



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Briefing Note

To: Council
From: Manager of Bylaw Services
Subject: Update: Animal Control Services and SPCA Contract

File No.: 4000-20
Date: October 9th, 2024

PURPOSE:

To provide an update to Council on the current status of the City of Courtenay's animal control services, and to inform Council of approaching changes to the "The British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" (SPCA) service contract and the resulting impacts.

BACKGROUND:

Animal control services are essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of both animals and residents in a community. In the City of Courtenay, the City's bylaw division has historically been responsible for animal control, as established by the past agreement with the Village of Cumberland, which provided part-time animal control services through an Animal Control Officer. This arrangement allowed for the management of stray animals and enforcement of local bylaws, while the City also collaborated with the SPCA to address issues involving dangerous dogs and support overall animal welfare efforts.

Animal Control Contract

The Village of Cumberland (Village) and the City of Courtenay (City) reached an agreement in 2010 for the Village to provide part-time animal control services to the City. The Village was to provide an Animal Control Officer along with the required equipment and vehicle for 14 hours per week. The duties of the Animal Control Officer were determined by Manager of Bylaw Services. All reporting lines were to the City and the Manager of Bylaw Services.

SPCA Contract

Important to the City's Bylaw services response to animal calls is the agreement between the City and the SPCA. The City renewed its contract with the SPCA in October of 2022 for continued services with needed amendments regarding the housing and keeping of dangerous dogs while the City completed legal processes (e.g. consent agreements). The agreement with the SPCA specified that the SPCA would accept dogs brought to them by Bylaw officers or their designate, accept dogs turned over to them by the public, and when requested assist Bylaw Officers as well as the RCMP in dealing with dangerous dogs at the discretion of the Branch Manager.

DISCUSSION:

Over the past year, animal control services have undergone several changes driven by public service level expectations and externally initiated contract reductions. These changes have necessitated adjustments to staffing levels, modifications to protocols for managing dangerous dogs, and a re-evaluation of the collaboration between the City, the SPCA, and new service providers to ensure effective animal control responses.

Animal Control:

In December 2023, a thorough assessment of the responsibilities and reporting framework for the contracted Animal Control Officer was conducted. The review revealed that the existing approach of contracting this

position failed to adequately address the City's needs, as it conflicted with the City's fundamental values and did not meet the expected service delivery model due to the disconnect between the Village and City systems and networks. Reliance on a single contractor was found to contribute to service inconsistency as any absence (e.g. vacation, illness, professional development etc.) was not covered by the contractor. Additionally, as City's Bylaw Officers did not have access to the contractor's paper files or digital network, it was not possible to transition files from one officer to another, resulting in service delays and records management challenges.

In early 2024, staff began exploring animal control options that would meet public expectations (based on the results of both the 2023 Bylaw Policy Survey and the 2023 Resident Survey), increase efficiency, and improve business continuity. In its exploration of options, the City consulted the Commissionaires Corps, as they provide animal control services to other municipalities on Vancouver Island. Based on the service discussion with the Commissionaires Corps, the estimated cost for the City to enter into a three-year agreement was \$263,655 (\$81,000-\$86,000 per year) for limited on-call services. The Commissionaire's service did not include any housing of seized, stray or dangerous dogs and was reliant on the continued provision of kennelling and other related services historically provided by the SPCA. Additionally, the Commissionaire's service would be provided on an on-call reactive basis, with no proactive bylaw compliance activities (e.g. off leash dog patrols).

Based on the limited service options offered by both the historic service contractor and what was available from Commissionaires, it was determined that neither option would be sufficient to meet the City's service objectives. With this recognition, staff-initiated discussions with the City's bylaw team and explored incorporating animal control responsibilities into general bylaw services. Further discussions of an in-house model revealed the opportunity to improve service levels and decrease risks to business continuity as all officers would be trained in animal control.

In January, 2024, the Village of Cumberland was given written 90-day notice that the City was terminating the Agreement for Animal Control services which would effectively stop services March 31, 2024. As of April 1, 2024, the City of Courtenay Bylaw Services assumed responsibility for all animal control. All Bylaw Officers have either completed or will complete both in house and certified training relating to animal control as part of the bylaw enforcement portfolio. This new model is anticipated to enhance service levels, as it enables any Bylaw Officer to address animal related compliance issues, and files can be picked up and addressed by any Bylaw Officer on shift.

