

Analysis of Resident Feedback on the Revisions to the City of Guelph's Animal Control Bylaw

Compiled by Rebecca Sutherns, January 2016

Background

As the City of Guelph looks to revise and consolidate its bylaw related to Animal Control, it hosted four identical facilitated public meetings in November 2015, followed by an online survey throughout December 2015, to gather public input on draft revisions proposed by the Animal Control Working Group. This report summarizes the feedback received from residents. It is intended to inform the work of the Animal Control Working Group, whose final recommendations will shape the content of a report to Council containing a recommended new Animal Control bylaw.

The written background information provided and questions posed at the in-person meetings and in the electronic survey were the same, although participants at the meetings benefited from additional context provided orally through questions and answers. At the meeting, participants were given space to provide written feedback after each question; on the survey, written answers were clustered into 3 areas.

81 people submitted written feedback at the public meetings and 2100 distinct survey responses were received. Responses from the public meetings have been consolidated into a single data set so as not to differentiate among the four meetings. A synthesis of all responses from the meetings and the survey is provided here.

Colour coding has been used for quick reference as follows:

	Feedback is consistent with Working Group recommendation
	Mixed feedback
	Advice differs from Working Group recommendation

Results

Disposal of Dead Animals

I. Should the City restrict the burying or disposal of dead animals within the City of Guelph?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	58%	37%
No	42%	63%

Comments from meetings:

People would welcome more information/guidelines/options here but not necessarily regulations. Some also wondered if this is a Waste Management responsibility, and/or had concerns about enforceability. There was a general sense that any rule should only apply to large animals and only on public property.

Number of Animals

2. Should there be a limit on dogs and cats older than three months per household?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	53%	64%
No	47%	36%

Comments from Meetings:

Opinions were very mixed. Most comments related to the need to ensure animal welfare on a case-by-case basis. Some people did suggest a specific number of animals – those ranged from a total of 4-10 per household. People were skeptical about enforceability.

3. How many flock animals should be allowed to be kept on each property, provided they are cared for properly?

	Meetings	Surveys
No limit	23%	23%
1 to 6	12%	21%
7 to 12	10%	16%
13 to 20	5%	9%
21 to 50	2%	4%
Zero (no poultry)	19%	7%
Not sure/Don't care	28%	20%

4. Should the number of all other animals be limited?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	65%	60%
No	35%	40%

Wildlife

5. Should the feeding and intentional attracting of wildlife (other than through bird feeders) be limited in Guelph?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	84%	66%
No	10%	26%
Other	6%	8%

6. Should the City prepare a wildlife management strategy to assist and provide direction with wildlife management issues?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	90%	83%
No	10%	17%

7. Is there anything else you would like to see or not see in the revised bylaw related to wildlife?

Meeting Responses

- 30 people commented that contact between humans and wildlife is bad for both sides – can be dangerous, unhealthy – in favour of minimizing contact.
- 16 people affirmed the need for public education regarding wildlife
- Other comments addressed the following issues:
 - Bird feeder guidelines
 - No culls
 - Need for consistent enforcement
 - Not the City's responsibility
 - Geese concerns
 - Wildlife corridors
 - Less development
 - Better signage
 - Better handling of garbage

Survey responses

- 573 people commented in response to this question. 102 of those said “no,” therefore 471 comments were made, representing 22% of respondents.
- Roughly 25 comments each were made about the following:
 - Need for more public education regarding wildlife, including favouring education over legislation
 - Need for better management of Canada geese in urban areas
- Between 10 and 20 comments were submitted about the following:
 - Need to protect green space, trees etc. from developers
 - Desire for the list of banned exotics to be less comprehensive, particularly in relation to parrots
 - Not the City’s job to do this – leave it to other levels of government, and common sense
 - Desire for co-existence between humans and wildlife
 - Concerns about skunks and beavers
- There were mixed opinions regarding the following:
 - Hunting vs. relocation
 - Restrictions on exotics
 - Whether coyotes require more controls or to be left alone
 - Cats running at large
- These topics were raised by between 3 and 10 respondents:
 - Desire for wildlife corridors, sanctuaries, natural habitats
 - Desire for experts to write policy, strategy
 - Stricter penalties for people out of compliance
 - Better guidelines for removal of wildlife and/or treatment of injured animals
 - Less strict regulations re: poultry
 - Recognition that humans created this problem
 - Better garbage pickup, including residences, parks and restaurants

Animals Running At Large

8. Please choose the statement that best applies to you:

	Meetings	Surveys
I agree that all animals, including cats, should be restricted from running at large	56%	56%
I disagree – cats should be allowed to run at large, however all other animals should be restricted from running at large	12%	19%
I disagree – only dogs should be restricted from running at large	14%	14%
Other option	15%	11%

9. If all animals are not restricted from running at large, should all animals be on a leash while in City parks?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	65%	71%
No	15%	18%
Other/NA	20%	11%

10. Should all animals be restricted from sports fields?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	40%	48%
No	56%	38%
Other	4%	14%

Comments from the Meetings regarding Running At Large

The main emphasis here was on the need for more off-leash areas that are easily accessible and fenced. A few respondents were keen for exceptions for dog trainers. There is a desire for fields and parks in the city to be well used.

