



**STAFF REPORT  
ACTION REQUIRED**

**Coyote Response Strategy**

<b>Date:</b>	September 3, 2013
<b>To:</b>	Licensing and Standards Committee
<b>From:</b>	Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	P:\2013\Cluster B\MLS\LS13014

**SUMMARY**

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The Coyote Response Strategy aims to reduce negative interactions between humans, their pets and property, and coyotes.

Coyotes have adapted well to life in the city. Although coyotes have posed little threat to humans, encounters have sometimes led to property damage and confrontations with pets. One main reason for these conflicts is people feeding coyotes, whether deliberately or inadvertently.

Research and experience have demonstrated that the most important actions that cities like Toronto can take to reduce direct public interaction with coyotes are education and the removal of coyote attractants such as food. Other methods have proven either ineffective or unsafe for urban environments.

Toronto Animal Services' Coyote Response Strategy (the Strategy) is based on these best practices. It involves investigating and determining appropriate responses to coyote issues, including public education, information sharing, and in specific circumstances, removal of the coyote(s). The report recommends that Council adopt the Strategy as the guiding policy for coyote management in the City of Toronto.

Toronto Animal Services (TAS) will continue building partnerships with community groups and coordinating with emergency responders to strengthen its ability to address issues with coyotes before conflict situations arise.

Legal Services was consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

1. City Council adopt Toronto Animal Services' Coyote Response Strategy as described in Attachment 1.

### **Financial Impact**

There is no financial impact expected from this report beyond what has already been approved in this year's budget.

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

### **DECISION HISTORY**

January 8, 2003, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) brought forward an information report headed "Coyote Response Strategy" to the Board of Health. This report outlined coyote management methods, removal criteria and presented a strategy on how to respond to problem coyotes in the City of Toronto.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2004/agendas/committees/hl/hl040614/it008.pdf>

June 14, 2004, the MOH submitted a report to the Board of Health concluding that there were no feasible alternatives to managing problem coyotes without including the option of using firearms when necessary. The Coyote Response Strategy was also amended to allow TAS to request the assistance of a contracted agent with the qualifications specified in the firearms by-law and other relevant legislation to dispatch a coyote using a firearm.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2004/agendas/committees/hl/hl040614/it008.pdf>

March 19, 2013, Licensing and Standards Committee requested that the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards report back to the Committee on policies regarding coyotes.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.LS19.7>

### **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

Coyotes have become common place in almost all urban areas of North America, including Toronto. They are a highly adaptable animal that can become habituated to residential areas and daily human activity. Park-like valleys that flow through our city make a very attractive habitat for coyotes. Food and shelter are also abundant, and natural predators are limited. In return, coyotes perform an important role in maintaining the ecosystem, helping to control the populations of rabbits, rats and geese.

Coyotes are rarely a threat to people. Research indicates that an average of 2.4 people per year were scratched or bitten by coyotes in Canada, compared to 460,000 dog bites that occur per year (Statistics Canada, 2009). In the last decade, there have been no reported

instances of coyotes biting people in Toronto. Nevertheless, the close proximity of these animals increases the risk for negative encounters. Coyotes find their way to residential areas where they may tear open garbage, cause concern for residents and come into conflict with pets.

## **COMMENTS**

### Best Practices

Staff in Municipal Licensing and Standards scanned best practices in other municipalities including Oakville and Niagara Falls to determine the most suitable response to coyotes for an urban area. The scan demonstrated that the most effective methods for reducing human-coyote interactions include public education and the removal of coyote attractants such as food. The jurisdictions consulted for this report indicate a drop in coyote complaints with the implementation of these strategies.

The issue with coyotes that are being fed by people is that they can lose their natural fear of humans. The feeding of coyotes can be deliberate or inadvertent. Overflowing or, carelessly stored garbage can attract smaller rodents such as mice and rats, which in turn attract coyotes. As a result, most public education campaigns on coyotes aim to raise awareness about food attractants and include instructions on how to coyote-proof properties and what to do during a coyote encounter.

City of Toronto's existing by-laws forbid both the deliberate and inadvertent feeding of coyotes. Chapter 608, Parks, Subsection 608-36 makes it an offence for anyone to feed wildlife, including coyotes, on public land. Chapter 548, Littering and Dumping of Refuse, and Chapter 629, Property Standards, when read together, may be broad enough for the purposes of giving effect to the no-feed coyote issue on private property.