SPCA Contracted Services

In December of 2023, contract renewal discussions under the 2022 contract terms commenced between the City of Courtenay and the SPCA. In January of 2024 the SPCA requested a meeting that included all local governments to which the SPCA provided animal care services to in the Comox Valley. The meeting was scheduled for May 30, 2024 at which the SPCA advised they would no longer be providing animal control contracted services to any local government in the Comox Valley as the local facility is changing its focus to supporting animals displaced by emergency circumstances and/or seized as a result of animal cruelty. This service termination was unanticipated by all affected local governments as there was no indication of a pending/emerging service change during the 2022 contract discussions. This discontinuation of service is unique to the Comox Valley and is not occurring in other services areas. The SPCA communicated a contract target end date of September 2024, but in recognition of the systems and work required to replace their services all affected municipalities were granted an extension to the end of December 2024.

The termination of the SPCA's service will, if an alternative solution cannot be found, have the following service implications:

- Strays that are listed in the respective bylaws, whether by bylaw officers or the public will no longer be accepted
- No longer selling dog licences or charging impound fees
- No longer holding any dangerous dogs that are awaiting court dates.

As of January 1, 2025, the only SPCA services available in the Comox Valley will be donor-funded programs including: accepting non-bylaw strays (when space is available), owner surrenders, emergency boarding, the pet food bank, spay and neuter programs, foster programs, adoptions, humane education, and; maintaining a database of Animal Kind dog trainers.

Recognizing a shared need amongst local governments in the Comox Valley to identify service replacement options, on July 16, 2024, a meeting was called with all community partners, that included, the City of Courtenay, the Town of Comox, the Village of Cumberland, the Comox Valley Regional District and K'omoks First Nation to seek a solution to the SPCA stopping services in the Comox Valley.

Through the collective efforts of all affected the City of Courtenay, CVRD, the Village of Cumberland and the Town of Comox a suitable kennel has been located and negotiations have started towards securing services of the kennel for Animal Control purposes. The K'omoks First Nation, after initial discussions, made a service decision that did not result in their continue participation to identify kennelling options. City staff are currently exploring dog licence sale options.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

A portion of the previous animal control contract has been reallocated to offset the cost of a part time bylaw officer, enabling seven-day service (initiating in October, 2024). The balance of the contract value will be applied to any new contract costs associated with the new kennel service. Contract details are currently being discussed amongst the kennel provider and the other local governments, but early discussions indicate a suitable service fit and cost.

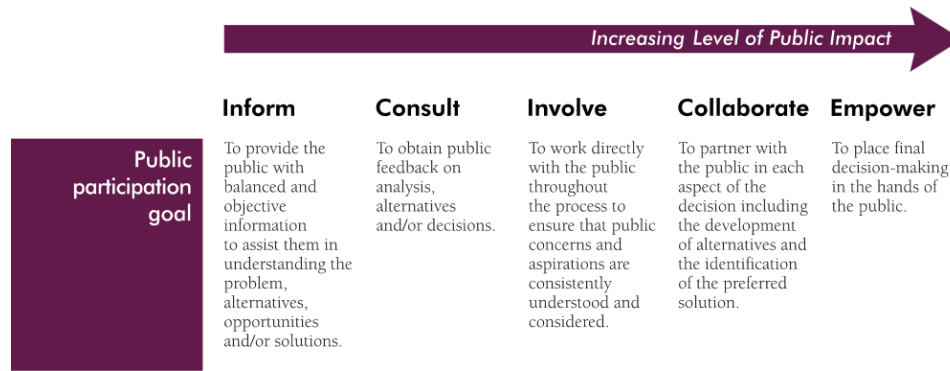
ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

The administrative implications resulting from the termination of the SPCA services are unanticipated and will impact the workplan of the Bylaw Services division as staff contemplate options, develop policies and procedures, draft and negotiated contracts, develop communications materials, and coordinate with other municipalities. Staff are currently reviewing operational priorities to determine what planned work will be affected by this now required work.

Additional administrative implications are anticipated to affect the Finance Department as the City will be required to transition dog licence sales to a yet-to-be-determined new purchase option.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

The SPCA and the affected local governments are working together on communications to ensure the public is informed of the change as we collectively seek to minimize any impacts.



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RECOMMENDATION: THAT Council receive the “Update: Animal Control Services and SPCA Contract” briefing note.

Prepared by: Mike Kurvers, Manager Bylaw Services
Reviewed by: Kate O’Connell, Director Corporate Services (CO)
Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.Pl., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)