

Response to 2024.EC16.3 - Addressing Dangerous Dogs

Date: March 25, 2025

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Municipal Licensing and Standards

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The City is committed to continuous improvement of dangerous dog investigation processes, prevention of dangerous acts, and enforcement of Dangerous Dog Orders.

In November 2024, staff reported to City Council on the recent steps taken to address dangerous dogs, including the standardization of the dangerous dog warning sign, development and launch of the [Dangerous Dog Orders map](#), and a comprehensive public education campaign ([2024.EC16.3](#)).

City Council requested additional information from the City Solicitor and Municipal Licensing and Standards as part of [2024.EC16.3](#), including information on the number of children bitten by dogs, dangerous dog signage in condos, information on the dangerous dog map, and the quantification of severity. The City Solicitor is providing a separate report to provide comments on the directives.

This report recommends an amendment to Chapter 349, Animals to support compliance with the dangerous dog order signage and the issuance of clear guidelines to the public about how staff assess the severity of dangerous dog acts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards recommends that:

1. City Council amend Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 349, Animals to amend section 349-15.1A(4) so it reads:

(4) That a warning sign is posted in the form and location required by the Executive Director, with such locations potentially including, but not being limited to, the following:

- (a) on the owners' private property in a location where it is visible to any person passing or entering the property;
- (b) on the outside of the unit door for the apartment unit or condominium unit where the dog owner resides.

2. City Council direct that the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing & Standards, in consultation with the City Solicitor, to amend public webpages and/or develop a public document or bulletin that outlines in more detail the elements used by staff to determine the severity of a dangerous dog act, including but not limited to, the following:

- a) The bite scale posted on the City's website
- b) The nature of the person and/or domestic animal's injuries, including if they required medical attention such as wounds requiring sutures or other wound repair or surgery, broken bones, severe sprains, or any other similar serious injury
- c) Whether the dog behaved in a manner that may pose a menace to the safety of persons or domestic animals.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

DECISION HISTORY

On November 14, 2024, City Council adopted Item 2024. EC16.3 - Update on Actions to Address Dangerous Dogs, with amendments. The report summarized actions taken by Toronto Animal Services to address dangerous dogs in Toronto. City Council requested the City Solicitor to report to Economic and Community Development Committee in the first quarter of 2025 on how condos can be required to be brought into compliance with city requirements to post Dangerous Dog Signage; options to include the entire postal code related to a Dangerous Dog Order on the city's website; and what steps could be taken to publicly quantify the severity chart.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EC16.3>

On May 29, 2024, the Economic and Community Development Committee adopted Item 2024.EC13.1 - Dangerous Dog Review Tribunal 2023 Annual Report, with amendments. The Committee received the Tribunal Chair's 2023 Annual Report, and requested MLS, in consultation with the City Solicitor, report back in the fourth quarter of 2024 on the definition of severity of a dangerous act.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EC13.1>

On March 20, 2024, City Council adopted Item 2024.EC10.2 - Response to EC6.9 - Incident and Operational Review of Serious Dog Attacks, with amendments. The report summarized operational reviews of a specific dangerous dog attack undertaken by MLS

and Toronto Public Health, as well as actions identified to improve processes and enhance public safety, including establishing a public dangerous dog registry and creating a new standard format dangerous dog warning sign.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EC10.2>

COMMENTS

Toronto Municipal Code [Chapter 349, Animals](#) requires that dogs must always be kept on a leash when off the property of their owner (except in designated off-leash areas in parks) and under the control of their owner (a person in possession or custody of the dog). Every owner must take reasonable precautions to prevent their dog from engaging in a dangerous act (any bite, attack, act of menacing behaviour or any combination thereof). Ultimately, dog owners are responsible for their dog's actions and dangerous acts can be prevented when proper precautions are taken.

Chapter 349 also sets out criteria for when a Dangerous Dog Order may be issued and outlines associated conditions a dog owner must comply with. Toronto Animal Services (TAS) within Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) investigates all dangerous acts committed by a dog and enforces the requirements under Chapter 349. TAS may also commence proceedings under the provincial Dog Owners' Liability Act (DOLA), which states that dog owners are liable for damages resulting from a bite or attack by their dog on another person or domestic animal.

This report provides MLS' perspective on the requests made to the City Solicitor by City Council on November 13 and 14, 2024 ([2024.EC16.3](#)) to report back on the following:

- a. how condos can be required to be brought into compliance with City requirements to post Dangerous Dog Signage;
- b. options to include the entire postal code related to a Dangerous Dog Order on the City's website; and
- c. what steps could be taken to publicly quantify the severity chart.

