

Considerations in Support of Recommendations

The following recommendations have been built on the policy directions provided in the June 2, 2025, Community Services report CS02833. These policy directions were originally developed based on feedback received during public engagement in 2023 and 2024, which were included with report CS02833 and shared on the Engage Edmonton webpage.

Animal Welfare

Animal Welfare Offences

Administration is recommending new standards of care required for animals. As referenced in the June 2, 2025, Community Services report CS02833, the City began enforcing the *Animal Protection Act* in 2019, working with other enforcement agencies to protect the welfare of animals suffering from neglect and abandonment. There is a need for additional measures in the bylaw to enhance the enforcement capabilities of peace officers to address welfare concerns.

These standards align with provincial legislation and municipal bylaws in other jurisdictions and include regulations to address abandoned animals, protection from severe temperatures and the unsecured transportation of animals.

Insights related to animal welfare and safe transportation were collected during Phase 1 research and public engagement. Feedback collected during public engagement identified enhanced authority for peace officers to hold pet owners accountable for abandonment and exposure to extreme temperatures as important. Other feedback received showed that 81 per cent of respondents agreed that the unsecured transport of animals should be illegal. Based on this feedback, a jurisdictional scan of other municipalities and consideration of similar regulations in other legislation and provisions related to securing animals when transported, as well as proper ventilation and space requirements, are included in the proposed bylaw.

Dog Regulations

Dog Attacks

Dog attack regulations that prioritize public safety in response to increasing dog attack complaints are proposed. Public opinion research results from across all audiences indicated support for a tiered attack structure with more serious consequences. An in-depth jurisdictional scan and best practices review informed the recommendations in the proposed bylaw.

The new bylaw prohibits an animal from damaging property, chasing an animal or person and attacking or biting a person or animal, causing physical injury, serious physical injury or the death of an animal. It is important to note that the death of a human is not captured under this bylaw, as infractions that are this serious are regulated under the Criminal Code and would be investigated by the Edmonton Police Service.

The proposed bylaw uses a tiered approach to apply escalating enforcement based on the severity of the attack and for repeat offences. In some cases, a lesser violation may be warranted. For example, a young untrained dog may chase a person or animal out of excitement or playfulness, not aggression. The tiered structure in the proposed bylaw allows for less punitive enforcement options for lesser violations under the nuisance dog category, while reserving the vicious dog category for dog attack incidents that warrant a serious response to protect public safety. The nuisance dog category requires two convictions for less serious offences, such as damaging property or chasing a person or animal, providing an opportunity for improvement and behaviour modification to occur.

The details of an attack require a significant amount of investigation to gather medical evidence and determine fault. The mandatory bite reporting requirement helps to identify opportunities for education and early intervention to prevent future incidents. Furthermore, this mechanism helps monitor for public health risks from rabies and is a common standard in other jurisdictions.

Vicious Dogs

Administration recommends regulations that will change the term 'restricted dog' to 'vicious dog.' The term 'vicious dog' provides clarity, as requested by Edmontonians and aligns with a common understanding of aggressive behaviour. The vicious dog classification is based only on the result of a conviction for dog attack offences or the *Provincial Dangerous Dogs Act*¹ and is not connected to breed.

Currently, a restricted dog designation requires the owner to meet additional public safety requirements, including liability insurance of no less than one million dollars and control measures for on and off-property, such as the requirement for a fully enclosed pen to limit the risks of vicious dogs leaving private property. The vicious dog rules will include displaying a "beware of dog" sign and identification through mandatory microchipping. The owner may be required to complete behaviour modification training as part of the licensing requirements.

Finally, residents agreed that a review process should be in place to be able to reconsider the vicious dog classification at a later date, which has been reflected by

¹ <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/d03>

including the completion of mandatory training, remaining appropriately licensed and committing no bylaw offences for at least three years. Overall, the terminology, signage, microchip, fines and appeal process are in line with other municipalities and support responsible vicious dog regulations in the interest of public safety.

Other Dog Offences

The proposed bylaw includes nuisance-based offences, such as excessive barking, defecation and leash requirements to promote responsible pet ownership while mitigating the impacts of neighbourhood disruptions.