Care of Animals

11. Should the City of Guelph adopt a Code of Practice that would outline guidelines for the minimal care of animals?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	97%	89%
No	3%	11%

12. Please if you support including the following statements in the Animal Control Bylaw or in a Code of Practice:

	Meetings				Surveys			
	Bylaw - Yes	Bylaw- No	Code of Practice - Yes	Code of Practice - No	Bylaw - Yes	Bylaw- No	Code of Practice - Yes	Code of Practice - No
Animals may not be left in a vehicle unless there is enough water and ventilation to prevent the animal from distress	77%	low	70%	low	83%	7%	53%	5%
Animals may not be transported outside passenger compartments...unless the animal is secured	70%	low	68%	low	71%	16%	51%	9%
Owners of unspayed female animals must keep their animals confined when they are in heat, so they do not attract other animals	56%	low	73%	low	56%	24%	48%	16%
Animals must not be kept tethered on a rope or chain that is less than 10 feet in length other than when the animal is being exercised or in the backyard	65%	low	68%	low	67%	18%	46%	12%

*Please note that the wording of the above examples was problematic, and respondents found the distinction between a Code of Practice and a bylaw confusing. The no/other response rate at the meetings was low, but inconsistently recorded. It is my sense that these answers reflect people's commitment to animal welfare rather than a clear understanding of the intent of this question.

13. Is there anything else you would like to see in the revised bylaw related to caring for animals?

Survey comments:

- 20% of survey respondents (535 people) made a comment in response to this question.
- There was considerable confusion over the wording of the scenarios in this question and the distinction between a Code of Practice and a Bylaw
- Many comments related to the need for animals to be properly cared for

- The most common specific response (about 8% of comments or 42 people) related to animals being left outside unsupervised. These comments related to barking, lack of shelter in extreme weather, length of time an animal is tethered etc.
- Over 20 people asked for more affordable spay/neuter services.
- **About 20 people** each made comments related to the following:
 - The need for unaltered males to be controlled (i.e. not just females in heat)
 - Stricter punishment for animal cruelty
 - The need to focus more heavily on enforcement
 - Seeing animal control as a provincial matter, not the City's concern, and therefore a waste of municipal tax dollars
 - Desire to ban all animals from vehicles
 - Need for stricter enforcement re: pet waste
- About 10 responses each related to the following topics:
 - Desire not to ban the keeping of parrots or other domesticated birds as pets
 - Pets should only be indoors
 - People found guilty of cruelty to animals should not be allowed to keep pets in the future
 - Need for more/better [fenced] dog parks in Guelph
 - Desire for more educational resources re: pet ownership, including for enforcement officers
- Other comments were fairly common but mixed in their intent. These included:
 - Vaccinations (for and against mandatory vaccinations)
 - Cats running at large
- Fewer than 10 comments each but some repetition was reported on the following issues:
 - Guidelines re: pinch collars, muzzles, aggressive animals
 - Feral cat control
 - No cats or dogs sold at pet stores
 - Desire to learn from other municipalities such as Calgary and Ottawa

Prohibited Animals

14. Should sheep and goats be permitted in the City of Guelph (subject to licensing and keeping in appropriate conditions)?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	59%	63%
No	41%	31%
Other		6%

Comments from the meetings:

Few comments given; most related to noise, smell and size of property.

15. Do you support this list of prohibited animals?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	62%	45%
No	38%	55%

Comments from meetings:

- Strong support for parrots, hedgehogs, lizards to be removed from list – especially parrots
- Suggestion to limit the list to genus not order
- Change “venomous” to “harmful to humans when in captivity”
- Most people did not feel they had the knowledge to comment

Pet Businesses

16. Should pet stores, pet daycares and pet grooming businesses etc. require a business license?

	Meetings		Surveys	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pet stores	96%	4%	92%	8%
Pet daycares	85%	15%	82%	18%
Grooming businesses	85%	15%	78%	22%

17. Should pet stores be restricted from selling cats and dogs?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	89%	79%
No	11%	21%

Comments from the meetings:

