Authority to Reduce Adoption, Sheltering, Surrender and Impoundment Fees for Dogs and Cats

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<td>To:</td>
<td>Licensing &amp; Standards Committee</td>
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<td>From:</td>
<td>Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards</td>
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SUMMARY

This is a staff initiated report seeking authority from City Council to grant the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards, or his or her designate, the administrative authority to temporarily reduce adoption, impoundment, surrender and sheltering fees. A tool commonly used by animal shelters throughout North America, adoption campaigns featuring reduced adoption fees, can result in considerable increases in adoption rates. These campaigns often coincide with holidays and are an effective way to manage capacity at shelters.

The current fees bylaw sets the fees for pet adoptions, sheltering, surrender and impoundment, but does not provide for the possibility of administratively reducing those fees when circumstances, as deemed by the appropriate City officials, warrant it. This report recommends amendments to Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 442, Fees, Administration of, to allow for such temporary fee reductions.

The City Solicitor was consulted in the preparation of this report.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards, recommends that:

1. City Council delegate the Executive Director Municipal Licensing and Standards, or his or her designate, the authority to:

   A. Reduce the adoption fees for cats and dogs when the Executive Director or his or her designate is of the opinion that:

      (i) The number of cats or dogs in Toronto Animal Services (TAS) shelters is at or near capacity;

      (ii) Cats or dogs in TAS shelters do not meet TAS general adoption criteria (for example, the animals have medical or behavioural issues); or

      (iii) It is appropriate to promote dog or cat adoptions at TAS shelters provided that the promotions do not exceed 2 (two) consecutive weeks at any given time or 6 (six) weeks in a calendar year.

   B. Reduce or waive impoundment, surrender, or sheltering fees for cats or dogs for compassionate reasons acceptable to the Executive Director or his or her designate.

2. That authority be granted to the City Solicitor to introduce the necessary bill in Council to give effect to Recommendation 1.

3. All other appropriate City officials be directed to take the necessary actions to Recommendation 1.

Financial Impact

The financial impact of adopting the recommendations of this report are not readily estimative, as they depend on the number of pet adoption campaigns, the number of animals adopted, and the number of other pets subject to fee reductions.

Despite the loss of revenue associated with an adoption at a reduced price, there are also considerable savings incurred in terms of shelter operations if an animal is adopted. The extent to which such savings may offset the revenue forgone is dependent on the resources the animal requires multiplied by the number of days that it would otherwise have stayed at the shelter.

Although it is difficult to determine the potential savings, staff estimate that after spay/neuter and licensing costs ($50 for a cat), the break-even point for sheltering a dog or cat is about two to three days. Sheltering costs include food, staff time (to feed, clean
and otherwise take care of the animals), the expenses associated with the physical space, and administration.

Staff know that the reduction of such fees is not common and that even when it does take place, it often results in a reduction of sheltering costs that likely more than offsets the forgone revenue. For this reason, staff are not requesting any change to the 2011 budget and feel confident that any associated variances can be easily absorbed.

Any resulting changes in expenditures or revenue will be reported on during the 2012 Operating Budget process.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

**DECISION HISTORY**
This is a staff initiated report to ensure that there is explicit authority in Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 442, Fees, Administration of, to reduce pet adoption, sheltering, surrender and impoundment fees under specific circumstances.

**ISSUE BACKGROUND**
Animal Services staff know from experience that a temporary reduction in pet adoption fees can be an effective way to manage the number of animals in shelters and minimize euthanasia. Adoption campaigns are widely used across Canada and the United States. Staff propose to formalise the authority to reduce these fees during adoption campaigns.

Animal Services staff know from experience that there are pet owners in the City of Toronto that do not have the financial means to claim or surrender their animals. Disincentives to claim animals can result in higher sheltering costs. Disincentives to surrender animals can result in more strays. To avoid situations where Animal Services staff must refuse to accept surrendered animals or refuse to allow some owners to claim their animal based upon financial restraints, Municipal Licensing and Standards seeks the authority for the Executive Director or his or her designate to waive or reduce these fees on a case by case basis for compassionate reasons.
COMMENTS
Although this report seeks authority to administratively reduce, and in some cases waive, a variety of animal services fees, one the biggest drivers behind the need for such authority is the issue of cat overpopulation and the consequent high euthanasia rates.