Engagement with Edmontonians recognized the need for greater clarity in definitions of nuisance-related offences on private property, including excessive barking. Further engagement during the second phase related to excessive barking resulted in mixed perspectives, but noted that more than 10 minutes of barking within a 30-minute period was a reasonable threshold for an offence. The proposed bylaw regulations take this duration into account, and clear definitions based on public feedback are included, creating a common understanding of the standards.

Another advancement in nuisance regulations pertains to the nuisance dog category, which carries an increased licensing fee and is based on having two or more convictions in three years related to barking, defecation, failure to control, property damage and chasing any person or animal. This is in line with the Dr. Ian Dunbar incident severity scale²; it discourages poor behaviour and differentiates where a vicious dog classification is inappropriate.

Cat Regulations

Feral Cats

Administration recommends new definitions for a feral cat, a feral cat colony and trap-neuter-return. Feral cats and those permitted to operate a trap-neuter-return program are exempt from licensing fees and regulations for roaming on private property.

Engagement with Edmontonians and not-for-profit animal rescue organizations has highlighted the importance of trap-neuter-return programs, with 72 per cent of general population respondents noting the importance of this type of program in their community. The City's Public Trap-Neuter-Return (PTNR) program aligns with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association's guidelines and adheres to evidence-based best practices for animal welfare. However, a more robust collective response is needed to address the feral cat overpopulation in Edmonton and

² 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.

trap-neuter-return programs have been proven to effectively reduce the feral cat population over time if scaled appropriately. The inclusion of these new regulations enables Administration to explore the potential to form a coalition of willing organizations to pool resources, knowledge and experience for a collaborative and coordinated trap-neuter-return program. This approach will take some time to develop and the bylaw is a necessary first step in creating a foundation for this work to evolve.

Roaming Cats

The proposed bylaw creates a distinction between owned and unowned cats by defining unowned cats and return-to-field, while continuing to restrict owned cats from roaming on private property. Unowned cats are exempt from licensing requirements and roaming cat regulations on private property because there are no owners who can be held responsible under the bylaw.

Academic experts recommend return-to-field and trap-neuter-return as a holistic and humane approach to managing the cat population³. Return-to-field is a shelter-based program where unclaimed, unidentified, healthy cats that have no apparent owner are sterilized, vaccinated, microchipped and returned to their place of origin. The proposed bylaw exempts unowned cats from licensing requirements and regulations and includes provisions that allow for the operation of return-to-field programs in accordance with best practices.

Restricting owned cats from roaming on private property is aligned with the public engagement feedback, where 63 per cent of the population agrees that a pet owner is responsible for preventing their cat from roaming on private property other than their own. Although public views on roaming are divided, 41 per cent agree that cats should not be permitted to roam freely on private property. However, 83 per cent believe pet owners should be held accountable for any damage caused by owned roaming cats. Overall, slightly less than half (43 per cent) of the residents responded that they were fine with cats roaming in public spaces.

By creating this distinction between owned and unowned cats in the proposed bylaw, the regulations will hold pet owners accountable, aligning with Edmontonians' views, while promoting best practices in the management of unowned and feral cats.

Other Animals

Only minor changes are proposed in this section, as the public engagement process revealed little support for significant changes to the existing bylaw concerning exotic

³ <https://www.millioncatchallenge.org/resources/return-to-field>

animals, snakes, reptiles, birds and most small animals, with the exception of specific outdoor enclosure requirements for rabbits.

Public perception regarding whether exotic animals, snakes and reptiles should be prohibited or regulated based on size found low support with less than 45 per cent approval across all categories. Based on this feedback and consideration given to potential impacts on the veterinary and animal rescue communities, these animals are not regulated in the proposed bylaw. These types of animals are regulated by provincial and federal legislation.

Similarly, there was low interest in regulating birds, or small animals, with the exception of rabbits, where 80 per cent of the population agrees rabbits should be confined to the owner's property and 78 per cent believe owners should have appropriate enclosures for rabbits that live outdoors. Based on this feedback and jurisdictional scan results, the proposed bylaw includes enclosure requirements for rabbits.