This report also responds to a request tomade by City Council for MLS to report back on the number of children bitten by dogs in the last five years, the severity of these bites and any special measures that can be taken with dogs involved in severe incidents.

Additional Information on Requests to the City Solicitor from Item 2024.EC16.3

a. Dangerous dog signage in condominiums

Chapter 349 requires that where the owner of a dog is served with a Dangerous Dog Order to comply, the owner must comply with several conditions including the following: "(4) That a warning sign is posted on the owners' private property in the form and location required by the Executive Director".

The current provision provides discretion to the Executive Director of MLS to prescribe the form and location of posting the sign on a dog owner's private property and to ensure dangerous dog signs are posted in locations where they are visible.

TAS enforcement staff encounter dangerous dog owners who reside in condos where the board has made by-laws or rules which may restrict signage on doors or other locations. In these cases, TAS enforcement staff have worked with owners to ensure signage is visible to those passing or entering the unit while avoiding conflicts with other requirements.

Staff recommend amendments to Chapter 349 to clarify that unit doors in condominiums or apartment buildings are locations where the Executive Director of MLS can require a dangerous dog warning sign be posted. MLS staff will communicate the bylaw changes on City webpages and will send out communications to condominium boards in Toronto to provide information about requirements under Chapter 349 and how they may be applied.

b. Postal codes on dangerous dog public postings

In March 2024, City Council directed the Executive Director of MLS to create and maintain a public record listing information from all active Dangerous Dog Orders under Chapter 349. Council directed that the public record include the dog owner's forward sorting area (first three digits of their postal code), ward number, dog name, dog breed, dog colour, and the date of the dangerous act. As of April 2024, a Dangerous Dog Orders map is publicly available on the City's [website](#).

As highlighted in a recent staff report ([2024.EC16.3](#)), the recommendation for publishing only the forward sortation area (i.e. the first three digits of a postal code) is based on consideration of privacy, security, and safety interests of affected individuals. Publishing the dog's name, breed and colour, the date the dangerous act occurred, owner's forward sorting area, and owner's ward on the dangerous dog map serves to make the public aware of City enforcement action on dangerous dogs. Making this type of information public increases accountability of these dogs' action and acts as a form of deterrence of recurring dangerous acts.

Staff continue to not recommend the posting of specific postal codes on the public map. Staff are concerned about the risk of the full postal code information or address of a dog owner being used for unintended purposes, including potential harassment of dog owners. Posting the forward sortation area on the map and requiring a warning sign to be posted in a location visible to the public reduces this risk while protecting public safety.

c. Defining severity in Chapter 349, Animals

Council requested staff report back on what steps could be taken to publicly quantify the severity chart. Under Chapter 349, one of the scenarios where TAS enforcement officers could serve a Dangerous Dog Order to comply is where the dangerous act is the first on record with the City but is found to be "severe." Severe is not defined in Chapter 349.

Where a dog owner disagrees with TAS' determination of what is severe in serving a Dangerous Dog Order to comply, the owner can appeal the order to the Dangerous Dog Review Tribunal (DDRT). The Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body that provides an

independent review of appeals to Dangerous Dog Orders that are issued by MLS. The DDRT consists of five public members appointed by City Council through the City's Public Appointments process. City Council appoints the Tribunal's Chair from among its members. The Public Appointments Secretariat in the City Clerk's Office coordinates the appointment process and is the main point of contact for applicants. The DDRT has the authority to either confirm the dangerous dog designation or rescind the dangerous dog designation and exempt the owner from compliance with the requirements of a Dangerous Dog Order.

It is legally possible to define severity in Chapter 349, but staff continue to recommend that a prescriptive definition of "severe" not be included in Chapter 349. When a dangerous act is reported to the City, an Animal Control Officer will examine all available evidence and circumstances to determine the severity of the act. There is a risk that having a definition of severe may limit Officer's discretion to issue a Dangerous Dog Order and protect public health and safety. This discretion allows Officers to investigate and understand the specific context of an act, such as extent of the bite (e.g., single wound or multiple wounds), and/or extent of the attack injury (e.g., bruising, fracture, etc.), and take appropriate action.