Adoption fees
A recent Ipsos Reid survey indicated that there are approximately 323,000 owned cats in Toronto. Staff estimate that fewer than 10% of these cats are obtained through Toronto Animal Services. Most come from other sources, such as the Toronto Human Society or individuals giving away cat litters. These cats are most often obtained for free from these sources and therefore, from this standpoint, tend to be much more appealing than a cat from Toronto Animal Services that carries a standard adoption fee of $84.75, including HST. Unfortunately, these owners often do not think of the costs associated with, and may therefore never provide, vaccination, spaying and neutering, and microchipping for their animal. These costs are built in to the Toronto Animal Services cat and dog adoption fees.

From staff experience, a reduction of adoption fees can result in adoption rates of four to five times the normal rate. This is an important tool to manage animal inventory levels and minimize euthanasia. This is also an important tool in managing feral cat populations, as pets adopted through Toronto Animal Services are vaccinated and spayed or neutered. Managing the feral cat population also helps to reduce pressures on shelters and consequently reduce associated costs. Thus, by improving adoption rates through reduced fees staff believe that any revenue foregone is more than offset by the benefits. It should also be noted that a study, using the Lexington Attachment to Pet Scale, to assess whether or not charging a cat adoption fee had an impact on the intrinsic value of a cat concluded that cat owners who did not pay a fee for their pet valued it as much as those who did pay a fee.

Further, staff believe that it is important to have the ability to reduce fees for "special needs" animals. These are animals that may require additional treatment and therefore incur additional expense. Without an incentive program to encourage adoption, these are animals that might otherwise be euthanised. In order to increase Animal Services’ "live release" rate, staff require the flexibility to offer such incentives.

Although the recommendations in this report refer to a capacity threshold, staff do not provide a specific figure for such threshold, as the appropriate capacity levels at which it may be prudent to conduct an adoption campaign may vary with the rate of animal admissions and turnover. These last two variables may be impacted by season and general economic conditions. For this reason, staff recommend that the authority to determine the need for an adoption campaign rest with the Executive Director, or his or her designate.
**Notable successes in other jurisdictions**

Many jurisdictions across North America waive or reduce adoption fees as a strategy to control overpopulation in animal shelters.

In June of 2010, The Calgary Humane Society waived adoption fees as part of its Adoption Donation Program. Over the course of that month, they were able to increase adoptions by 42% over the same period in 2009.

The Wisconsin Humane Society started a short-term pilot project in 1998 in which they waived adoption fees on cats that were over one year of age. The campaign resulted in a significant decrease in the amount that cats stayed in the shelter, thereby decreasing not only sheltering costs, but labour-intensive medical and behavioural problems that can arise in crowded environments. These savings offset any revenue loses. In addition, because cats tended to remain healthier under the improved conditions, euthanasia rates fell by 25%. The program proved to be successful enough to spawn a partnership with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to run studies and publish materials to further support the strategy.

The Kansas Humane Society began waiving adoption fees for adult cats in August of 2005. Between 2005 and 2007, the “live release” rate for adult cats increased from 19.5% to 32.6%. Over that same period, the number of adult cat adoptions increased from 613 to 940 (an increase of 53%).

**Surrender and impoundment fees**

Failure to provide the authority for Animal Services management to waive or reduce surrender, impoundment and/or sheltering fees for cats and dogs for compassionate reasons could and has resulted in owners releasing their animals onto City streets or leaving their animal unclaimed at one of the shelters. In such cases, Animal Services is placed in a position of still having to take care of that animal, whether it is picked up on the streets or left unclaimed by the owner at the shelter.

In instances where owners are being responsible by bringing their animal to one of the shelters for surrender, they should not be turned away if they cannot afford to pay the surrender fee. Doing so may result in animals being released on the streets and left to their own devices.

Similarly, in instances where owners are being responsible and have attended one of the shelters to reclaim their animals, they should not be turned away if they cannot pay the sheltering fee. Doing so will simply result in added cost to the City and a further pressure on the capacity of the shelters. Generally, the best place for any pet is with his or her owner.
Animal Services staff know from experience that failing to provide for a reduction in surrender, impoundment and sheltering fees for cats and dogs for compassionate reasons will result in more animals being housed at the animal shelters, thereby increasing the shelter's population and potentially increasing euthanasia rates.

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**SIGNATURE**

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