

EC10.2 - Response to EC6.9 - Incident and Operational Review of Serious Dog Attacks, March 20, 2024, Lenka Holubec

March 20, 2024

VIA E-MAIL: councilmeeting@toronto.ca

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Re: EC10.2 - Response to EC6.9 - Incident and Operational Review of Serious Dog Attacks

Dear Mayor Chow, Deputy Mayors and Toronto City Councillors,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on **EC10.2 - Response to EC6.9 - Incident and Operational Review of Serious Dog Attacks**.

This is to support The Economic and Community Development Committee recommendations:

- to **publicly list dangerous dog orders**, standardizing dangerous dog signs
- City Council request the Mayor **to include resources in the 2025 Budget (up to \$500,000) for the MLS Division to implement a proactive communication strategy and public education campaign to support compliance and enforcement with the goal of reducing the occurrence of dangerous dog acts**
- City Council **request the Government of Ontario consider amendments to the Dog Owners' Liability Act (DOLA)** to provide an expeditious process to hear DOLA proceedings, as well as an explicit mechanism for municipalities to recover costs incurred by the municipality when it holds an animal pursuant to a warrant or interim control order under DOLA

While these measures represent a step forward, it is only a baby step addressing the tip of an iceberg of fast escalating situation with rising number of dogs, bites, dangerous dogs and how this is affecting our public spaces, parks, native wildlife and biodiversity. It is mostly a retroactive measure to deal with situation where harm already occurred, while funding for proactive measures addressing dogs in the city in a comprehensive manner is not on the table despite mounting evidence that Toronto has a dog problem.

[Does Toronto have a dog problem? With a rise in attacks — and tensions — some say the rules to keep everyone safe aren't working](#)

“A year (2023) where the city has noted a 39 per cent rise in reported dog bites, a year of growing unease about off leash-dogs and irresponsible owners, a year of rising tension about who has a right to enjoy Toronto's green spaces. And a year of wondering whether the city is capable of handling this very messy coexistence”

Recommendations:

The workgroup dealing with 2023.IE6.8 - Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas - to review and update the City's approach to planning, locating, funding, building and maintaining Dogs Off-Leash Areas – could be extended to address more issues, outside of DOLA's, contributing to a dog problem in Toronto.

Presently, the city does not really know how many dogs and what kind of dogs live in the city, since licensing rate remains stubbornly around 30% over many years.

"The estimate is about 30 per cent of dogs and only 10 per cent of cats are licensed, Mary Lou Leiher of Toronto Animal Services said." Leiher declined to answer if there should be more effort put into enforcing the bylaw. "A fine is always the last resort" she says. The city is planning an education blitz in the new year to convince more pet owners to get a license." [Less than one third of dogs in Toronto are licensed. Posted October 3, 2014](#)

The city is providing for years the information that there is more or less 300,000 registered/licensed dogs in the city, while both the human and pets population grew significantly. Without having reliable numbers, it is near impossible for the city to adequately manage dogs in the city. This is also reflected in rising bites as owners of a potentially growing group of dangerous dogs are not known.

[European Study of Dog Bite Fatalities Suggests Rise in Deaths Could be Due to Increasing Number of Dangerous Breeds, 2021](#)

"One explanation for the increase in number of fatalities could be that people have changed in the way they train, keep and interact with dogs. Another potential explanation is the increasing popularity of dog breeds that have the potential to kill also adult humans."

It seems that the city never had a firm grip over dogs stats, licensing, science based education for dog owners, while enforcement has been negligible.

"City staff said Tuesday there are about 300,000 dogs in Toronto and roughly 2,000 owners with active DDOs." (dangerous dog orders) [After high-profile maulings, stricter rules for dangerous dogs could be coming to Toronto, Feb 24, 2024](#)

Toronto population grew from 2.79 million in 2013 to 2,928,879 in 2024.

According to [Latest Canadian Pet Population Figures Released](#) "figures from 2020-2022, the Canadian dog and cat populations continued to grow, increasing from 7.7 million to **7.9 million for dogs**, and from 8.1 million to **8.5 million for cats**. Not surprisingly, the survey results confirm that pet ownership in Canada increased throughout the pandemic, with **60% of households reporting ownership of at least one cat or dog.**"

Considering Toronto estimated population in 2024 being near 3 million, the city may be dealing with double or triple the number of dogs than the official numbers of registered dogs. The bottom line is that the city is not prepared for pets/dogs population sharp rise. Consequently, people's safety, the safety of public places and nature/wildlife conservation became very compromised.

The fact the city has not been enforcing the leash laws for years has likely contributed to the current crisis. We would likely face many more accidents if the speeding laws were not enforced.

[Does Toronto have a dog problem? With a rise in attacks — and tensions — some say the rules to keep everyone safe aren't working](#)

"The city favours an education approach, because people are not legally obligated to give their information to a bylaw officer. Many walk away, leash their dogs, and tip off approaching friends to the blitz. Last year, nearly 6,000 complaints about off-leash dogs were registered with the city. Fifty tickets were issued"

In conclusion, The Economic and Community Development Committee recommendations are a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done.

