

Animal Services seeing an increase in requests for help in keeping pets

As the affordability crisis continues, impacts are also being felt by Aurora's Animal Services Department.

The Town of Aurora says the Department has seen an increase in calls not for animal control, but what they describe as "requests for pet retention support" including access to more affordable veterinary care, training resources, and short-term financial assistance to make ends meet.

"We are also seeing more animal welfare concerns as some pet owners struggle to meet basic needs such as nutrition, grooming, and appropriate housing" highlighting the importance of early intervention and accessible supports," says the Town of Aurora. "Addressing these needs is a shared effort, and community involvement is essential to responding in a compassionate and sustainable way."

One such initiative Aurora's Animal Services division is spearheading is the establishment of a Pet Food Bank.

As The Auroran reported last month, the Town has established a pet food bank to support local pet owners in need, "to ensure that no one must make the heartbreaking decision of surrendering their pet due to the inability to afford food."

"We understand that pets are cherished members of many families," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. "The Pet Food Bank is a way for our community to come together and support one another, ensuring pets can stay in loving homes where they belong."

The Town says the establishment of the Pet Food Bank program was a "proactive" step in addressing emerging community needs.

"As food insecurity continues to impact residents, more people are seeking support, highlighting an opportunity to help keep pets with families who love them," they say. "By introducing this resource early, we aim to ease pressure before it becomes overwhelming. Ultimately, the program is about supporting residents and their pets in a compassionate, community-focused way."

"Animal Services has taken a thoughtful and intentional approach to developing this program, ensuring it reflects the evolving needs of our community. This includes reviewing local trends, particularly the growing number of residents seeking support to care for their pets during times of financial hardship, as well as engaging with community partners facing similar challenges."

While the Pet Food Bank is community-driven and supported through donations, the Town has also partnered with PetSmart in Newmarket to provide a monthly donation of food, and they continue to seek partnerships with other pet retailers to "ensure a consistent supply to meet community needs."

"We are currently most in need of unopened dry dog and cat food, canned dog and cat food, as well as cat litter. As this program continues to grow, these essential items will be in ongoing demand and will need to be consistently replenished to support the needs of our community," says the Town, noting they are also offering food donations for birds, gerbils, hamsters, and rabbits at this time.

Given the community need, the Town says the success of this fledgling initiative will be measured through the number of residents accessing the program, how effective it proves to be in "easing short-term challenges for pet owners," and they will also measure how this support program will impact the number of pet surrenders due to financial hardship.

"In addition, we are monitoring community awareness and engagement to ensure residents know support is available before situations become critical," says the Town. "Feedback from participants and partners will help identify what's working well and where improvements can be made. Ultimately, success means supporting the wellbeing of both residents and their pets while strengthening community connections."

"There are many ways the community can help, including fostering through local shelters such as the Georgina Animal Shelter,

adopting when ready, donating supplies like pet food and cat litter, supporting local veterinary initiatives, and helping raise awareness of available resources.?

For more information on Aurora's Pet Food Bank, including acceptable donation items, visit aurora.ca/petfoodbank. Businesses looking to arrange larger donations are invited to reach out to animalservices@aurora.ca. Further information on Animal Services can be found at aurora.ca/animalservices.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter