

Aurora looks to Georgina for animal shelter service

By Brock Weir

Aurora is set to wrap up its long relationship with the OSPCA, joining with three other York Region municipalities in contracting Georgina to handle animal shelter service.

The change, if approved by Council this week, will come into effect in 2018 and result in a \$60,000 savings to taxpayers.

The switch to the Township of Georgina's in-house animal shelter service is the result of a long investigation on ways York Region's Northern Six (N6) municipalities (Aurora, King, Newmarket, Georgina, Whitchurch-Stouffville and East Gwillimbury) could collaborate and save money.

Although the study didn't result in a full N6 complement contracting Georgina, Aurora will be joining Georgina, Newmarket and East Gwillimbury on the contract.

Aurora has used the services of the Whitchurch-Stouffville-based OSPCA since 2008.

In 2015, the N6 began looking at a study for potential options to collaborate on animal shelter services.

The N6 CAOs and the Animal Shelter Working Group have agreed that a five year term contract (with an optional one year extension) between the Towns of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina and Newmarket is a partnership that will continue to provide efficiencies, service improvements and a level of cost certainly to all of the respective communities, said Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Corporate Services in a report before Council. The agreement establishes a board of senior staff to oversee the agreement and identify additional opportunities for alignment of fees, bylaws, education and enforcement, and other potential municipal partners and/or facilities. The agreement also outlines animal shelter services.

Based on a cost sharing model, Aurora's share of animal shelter services for 2018 is set at the lowest of the four participating municipalities at \$122,400. This number increases to \$158,100 in 2019 and, by the end of the contract, Aurora's contributions are expected to total \$773,900.

The overall impact to the operating budget is a net savings of approximately \$60,000, Ms. Van Leeuwen concluded.

This savings, however, will be partially taken up by the creation of one full-time employment position dedicated to animal control.

A municipal partnership for the provision of shelter services commencing in 2018 will result in the Town of Aurora ending their service relationship with the OSPCA, said Ms. van Leeuwen. The Town of Aurora Bylaw Services division is proposing to proceed with providing animal control and enforcement in-house. This will require Council approval for an additional full time bylaw officer dedicated to animal control and a capital project budget for the purchase of a vehicle, equipment and training.

Benefits to providing animal control and enforcement services within the Bylaw Services Division include increased accountability, control and performance; enhanced community outreach and engagement; more flexibility to respond to community needs through cross training; opportunities for innovative approaches to create a dog-friendly community; [and] greater compliance with animal control and pet licensing bylaws.

The sweeping changes received the widespread support of Council, sitting on the Committee level last week, but there were still questions on the table, including questions from Councillor Wendy Gaertner on how taking these services in-house would benefit animal control within Aurora, from pet licensing to improved service to residents.

While Mandie Eddie of the Bylaw Department said licensing is a separate matter, there are a number of benefits to be realised.

Accountability would be one; responsiveness in a timely manner to the residents would be another, said Ms. Eddie. We have begun preparations already for officers to support any endeavours we have with animal control because we believe it is important to the public. We have made strides in making better enforcement through the trails systems and bringing it in house would bring the accountability into the office. We would be better informed, have better communication all round.

I ran animal control in two other municipalities and it was something where the accountability stayed at home. We were really able to manage things according to what our residents' requirements were.

This ticked all the boxes for Councillor Tom Mrakas.

We say time and time again our job is to look at ways to provide a better service for the same or less money and that's what I think staff have done. We're going to be providing that better service to our residents, he said.