Sincerely,

Lenka Holubec, member [ProtectNatureTO](#)

Background

Submissions to City Council

(February 15, 2023) Letter from Clyde Robinson, on behalf of Ashbridge's Bay Nature Stewards and Lenka Holubec, member of ProtectNatureTO (MPB.Supp)<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/mpb/comm/communicationfile-165731.pdf>

(Oct 11, 2023) 2023.IE6.8 - Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas, Infrastructure and Environment Committee on September 20, 2023_Lenka Holubec REVISED for City Council meeting on Oct 11, 2023<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ie/comm/communicationfile-172288.pdf>

In the press:

[Dogs behind violent attack on Feb 7, 2024 on woman still not found, even after Toronto man arrested, posted March 1, 2024](#)

A man has been arrested and charged after a woman was attacked by two dogs while waiting at a bus stop in Toronto, leaving her with serious injuries, police say.

But Toronto police said the dogs involved have yet to be found.

Police announced the arrest Friday in connection with an attack reported on Feb. 7 attack in the Martin Grove Road and John Garland Boulevard area in the city's west end."

[Toronto woman mauled by 2 dogs says city report doesn't go far enough to prevent attacks, Posted February 20, 2024](#)

"Out of the 300,000 dogs registered in the city, there are 2,000 dogs with dangerous dog orders, of which 400 are considered serious."

"Even when we know of a problem and even when the dog has killed, we don't respond effectively," said Councilour Saxe.

She said nothing has changed since then until this report, which will hopefully improve the system. "This is a problem. Dogs can be wonderful companions, but only if they're trained and exercised properly," said Saxe.

Personal injury lawyer Jasmine Daya agrees and argues the focus does not need to be on awareness.

"I think the public is educated enough. I don't think signs are going to be helpful in stopping dogs from attacking other individuals. I would rather see that money spent on enforcement officers," said Daya."

[Keep pet dogs on leash to prevent attacks, Toronto tells owners amid rise in incidents. Aug 09, 2023](#)

Toronto Animal Services reports a 39% rise in dog attacks against humans in 2022

Keep pet dogs on leash to prevent attacks, Toronto tells owners amid rise in incidents Toronto Animal Services reports a 39% rise in dog attacks against humans in 2022 Toronto dog owners are being told to keep their canines leashed and under control at all times following an increase in attacks involving off-leash dogs. **According to Toronto Animal Services, there was a 39 per cent increase in the number of reported dog attacks against humans in 2022 compared to 2021. There were 1,316 dog attacks against humans in 2022 and 946 in 2021. Toronto Animal Services says there was also a 19 per cent increase in the number of reported animal-to-animal fights in 2022 compared to 2021. There were 402 animal-to-animal incidents in 2022 and 337 in 2021. This year alone, the city has issued more than 44 dangerous dog orders and 168 written warnings for bylaw violations. Currently, the city says there are 373 incidents involving dogs and dangerous acts under investigation. Jasmine Herzog-Evans, manager of the enforcement and mobile response unit at Toronto Animal Services, told reporters on Wednesday that the key to reducing the number of dog attacks is responsible pet ownership.**

Recent research dealing with topic of dangerous dogs

[European Study of Dog Bite Fatalities Suggests Rise in Deaths Could be Due to Increasing Number of Dangerous Breeds, 2021](#)

“Sweden - In January 2021, the first study examining dog bite fatalities in 30 European countries was published. The cause of death data was collected from [Eurostat](#), similar to how [CDC](#) collects this data for all 50 states. In 2011, reporting data to Eurostat became mandatory under EU Commission regulations. The study found that the number of European fatalities due to dog attacks increased "significantly at a rate of several percent per year" over the period studied.

The number of European fatalities due to dog attacks increased significantly at a rate of several percent per year. This increase could not be explained by increases in the human or the dog populations...

We detected a strong increase in number of fatal dog attacks over time, which of course is of concern. This increase could be seen both over a shorter (6 yr) and a longer (20 yr) time frame, and it matches a similar increase in the USA. **The increase in fatalities could not be explained as a simple function of there being more dogs, because the increase was more rapid than the increase in the dog population.** - (Sarenbo et al., 2021)

In the discussion section, the authors suggest explanations for the rising number of fatalities. One being the increasing popularity of dog breeds that have the potential to kill adult humans. Since W54 does not track breed of dog involved, the authors point to breeds that are "recurrently identified as perpetrators in literature concerning fatal dog attacks" as "indirect evidence" that an increasing number of dangerous breeds can partly explain the observed increase in fatalities.

One explanation for the increase in number of fatalities could be that people have changed in the way they train, keep and interact with dogs. Another potential explanation is the increasing popularity of dog breeds that have the potential to kill also adult humans. These types of explanations needs to be investigated using other methods than ICD data. However, some indirect evidence already exist that an increasing number of dangerous breeds can partly explain the observed increase in fatalities. The following dog types (purebred or not, and according to the FCI classification of dog breeds) are recurrently identified as perpetrators in literature concerning fatal dog attacks: Bull type terriers (FCI Group 3.), Mastiff type (FCI Group 2.), Nordic Sledge dogs and Asian Spitz and related breeds (FCI Group 5), and Sheepdogs originating from Germany in FCI Group 1. - (Sarenbo et al., 2021)”