians and pet owners alike. More than 18,400 responses were received over both phases of the project. Detailed attachments showing results of this engagement process can be found in the June 2, 2025, Community Services report CS02833, Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw Renewal.

Phase 1 (May-November 2023)

Phase 1 focused on understanding the public's diverse perspectives on what is working, what needs to be changed and what is 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, an online forum via Engaged Edmonton, 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 readily completed among more than 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. Participants provided additional 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 group discussions, one in-depth interview, 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.

BYLAW 21244 - Animal Care and Control Bylaw

The What We Heard Reports and Public Opinion Research Summaries attachments in report CS02833 Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw Renewal³ provide an overview of the research and public engagement process and resulting feedback that has informed this report and will inform the new Animal Care and Control Bylaw. Administration will continue with this community-centred approach in future steps of engagement and communication planning.

Budget/Financial Implications

Administration has included minor adjustments in licensing and shelter fees, while balancing the need to support Edmontonians and the animal care community through reduced licensing fees for seniors, people receiving income assistance and waived licensing fees for local not-for-profit animal rescue organizations.

These changes will generate limited additional revenue and will only minimally offset the cost impacts of increased service demand, veterinary medical services and supplies, shelter care and animal transfer fees. Feedback received during public engagement also demonstrated support for subsidizing licence fees for low-income Edmontonians. While Administration supports reducing financial barriers to pet ownership, more research and analysis are required to understand the costs and benefits of expanding the subsidy program in this way. Once that work has been completed, Administration will return to Council with its findings and a recommended course of action.

The new bylaw also proposes a series of escalating penalties for serious violations that align with the public interest, such as dog attacks, to reflect the increased risk to public safety and well-being, which will not require additional funds to implement. This change also includes doubled fines for repeat infractions within the same violation category to encourage responsible pet ownership. Fines represent a small portion of financial contributions and are not used as a revenue tool.

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 (1) 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 Care and Control Bylaw will incorporate specific animal welfare provisions aimed at addressing identified gaps in provincial legislation in a minimal manner. The Bylaw will also incorporate corresponding fine amounts and amend the animal regulatory provisions contained in the Public Spaces Bylaw, Bylaw 20700, to ensure consistency and interpretive harmony (Attachment 4).

3

<https://pub-edmonton.escrimemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=a4ba87da-8691-416e-8ae2-96deee9924be&lang=English&Agenda=Agenda&Item=23&Tab=attachments>

BYLAW 21244 - Animal Care and Control Bylaw

Attachments

1. Bylaw 21244
2. Considerations in Support of Recommendations
3. Jurisdictional Scan - Fines, Fees, Limits
4. Public Spaces Bylaw Schedule A - Fines - Redline

Others Reviewing the Report

- M. Gunther, Acting City Solicitor