Section 548-4 prohibits, in part, the placing or depositing of any waste on any land, except as required or permitted under commercial and residential waste by-laws. Section 548-5 also requires the owner of land on which refuse has been placed or deposited to immediately clean and clear the refuse from the land. According to Section 548-1, the definition of "refuse" and "waste" includes "organic material" such as food.

Chapter 629, Property Standards, also contains a number of relevant provisions for the enforcement against people who leave food on their property, including sections 9, 10B and 22A. Section 629-9 calls for all properties to be free from pests and conditions that encourage the infestation by pests, meanwhile subsection 629-10B requires private properties to be kept clean and free from the accumulation of refuse. If garbage and refuse is kept on private property, according to subsection 629-22A, it needs to be stored in receptacles.

Beyond the removal of coyote attractants such as food and public education, other methods applied for managing coyotes have proven either ineffective or, not suitable for urban environments. These methods include relocation, trapping and hunting.

In Ontario, the Ministry of Natural Resources (Ministry) is responsible for the management of wildlife in urban areas. The Ministry recommends 'prevention first' and 'lethal action as a last resort' when it comes to responding to coyotes. In particular, the Ministry's website offers information on how to coyote-proof properties and remove sources of food. Ontario's *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997*, S.O. 1997, Ch. 41 allows municipalities to use or employ licensed hunters or trappers to help resolve coyote conflicts without obtaining approval from the Ministry.

The relocation of coyotes from urban areas is unsustainable because coyotes are mobile and territorial animals. Once relocated, they can travel great distances to return to their original home. Relocation could also inflict the coyote's problem behaviour on another community.

The use of firearms or leg-hold traps presents its own challenges. These methods can be dangerous to humans and their pets in urban areas. Furthermore, when coyotes are hunted, they compensate by producing larger litters and expanding their range if there is a suitable habitat. For this reason, efforts to eliminate the coyote populations from cities have proven futile.

### Coyote Response Strategy

TAS has an existing Coyote Response Strategy that adopts best practices in the field and focuses on addressing issues with coyotes before conflict situations arise. Residents can report unusual coyote behaviours to Toronto Animal Services, who will respond based on the available information and the degree of potential impact the coyote behaviour has on the community.

One of the most integral components of the Coyote Response Strategy is public education about the nature of coyotes and how to deal with wildlife in an urban environment. TAS' public education efforts include:

- Presentations at community meetings
- Door-to-door information campaigns
- Mail-outs to residents with educational material
- Information on the City's website ([www.toronto.ca/animal\\_services/coyote.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/animal_services/coyote.htm))

### Lethal Measures

The Strategy allows for the removal of the coyote *only* if a bona fide health and safety risk to the public and/or humane reasons regarding the coyote have been determined. Removal methods include capture using current equipment or, dispatch by firearm. In these cases, TAS can seek assistance from various wildlife experts and the Toronto Police Service if the removal of a specific animal(s) is required using a firearm.

Although there are no feasible alternatives to managing problem coyotes without including the option to use firearms when necessary, the lethal response is considered as a last resort. TAS staff are not armed and their efforts are focused on educating the public on how to minimize negative interactions with coyotes.

The Strategy does not apply to the Toronto Police Service because their protocols are governed by the Toronto Police Services Board and the Chief of Police as per the *Police Services Act*. Nonetheless, Municipal Licensing and Standards is consulting the Toronto Police Service on responses to wildlife complaints and in support of the Strategy.

### Partnerships

TAS will continue working with community organizations such as the Toronto Wildlife Centre and Coyote Watch Canada. In particular, it will build partnerships to help increase public awareness of the problems caused when a coyote is being either deliberately fed or has regular access to food such as garbage. These partnerships have proven crucial in preventing conflicts with coyotes in many other jurisdictions including Oakville and Niagara Falls. In addition, TAS will maintain statistics on all sightings/incidents involving coyotes in order to effectively monitor resident interactions with this wildlife population.

TAS' Coyote Response Strategy aligns with best practices in urban coyote management. Providing long term-solutions and factual information to residents should largely alleviate conflict, fear and misperceptions regarding coyotes. These policies are being strengthened through community partnerships and increased coordination with emergency responders to reduce negative interactions between Toronto residents and coyotes.