This new restriction aligns with recent situations we have experienced with the establishment of feral domestic rabbit populations that have then died off due to Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD). This fatal, viral disease is not treatable and is classified as an immediately notifiable disease under the Health of Animals Regulations. Regulating enclosures and limiting the maximum number of rabbits allowed (see Animal Limits below) will reduce the potential formation of new feral domestic populations and associated risks of disease.

Prohibited Animals

The proposed bylaw includes clear definitions and regulations for prohibited animals, including venomous snakes and venomous insects, and what constitutes a large animal over 10kg. It does not introduce additional regulations for other livestock already covered by federal or provincial legislation.

Public engagement sought to understand public perceptions around urban livestock, including hens, bees, ducks and quail. Findings indicate little support for new urban livestock additions beyond hens and bees. In the proposed bylaw, hens and bees will be included as new licensing categories, which support community concerns to prevent ecological harm and limit risks for nuisance and public safety.

Pet Licensing

Responsible pet ownership is encouraged through licensing and pet identification requirements, discounts for spayed and neutered pets and subsidized pricing for seniors and those receiving income assistance. Administration recommends additional research and analysis to explore the potential to expand the subsidy

program to include those meeting a low-income threshold. The feedback received during public engagement highlights the need for a pet licensing structure that considers different demographics and organizations that require a unique approach to licensing requirements.

Based on the feedback, the proposed bylaw includes subsidized pricing for all spayed or neutered pets in the home for seniors or those on income assistance. This subsidy change is an expansion of the existing program, which only provides the discount for one animal per household. In addition, new licensing allowances waive the fee for foster animals in the care of not-for-profit or registered charitable animal rescue organizations.

Hens and Bees

New licensing categories will regulate hens and bees, making them consistent with the feedback received during public engagement, where overall, the licensing and approval process for licences was favourable. The public engagement feedback reflected the desire of hen and bee owners to be permitted to use and sell the animal products they produce, such as honey. Therefore, the new bylaw does not restrict the use or sale of animal by-products, with the exception of the prohibited animal section that grants the ability for the City Manager or his delegate to restrict these activities by imposing prohibited animal licence conditions. This restriction does not apply to properly licensed hens and bees. It is important to note, however, that these practices may be regulated by provincial and federal legislation.

During Phase 2 of public engagement, further information was collected related to the requirement for neighbour notifications in the beekeeping licence application process, with 60 per cent of residents agreeing that beekeepers should consider the allergies of adjacent neighbours. Previous decisions to deny or revoke licences highlighted concerns amongst appellants that the practice of basing such decisions on sworn affidavits establishing medically diagnosed allergies to bee stings was vulnerable to abuse by dishonest neighbours.

Based on public feedback and previous experience, proposals include neighbour notifications, which protect residents on adjacent properties where bee licences are requested, but are balanced with a new requirement to provide proof, in writing, from a medical professional that an individual residing on an adjacent property has a diagnosed allergy to bee stings.

Furthermore, the proposed bylaw formalizes the licensing requirements for bee hives on non-residential properties, including additional regulations for approvals for these licences.

Pigeons

It is recommended that licensing and related requirements for pigeons be included in the proposed bylaw. Although the public engagement feedback on this topic was mixed, consideration of low licence numbers and complaint volume was a deciding factor.

Animal Limits

The proposed bylaw limits dogs, cats, pigeons, rabbits, hens and bee hives.

The majority of respondents support a limit of three dogs and six cats, which, along with licensing activity and the limits found in other jurisdictions, was a major factor in forming the recommendation to limit the most common pets. Allowing six cats and three dogs per residence maintains community harmony, minimizes the potential for health and safety concerns and fosters responsible pet ownership.

A new section establishes the ability to grant permission for animals in excess of the defined limits. This exemption enables Edmontonians to remain in compliance with the bylaw while supporting animal fosters. This permission will help volunteers working with animal rescue agencies to care for more animals and potentially increase the capacity of the system overall. This section is in line with other Canadian municipalities and is reinforced by animal care best practices and supported by the feedback received during public engagement. Businesses with a valid Animal Breeding and Boarding Facility licence on non-residential properties will be exempt from the established limits and the excess animal permit requirement.

The addition of hen and bee licensing categories proposed in the bylaw includes a limit of between two to six hens and up to three beehives, depending on the property type, in alignment with current guidelines.

