

COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council
From: Corporate Services
Date: October 13, 2023
Subject: Regulation of Cats

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council directs staff regarding next steps with respect to the regulation of cats.

BACKGROUND:

During the previous Council term, multiple residents expressed grievances about the presence of cats at large in our community. These concerns included issues related to property damage, and public health. In response to these concerns, administration prepared a proposed amendment to the Animal Control Bylaw, with the intention of addressing these issues and providing a framework for the regulation of cats. A copy of the previous reports and minutes have been attached for Council's review and consideration.

However, Council opted to table the proposed amendment to allow for additional information to be gathered, as well as to consider the potential implications and public sentiment more thoroughly.

In 2019, Council directed Administration to proceed with amending the Animal Control Bylaw to restrict cats at large with escalating fines/penalties (motion # 31096). Staff turnover over the last few years has postponed this report coming forward. With the commencement of a new Council term, it is an opportune moment to revisit this matter and determine whether there is continued interest in pursuing the amendment to regulate cats within Mackenzie.

The following report outlines staff research and feedback received from other communities regarding the regulation of cats.

CAT REGULATION CONSIDERATIONS:

Regulating cats at large in a small town can have several implications, both positive and negative, which should be carefully considered before implementing any new bylaws.

Positive Implications:

1. **Reduced Nuisance Complaints:** Implementing regulations can help address complaints from residents regarding issues such as cats digging in gardens, making noise at night, or leaving feces in public areas.
2. **Public Health and Safety:** Regulating cats can contribute to public health and safety by reducing the risk of cat-related diseases, such as toxoplasmosis, and preventing cat-related accidents, like car collisions.
3. **Animal Welfare:** Regulations can promote responsible pet ownership, ensuring that cats receive adequate care, including vaccinations and sterilization, which can improve their overall welfare.
4. **Protection of Wildlife:** Free-roaming cats can pose a threat to local wildlife, especially small birds and mammals. Regulations can help mitigate this impact and protect the local ecosystem.
5. **Control of Overpopulation:** By requiring cat owners to spay/neuter their pets, regulations can help control the population of stray and feral cats, which can become a burden on animal control services.

Negative Implications:

1. **Enforcement Challenges:** Enforcing regulations on free-roaming cats can be challenging, as it may require additional resources and personnel to identify, track, and address violations.
2. **Community Opposition:** Some residents may oppose regulations, viewing them as an infringement on personal freedom or an additional financial burden. Managing public sentiment can be challenging.
3. **Resource Allocation:** Allocating resources for animal control, including shelter space and veterinary services, can be a financial burden for small towns with limited budgets.
4. **Stray Cat Management:** Regulations may lead to an increase in the number of cats surrendered to animal shelters, which can strain the capacity of local animal control facilities.
5. **Unintended Consequences:** Regulations may lead to unintended consequences, such as abandonment of cats or an increase in the number of feral cats if not carefully planned and executed.

Research

Research was conducted on communities of similar population sizes to determine whether their animal control bylaws encompassed regulations pertaining to cats.

City/Town/District	Population (2021)	Bylaws Regulating Cats
District of Sicamous	2,613	No
District of Elkford	2,749	Yes
Town of Princeton	2,894	Yes
City of Enderby	3,028	No
District of Houston	3,052	No
Mackenzie	3,281	No
Town of Lake Cowichan	3,325	No
Village of Pemberton	3,407	No
District of Lantzville	3,817	No
District of Port Hardy	3,902	Yes
District of Invermere	3,917	No

Of the three similar sized municipalities that did regulate cats, the following is a summary of their comments about their regulations:

Elkford

- Cats must be licenced
- Fines for cats at large

Port Hardy

- Cats must be licenced
- Fines for cats at large

Princeton

- Fines for cats at large

The three municipalities reported that enforcement is challenging, as it often necessitates cat trapping. In order to ticket for cats at large the cat needs to be secured at the property of the complainant and picked up by the Bylaw Officer. Cat owners would then be responsible for paying fines for their cat being at large and a cat licencing fee if required. As for cat licencing, Elkford and Port Hardy reported that not many people get their cats licenced, and this is also difficult to enforce unless prompted by a complaint. Despite these challenges, the municipalities have not witnessed a substantial increase of cat-related complaints or calls since implementing the cat regulations. However, they have established a mechanism for issuing fines to address nuisance cats.

Options for Regulating

Municipalities can regulate cats, promote responsible pet ownership, and address issues related to cats at large by the following means:

- Licencing
- Leash laws
- Spaying and neutering requirements
- Impoundment and redemption
- Public education
- Nuisance regulations
- Fines and penalties

Recommendation

Following review of the current issues being faced, the District's current bylaw, and the bylaw and feedback from others, staff are recommending the following:

1. Drafting an amendment to include regulations to enforce any animal at large, but not add any changes to include licensing at this time; OR
2. Making no changes to the Animal Control and Licensing Bylaw. No. 1354, 2016.

Council may choose to pursue an alternative enforcement avenue if they wish.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

Community and Social Development

- Our investment in the municipality's services and infrastructure, our commitment to principles of social equity and well-being, and our belief in the value of resident engagement, creates a healthy community in which everyone feels valued and enjoys a high quality of life.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Chelsea Smirle, Legislative Clerk/Executive Assistant

Reviewed By: Corporate Services

Approved By: Chief Administrative Officer