

Re: LS8.2

Responsible Dog Ownership: Results of Consultation

**Licensing and Standards Committee
November 26, 2015**

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Municipal Licensing and Standards**

- In 2013, the Ombudsman initiated an investigation of Toronto Animal Services response to a severe dog bite
- Issues: timeliness of TAS response; process; and the training of staff who respond to incidents of dog bites
- The report was presented to Toronto City Council at its March 31, 2015 meeting and included recommendations for TAS to address the above issues

- In response, ML&S has:
 - Changed its response time for dog bites from five days to within 24 hours
 - Made more information available to the public on City's website and "What to do when a dog bites" brochure was created
 - Made improvements to processes and training in the handling of incidents of dog bites and improved the ways in which TAS responds to reported incidents of dog bites

ML&S launched a review to:

- Address City Council's direction to provide recommendations on how the City can effectively respond to incidents of dog bites and dogs at large that may pose a risk to public safety
- Determine how the City can effectively balance, manage and address dog behaviour, owner responsibility and public safety
- Reduce the negative interactions between dog owners and non-dog owners
- Encourage responsible dog ownership
- Engage the public through consultation

To ensure public safety, dog owners must abide by:

Toronto Municipal Code, Chapter 349, Animals:

- Requires that all dogs be licensed and wear a tag
- Provisions for dealing with dogs at large, dogs that have bitten, tethering and responsibility to care for animals

Dog Owners Liability Act:

- Provincial law which sets out that the owner of the dog is liable for damages resulting from a bite or attack by the dog on a person or domestic animal

In 2014, TAS received 6,710 complaints related to Animals bylaw and a further review determined the following:

- 8% of complaints were Dog to Human Bites
- 3% of complaints were Dog to Animal Bites
- 7% of complaints were Dog Attacks/Menacing (growling, baring teeth)

Location where dog to human bites occurred:

- 54% on private property (35% occurred on the dog owners property)
- 33% on public property
- 13% location unknown

Location where dog to animal bites occurred:

- 34% on private property (6% occurred on the dog owners property)
- 62% on public property
 - 37% on public property (not in a park)
 - 13% were in a designated leash free area
 - 12% were in a park where a leash was required
- 4% location unknown

Survey

- ML&S developed a comprehensive online survey on dog behaviour and dog owner responsibilities
- ML&S website www.toronto.ca/mlshaveyoursay
- Open from August 21 to October 30, 2015
- ML&S circulated the survey through Councillors' offices, businesses, stakeholders, neighbourhood dog and resident associations and social media
- ML&S received over 2,500 responses to the survey

Public consultations and stakeholder meetings

- ML&S held five public consultation meetings

ML&S staff also consulted with:

- College of Veterinarians of Ontario
- the Ontario Veterinary Medicine Association
- University of Guelph Veterinary College Behaviour Department
- North Toronto Veterinary Behaviour Specialty Clinic
- dog trainers
- dog walkers
- Toronto Humane Society

What we heard.....

- 64% of the respondents believe muzzling is sufficient to protect the public from dogs that have bitten
- 60% of the respondents want to see the owner subjected to increased fines for dogs that have bitten
- 46% of the respondents want special licensing and 44% want signage posted for dogs that have bitten
- 79% of the respondents want the City to invest in public awareness and information about dog owner safety and responsibilities

Public Safety Concerns:

- Those who participated identified public safety concerns in public spaces:
 - Aggressive dogs in public spaces
 - Dogs at large (including dogs off-leash in parks (not in the designated areas) and dogs that are tethered in a public space (e.g., while the owner is in a store))
 - Negative experiences had lingering affects on some people and their dogs

Safety in the Off Leash Parks:

- Those who participated identified public safety concerns in designated off-leash areas of the park, including:
 - children under 12 years unaccompanied by an adult in designated off-leash areas of the park
 - The dynamics of unaltered (not spayed/neutered) dogs in designated off-leash areas
 - The dynamics of large and small dogs in the same designated areas

Education to promote responsible pet ownership:

- Most people who attended consultation meetings indicated that Chapter 349, Animals was not clear
- Most are aware that the dog owner is responsible for their dog's behaviour
- Many reported that they did not know who to report a dog bite to or were not sure what steps to take
- Many reported that they would like to see the City take a bigger role in educating the public about dog safety and dog owner responsibilities

Enforcement:

- Some participants reported slow response times and not enough staff to investigate offences when they occur (such as early morning or in the evening)
- Some were frustrated by their experience in reporting the incident
- Others noted that offending behaviour often continues even after its reported – deterrents needed to prevent bad behaviour

- Toronto is the only city of 15 cities reviewed that does not have a definition of dangerous, vicious or menacing dog in its by-law
- Toronto does not have additional licensing fees, or ownership requirements for dogs deemed dangerous, vicious or menacing
- Penalties including Toronto's minimum and maximum fines established in Chapter 349 are somewhat lower than other cities

- To help educate and inform the public, Chapter 349, Animals needs to be clearer, with definitions which capture dangerous, vicious and menacing
- Stakeholders and members of the public indicated that the City of Toronto should focus on:
 - Education
 - Enforcement
 - Increase in Fines

ML&S will report back to L&SC in April 2016 with:

- Proposed by-law amendments
 - To include definitions of dangerous/vicious dogs
 - To add requirements for dog owners to identify themselves
 - To investigate provisions to increase authority to seize animals in distress or when there is a public safety concern
 - To increase and escalate penalties for offences
 - To review the by-law for ambiguous language
- An education and communication plan
- An enforcement strategy