- Strong affirmation for the business licensing and adoption rather than sale of cats and dogs – would like rabbits added to that list
- Concerns about online pet sellers, puppy mills
- Interest in regulating kennels and breeders
- Concern about very small businesses – would like exemption
- Income from these licenses should be channelled toward animal welfare
- Some confusion about whether all businesses require a license anyway

Licensing

18. Please indicate if you do or do not support licensing for the following animals, in addition to licensing dogs:

	Meetings		Surveys	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Cats	86	14	58	40
All reptiles	63	37	43	54
All flock animals	75	25	45	53
Ferrets	63	37	38	59
Pot-bellied pigs	68	32	56	42
Any animals used for breeding purposes	79	21	75	24

Comments from meetings:

The comments on this question were fairly limited and quite varied. There is interest in one-time microchipping rather than licensing for cats, and some support for cats to be treated equivalently to dogs. There is support for more affordable spay/neuter service and lower licensing fees. There is minimal support for licensing indoor animals.

19. Should there be a discount for licensing multiple animals in the same household?

	Meetings	Surveys
Yes	71%	80%
No	29%	20%

20. Do you have any other comments about animal control in the City of Guelph?

This question was only asked in the survey, although in-person respondents were also welcome to write any other comments they had. One third of survey respondents made comments in response to this question (i.e. 700 people). Despite the large number of responses, themes were easily discernable.

The largest number of comments (10% or 70 people) related to the recommended list of prohibited animals. Of those, some people were concerned with the accuracy/adequacy of the list overall, while others wanted specific animals removed from the list. The groups of animals most frequently mentioned for removal were:

- Parrots (and in some cases other birds) – these were mentioned most frequently by far
- Lizards (including geckos)
- Turtles and tortoises
- Hedgehogs
- Aquarium fish
- Tarantulas
- Snakes under 3m

There were mixed comments regarding red ear sliders.

Other themes that were raised in 30 comments or more included:

- Encouragement to the City to avoid over-regulation
- A strong desire for more off-leash areas for dogs, particularly ones that are fenced
- Concerns about enforcement capacity, of existing bylaws as well as proposed new ones
- A desire to eliminate the problem of cats running at large

Issues that elicited 20-30 comments each included:

- A desire for Guelph to lead in this area by emphasizing education and incentives over legislation and punishment
- Resistance to punishing/restricting/discriminating against responsible pet owners because of the poor behaviour of a few irresponsible ones
- Encouragement to the City to focus on other more pressing issues because this one is perceived to be a waste of taxpayer time and money.
- Reminders that to some people, pets are loved like family
- Thanks for engaging in this process!

Issues that generated 10-20 comments included:

- A desire for lower licensing fees, which would be in line with some other municipalities, particularly if the range of animals being licensed expands
- Concerns with dogs being out of control when off leash
- Keeping animal welfare paramount in this discussion

Issues that generated 5-10 comments were more numerous, including:

- Assertion that animal owners should be the ones paying for animal control and shelters etc. rather than the full tax base doing so
- Maintaining access to sports fields for off leash animals at certain times, especially in Exhibition Park
- Encouragement to use the expertise of vets and the OVC more
- A desire for Guelph to stay known as an animal friendly city
- Concerns about Canada geese
- Affordability of spay/neuter
- Concerns about barking dogs left unattended
- Affirmations that this process has been useful
- Support for cats being allowed to roam freely
- Stiffer penalties for infractions, animal abuse
- Changes to the current poultry regulations, most notably the floor service and the distance from lot lines
- Desire for more evidence and expert advice to inform the proposed policy changes
- Faster response time from OSPCA officers

- Support for licensing but not for restrictions on the number of animals per household
- Mandatory spay/neuter and/or microchipping
- Concerns about feral cats
- Affirmation of “grandfathering” existing pets if these changes are adopted
- More money to the Humane Society

2-5 comments were made about the following issues:

- Desire for backyard beehives
- Concerns about skunks in neighbourhoods
- Pet ownership is not a right – it's a privilege
- License only outdoor cats
- Be more proactive about enforcement – not just complaints-based
- Food security issues (related to chicken, geese)
- Puppy mills
- Retractable/Flexi leashes on dogs
- Desire for better training for OSPCA officers

Some specific ideas were raised in the comment section, including:

- Establishing an ongoing Animal Control Advisory Board (this person left their contact information if anyone would like to follow up with him/her)
- Desire for a summary of the survey responses to be made public
- Why would people invest in microchipping if they also need to buy a license?
- A free license for retired service dogs
- Dogs being allowed on public transit
- Sliding scale for business license fees
- Off leash cat areas
- Volunteer, trained animal control officers
- De-linking animal control and animal shelter
- Concerns about bylaw compliance being run by a third party (i.e. the Humane Society)

Demographic Distribution of Survey Respondents

