



BYLAW 35-24 - RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP BYLAW

Purpose

The purpose of Bylaw 35-24 is to regulate the control of animals in the Town of Okotoks.

Readings

This Bylaw is ready for three readings.

Report, Analysis and Financial Implications

Draft Bylaw 35-24 reflects amendments to Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw 18-08 by removing requirements for the licensing of dogs, with the exception of the annual animal over-limit and adoption licenses (previously named Animal Fancier license). Administration opted to rewrite the Bylaw to be reflective of organizational changes and the removal of dog licensing requirements.

The original intent of dog licensing was to aid in the quick reunification of lost dogs with their owners, limit the number of dogs per household, and to promote responsible pet ownership. Despite the intent, the licensing process has proven to be both costly and relatively ineffective, requiring significant administrative resources with limited impact on achieving its goals.

Local social media platforms, such as Facebook, have provided an effective and efficient means of communicating lost dogs and other animals in and around the community and reuniting them with their owners. Eliminating the dog licensing requirement presents an opportunity to streamline services while maintaining public safety and reducing unnecessary administrative costs. Most responsible dog owners already ensure their pets are easily identifiable through microchips, tattoos, or identification tags. With the widespread use of these methods and the growing role of social media in reuniting lost pets with their owners, the traditional dog licensing process has become redundant.

In the draft Bylaw, the Animal Fancier license which is required for households having four (4) dogs (up to a maximum of 10) will remain and is retitled to "over limit" license.

As of August 14, 2024, the year-to-date revenue from dog licensing is approximately \$130,000 with an additional approximately \$50,000 in invoicing that is unpaid, nearly 28%, as of August 9, 2024. The dog licensing revenue are split with 1/3 allocated to Parks and 2/3 to Okotoks Municipal Enforcement (OME), comprising of 10% of Parks and 6% of OME's total revenues.

Statistics from 2023 illustrate the limited effectiveness of dog licensing with 41% of tickets issued for dogs at large involving unlicensed dogs. The current system imposes an administrative burden of approximately 1,500 staff hours annually including processing fees, handling renewals, and managing data. By shifting to a straightforward dog identification

requirement, where owners must display a tag with their current phone number, the Town can significantly reduce this burden and simplify the process.

This proposed amendments will affect over 3,000 households in Town, with about one third of households currently using the dog licensing system. The primary goal of the original bylaw to reunite lost dogs with their owners will be upheld and currently no other philosophical changes to Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw 18-08 are proposed. The proposed amendments focus solely on modernizing the service, reducing costs, and eliminating unnecessary red tape for residents.

The removal of dog licensing will create more staff capacity allowing administration to redirect resources to focus on higher priority tasks such as moving to online payments, permits, and licensing.

By discontinuing dog licensing, Administration would be able to re-focus administrative support to higher priority initiatives. To help offset the costs of lost revenue through the discontinuation of dog licensing, Administration would seek alternate revenues such as:

- sponsorships at the Okotoks Off Leash Park;
- sponsorships of the dog bag dispenser program at large; and
- ramp-up deliberate enforcement of the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw.

The off ramp of dog licensing was reviewed at the September 16, 2024 Governance and Priorities Committee meeting. At that time a motion was made to forward a recommendation to Council to remove fees for dog licensing in draft Fees, Rates and Charges Bylaw 09-25 and bring forward the corresponding necessary amendments to the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw 18-08 for Council consideration no later than December 31, 2024.

Strategic Plan Goals

<input type="checkbox"/>	Responsibly Managed Growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrated Environmental Leadership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong Local Economy		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organizational Excellence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced Culture & Community Health

Community Engagement Strategy

The community engagement strategy will include notification via social media, website, and corporate digital monitor displays. Website updates also to include removal of dog licensing application forms, removal of dog tag search function. A 90-day grace period to be implemented to allow dog owners to meet the requirements of the dog ID tag.

Alternatives for Consideration

n/a

CAO Comments

The Governance and Priorities Committee provided direction in September to build the proposed changes to licensing into the final budget. I strongly support these changes. We must start to evolve from historic roles to relevant roles in the municipality. Health and safety of the community is maintained through the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw.

Attachment(s)

1. Draft Bylaw 35-24 Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw
2. Bylaw 18-08 Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw Redlined Version

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November 7, 2024