### **CONTACT**

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### **SIGNATURE**

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Tracey Cook, Executive Director  
Municipal Licensing and Standards

### **ATTACHMENT**

Attachment 1: Toronto Animal Services' Coyote Response Strategy

## Attachment 1: Toronto Animal Services' Coyote Response Strategy

When Toronto Animal Services (TAS) receives inquiries and complaints about coyotes, the following levels of response may be initiated based upon the information received and the degree of potential impact on the community:

### **Education**

TAS can facilitate public education efforts in some or all of the following ways:

- a) Provide written information and educational pamphlets for distribution in communities through various means such as newsletters, area veterinarian offices and pet stores. Access to pet owners is important as many coyote encounters involve domestic pets.
- b) Provide information on the City's website about coyotes and wildlife in the urban environment, encountering a coyote, discouraging coyotes from approaching and some facts regarding these animals.
- c) Assist with appropriate messages for signs that may be posted in parks where there are ongoing coyote related concerns (e.g. advising the public not to feed coyotes).
- d) Public Service Announcements may be used as a tool to educate residents about coyotes on issues such as the effects of feeding coyotes in their area.
- e) Participate in public meetings held in the community where coyote issues are a concern. Invite wildlife experts to give information on urban coyotes.
- f) Provide a program that has been developed for use in elementary schools. This program teaches children an appropriate response to use if they encounter a coyote. The program teaches children not to feed coyotes and the very basic physical differences between a dog and a coyote for identification purposes.

### **No-Feeding Provisions for By-Law Enforcement**

Where education and warnings have failed to stop the feeding of coyotes, Municipal Licensing and Standards can investigate and may bring charges against residents of Toronto under the following sections of the City of Toronto Municipal Code:

- Where an incident occurs on park lands – Chapter 608, Parks, 608-36: makes it an offence for anyone to feed wildlife, including coyotes, in public parks.
- Where an incident occurs on other lands – Chapter 548, Littering and Dumping of Refuse, 548-3: makes it an offence for anyone to place, dump or deposit a quantity of waste (organic waste – consists of all food materials, including fresh, frozen, dried, cooked, prepared foods and leftovers) on any land within the City.
- Where an incident occurs on private property – Chapter 629, Property Standards, Sections 9, 10B and 22A: requires all yards and any other part of a private property be kept free from refuse, garbage, pests, and conditions that may attract pests or constitute a health, fire or other hazard. Garbage and refuse that is kept on private property has to be stored in receptacles. Chapter 548- 4 prohibits, in part, the placing or depositing of any waste on any land, except as required or permitted under commercial and residential waste by-laws. Section 548-5 also

requires the owner of land on which refuse has been placed or deposited to immediately clean and clear the refuse from the land.

## **Removal**

A coyote may be removed under the following conditions:

- (a) Where a coyote is **injured, sick or debilitated;**

TAS will undertake an investigation to determine whether the coyote can recover without assistance or, whether it should be captured and brought to a wildlife rehabilitation and treatment facility or, be euthanized for humane reasons. In accordance with the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, the recovered coyote will be located back into the area from which it was captured.

- (b) Where a coyote has **attacked and/or bitten a human** and TAS can confirm the injuries as being caused by a coyote;

Conditions for removal will *not* normally include an attack or **bite on another animal** as this is normal coyote behaviour and prevention using one or some of the educational effort listed above is the strategic response.

- (c) Where a specific coyote is **exhibiting behaviour**, which is **considered to be a bona fide threat to public safety;**

This will be determined through a TAS investigation and in consultation with agencies such as the Ministry of Natural Resources, Toronto Police Service, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, other experts and affected landowners. Before removal is considered it must be reasonably determined that the specific coyote is identified. Removal of more than one coyote in the specific area may be considered where a bite has occurred.

## Removal Methods:

- (a) Where a coyote is injured, sick or debilitated or is considered a bona fide safety threat to the community, TAS will attempt to capture it using equipment that is currently available.
- (b) Where removal cannot be effected by TAS, the assistance of the Ministry of Natural Resources, and/or Toronto Police and/or other qualified experts will be requested to attend in the dispatch of the coyote using a firearm in accordance with related legislation. TAS will provide full cooperation, relevant information and assistance to the experts in the tracking and location of the indicated coyote(s). Furthermore, where a coyote is to be dispatched through the use of a firearm, TAS will fully cooperate with the Toronto Police Service and all other relevant parties so that any indicated precautions can be instituted in the interest of public safety.