The current approach where Officers use all available evidence and understand specific context has been sufficient to respond to severe incidents. Chapter 349 requires Officers to determine the severity of the dangerous act, not just the extent of the injury to the victim. The injury (e.g., a cut from a bite) is just one consideration in an Officer's determination of severity but other considerations such as intensity of the act and the dog's behaviour are considered, which are more difficult to define. For example, there are incidents where victims were attacked and though the physical injuries were non-severe, the Officer was able to determine that the act had a severe intensity in totality of the circumstances and issued a Dangerous Dog Order accordingly.

Introducing a definition of severe into the bylaw may result in certain circumstances not being found to be "severe" by definition even if they warrant a Dangerous Dog Order based on the specific circumstances in order to protect public safety. There is also no evidence that not having a definition for severe has prevented staff from issuing a Dangerous Dog Order.

Staff's current approach also aligns with best practices in not setting out a prescriptive definition for a severe dog attack. Staff reviewed comparable bylaws in 18 Canadian jurisdictions. Five (Calgary, Winnipeg, London, Hamilton, and Windsor) use the term severe or a similar word as it relates to dog attacks, but none of the 18 define a severe dog attack.

TAS provides public guidance on City webpages and other materials on the dangerous act investigations process and factors that Officers consider in assessing if a dangerous act is severe, including a scale to assess dog bite injuries (one consideration in determining severity).

To support further clarity on how staff assess the severity of a dangerous dog act, this report recommends making changes to relevant webpages and/or develop a public

document or bulletin that outlines in more detail the elements used by staff to determine the severity of a dangerous dog act, including but not limited to, the following:

- The bite scale posted on the City's website;
- The nature of the person and/or domestic animal's injuries, including if they required medical attention such as wounds requiring sutures or other wound repair or surgery, broken bones, severe sprains, or any other similar serious injury; and
- Whether the dog behaved in a manner that may pose a menace to the safety of persons or domestic animals.

Making these clarifications will ensure the public is aware of the City's processes and provide an opportunity for staff to raise awareness on relevant bylaw requirements and the investigation of dangerous acts.

Request to Municipal Licensing and Standards from Item 2024.EC16.3

Number of children bitten by dogs in the last five years and severity of bites

In December 2024, TAS enforcement staff began formally recording the age of the victim of dog bites during each incident report. Prior to this, staff were not expected to record age in every case, but age was often recorded in circumstances where the victim was a child or a senior. Only 15% of dog bite instances recorded by TAS enforcement in the last five years included age of the victim. This 15% is expected to reflect an estimate of the number of children and senior bites combined. The remaining 85% of dog bite instances over the last five years were likely to adults.

Over the past 5 years (2019 - 2024), there were 342 cases recorded cases of victims aged 19 years or younger. Majority (55%) of the recorded bites to children were not severe and 12% were a non-bite attack. In 20% of cases, enforcement staff are aware an attack occurred but are unable to confirm the nature of the attack (e.g., bite or other dangerous acts). 13% of cases were deemed severe.

Measures taken with dogs involved in severe incidents

As required under Chapter 349, when a dangerous act is reported to the City, an Animal Control Officer examines all available evidence and circumstances to determine the severity of the act. If the dangerous act is determined to be severe or is the second or subsequent dangerous act on record, TAS will serve the owner of the dog with a Dangerous Dog Order.

Chapter 349 outlines associated conditions a dog owner must comply with when served with a Dangerous Dog Order. TAS may also commence proceedings under the provincial Dog Owners' Liability Act (DOLA), which sets out that dog owners are liable for any damages resulting from a bite or attack by their dog.

When a Dangerous Dog Order is issued, the dog owner must immediately comply with the following:

- Dog must be muzzled except when on the owner's premises;
- The standardized warning sign must be posted on the owner's premises;

- Dog is prohibited from using the City's dogs off-leash areas in parks;
- Owner must obtain a dangerous dog tag and the dog must wear the dangerous dog tag;
- Dog must be microchipped;
- City keeps a photo of the dog on file; and
- Dog owner must ensure the dog receives socialization/obedience training within 90 days of issuance of the order.

TAS investigates all reported service requests related to Dangerous Dog Order compliance. Initial compliance checks are conducted after an Order is issued, and proactive compliance visits for owners of dangerous dogs involved in severe dangerous acts are conducted once every 6 months, and annually for all others.

A Dangerous Dog Order lasts the life of the dog unless rescinded on an appeal to the [Dangerous Dog Review Tribunal](#). The Tribunal provides an independent review of Dangerous Dog Orders issued by the City.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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