
City Council

Notice of Motion

MM9.5	ACTION			Ward: All
-------	--------	--	--	-----------

Taking Action on Hoarding: Protecting the Safety and Welfare of Toronto's Animals and Communities - by Councillor Josh Matlow, seconded by Councillor Michelle Berardinetti

** Notice of this Motion has been given.*

** This Motion is subject to referral to the Executive Committee. A two thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

Recommendations

Councillor Josh Matlow, seconded by Councillor Michelle Berardinetti, recommends that:

1. City Council request the City Manager to ensure that inspection staff from Public Health and Municipal Licensing and Standards are able to identify signs of animal hoarding.
2. City Council request the City Manager to direct inspection staff from Public Health and Municipal Licensing and Standards to report properties that exhibit signs of animal hoarding to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and City Animal Services.
3. City Council request the City Manager to develop a protocol to assist hoarders that reflects that the individual may suffer from mental health problems.

Summary

Animal Hoarding refers to an individual who keeps a higher than normal amount of pets and is unable to care for them. Cats are the most common animal hoarded due to the large number of stray and "outdoor" cats in Toronto. As demonstrated by several recent incidents, council should work to stop animal hoarders as the practice poses health risks to the animals, the hoarders themselves and their surrounding neighbours.

Animal hoarding is generally considered to be a form of animal cruelty due to the harmful effects the practice has on the animals. A recent inspection of a cat hoarder in the Yonge and Eglinton area found animals in states of ill-health too horrific to describe in a public document. The primary health issues involved are malnourishment, overcrowding and problems relating to neglect. The physical and psychological effects of hoarding on an animal are long lasting and usually continue even after the animals have been rescued.

Hoarding is generally considered to be a symptom of mental disorder rather than a deliberate act against animals. Individuals typically believe that they are providing adequate care for the animals and have difficulty understanding that they are doing harm. Hoarders are usually found living in unhealthy environments, surrounded by toxic levels of animal feces and urine. The hoarders, and their neighbours, are also at elevated risks of zoonotic diseases such as rabies, ringworm and toxoplasmosis.

In addition to greater threat of disease, neighbours of hoarders are also impacted by pungent ammonia odours emanating from animal waste. Adjacent residents have complained of not being able to use their backyards or porches and even being forced to keep windows closed during hot summer nights because of the strong smells. Neighbours also suffer because hoarder's houses are commonly unkempt, with broken windows, trash piled on porches, overgrown yards and are often dangerous fire hazards.

Animal hoarding has been a long-standing problem in Toronto. There have been cases where individuals residing close to hoarders have filed complaints to several City divisions over the course of a decade without a resolution. Meanwhile, they are unable to enjoy their outdoor space or sell their home.

While the problems are all too obvious to affected neighbours, the solutions have been less clear. There are a number of City divisions that have facets of the hoarding issue under their purview including; Public Health, Animal Services and Municipal Licensing and Standards. Unfortunately, none of these individual bodies has the legal powers or resources to address hoarders on their own. The City divisions are able to issue work orders pertaining to visible by-law infractions but do not have the legal powers to obtain a warrant to enter a private residence.

This motion seeks to address animal hoarding by requiring City departments to report suspected hoarders to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) and City Animal Services. The OSPCA, under the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, is able to obtain warrants that allow its officers to enter a private residence based on the suspicion that an animal is in distress. Evidence to obtain a warrant can include strong ammonia smell or a report by a municipal inspector. City Animal Services are required in hoarding cases for the division's capacity to care for the animals once they are rescued. It is also important that the hoarders themselves are referred for appropriate mental health treatment.

(Submitted to City Council on June 14 and 15, 2011, as MM9.5)