A proposed maximum limit of four rabbits per household is in alignment with feedback received during public engagement. While the feedback received showed there is little agreement for pet rabbits to be licensed, 79 per cent of respondents agree there should be a limit on the number of rabbits permitted per household. A jurisdictional scan determined that four is the average limit found in other municipalities.

The existing maximum of 75 pigeons will continue. Despite public engagement feedback suggesting the limit was too high, it was deemed unnecessary to reduce this limit based on the low volume of pigeon licences and complaints.

Fees

Over the last six years, licensing fees have remained unchanged, even though the scope and cost of veterinary medical care required for animals at the Animal Care & Control Centre have increased and the cost of medical supplies has risen significantly. An increase in licensing fees helps offset these rising costs and reduces reliance on the tax levy as a funding source for these services.

The proposed licensing fee increase considers the operational cost of service delivery, licensing fees in other jurisdictions, the current economic climate and affordability challenges. The licensing fee structure in the new bylaw includes a modest escalating fee increase over three years to mitigate some of the impacts of inflation in the next budget cycle. This fee structure allows for a gradual increase in licensing fees for Edmontonians recognizing the economic pressures many are facing in terms of affordability. To offset the impact of a licensing fee increase, the 50 per cent discount for one pet per household for seniors and those on income assistance will be extended to all spayed or neutered pets in the household. This subsidized pricing approach balances the licensing fee increase to support those most in need and is in alignment with the feedback collected during public engagement. Following the implementation of the new fee schedule, additional supports will be assessed to continue to reduce barriers for low-income residents.

During public engagement, feedback received highlighted the need to support animal rescues and their volunteer fosters by permitting excess animals for foster homes and by waiving the licensing fee for foster animals. Based on this feedback and to support animal welfare and rescue agencies in Edmonton, the licensing fee for foster animals is waived and the proposed excess animal permit will be issued free of charge.

The hen and bee licensing category will include an annual licensing fee, offsetting the operational costs of administering the program. This change is in alignment with other jurisdictions and ensures consistency with licensing requirements of other animals included in the bylaw.

Adjusting licensing fees provides assistance to partnering non-profit organizations that align with the City's goals and supports affordability for Edmontonians without compromising revenue. Licence fees are a type of regulatory charge, which is a levy imposed in relation to rights, privileges or approvals awarded or granted by the City. Council Policy C624, *Fiscal Policy for Revenue Generation*, provides a high-level governing framework for allocating service costs throughout the community for regulatory charges.

Updated shelter care and veterinary service fees for animals that are admitted to the Animal Care and Control Centre are recommended. The proposed shelter and

care fees are based on a jurisdictional scan of other municipalities and similar boarding facilities. The veterinary costs for treatment provided in shelter are the actual cost of the product or service.

Fines

Proposed fines include a tiered structure, with serious penalties for violations where there is a significant public safety risk, which is in alignment with public opinion. Comparison research found Edmonton's fines fell below other major Canadian cities, from minor to serious offences. A strong majority of respondents (91 per cent) agreed that fines relating to subsequent offences should be increased to encourage a change in owner behaviour. Based on this feedback, repeat offences of the same violation will carry a penalty with double the initial fine amount to discourage repeat offenders.

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 and the need for behavioural change.

Additional Fine Considerations

In Alberta, the maximum fine for a bylaw offence is \$10,000. As most bylaw prosecutions are initiated by a Part 3 Ticket under the *Provincial Offences Procedure Act* and most bylaw offences are relatively minor in severity and impact, the consequence for a bylaw contravention in Alberta is usually a fine of \$1,000 or less. At the municipal level, regulatory fines should not be expressly or implicitly tied to revenue generation and this consideration was not factored into Administration's fine recommendations.

The relationship to fines and deterrence is complex and depends on the offence. For this reason, any adjustments have been developed to be proportional to the offence. In the case of dog attacks and bites causing severe injury, for example, higher fines are a suitable approach when the signal is recognized as fair by the public. Fines were only adapted based on what Edmontonians felt strongly about, consistent issues with bylaw data or to establish new offences, where necessary. This bylaw addresses public concerns and ensures enforceability through fines, although officers are guided by the "4Es" principle (Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce) with respect to their actions, with fines only being used as a first resort for serious public safety offences.