

?Dangerous dog? and on-leash crackdown will better protect the public: Council

By Brock Weir

New provisions spelling out just what constitutes a ?dangerous? dog, and a crackdown on leashes, will allow animal control officers to better protect the public, according to Council.

Aurora approved a series of changes to the Town's existing Animal Control bylaws this week after they received tentative approval last Tuesday at General Committee.

Among these changes is a move to follow Toronto's lead in defining what a ?dangerous dog? is in municipal legislation.

The move follows a motion earlier this year floated by Mayor Geoff Dawe to provide clarity on what can often be a very murky matter.

In her report to Council, Mandie Crawford, Aurora's Manager of Bylaw Services, said Ontario's Dog Owners' Liability Act speaks to the responsibilities of dog owners, restricts pit bulls and gives Peace Officers the power to seize or quarantine animals under specific conditions, but there is some grey area.

?This legislation may not be appropriate in all circumstances where a minor bite or attack has occurred and has been investigated,? she said. ?Introducing ?dangerous dog? provisions in the Town's Animal Control Bylaw would enable officers to impose restrictions such as muzzling and/or requiring a dog to receive behavioural training. This may adequately address the risk and allow dog owners to keep their pet under certain restrictions.?

The suggested amendments included allowing the ?dangerous dog? label be applied to dogs that have ?bitten, attacked or pose a menace to the public? following an ?investigation of the severity of the behaviour or bite.?

?Provisions would allow for an appeal to the Director who would have the ability to lift the ?dangerous dog? designation if they are of the opinion the dog has been rehabilitated,? she said.

Additional provisions would ban dangerous dogs from Canine Commons, Aurora's leash-free dog park near the top of Industrial Parkway North, muzzling the dangerous dogs when they are off their owner's property and requiring an increased licence fee to ?offset the extra administration for dangerous dogs.?

?One or all of the restrictions could be imposed upon the dog depending on the severity of the bite or dangerous behaviour, the frequency of aggressive actions or attacks and would be progressive in nature if there is a reoccurrence,? said Ms. Crawford.

?Exemptions would be in place for dogs where an investigation of the attack reveals the dog was acting in self-defence.?

Additional amendments to the Animal Control bylaw will see dog owners restricted to leashes of three metres to address concerns that dogs on longer leashes are less likely to be brought under control by their owner, and restricting the handling of dogs on leashes to three at a time, and restricting the number of animals under one person's care at Canine Commons to three.

?Adding provisions under the current bylaw to address leash lengths and their use, the number of animals on-leash that an individual may handle, and have oversight of while in the dog park will give Animal Control Officers more preventative and appropriate tools for enforcement,? concluded Ms. Crawford. ?It will also assist dog owners with options for rehabilitation of dogs instead of answering to charges in court. Adding provisions for the keeping of animals during extreme weather conditions will reduce health risks to animals.?

When the changes were brought forward to local lawmakers last week, they expressed support but questioned whether they actually went far enough.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, for instance, said she recently received a call from a member of the public about a dog being left in a nearby backyard they suspected was being treated improperly, barking excessively and ?getting upset.

?Kids were actually getting upset and residents can't enjoy the peace and quiet of their backyard or home,? said Councillor Gaertner, asking what can be done to help residents in this case.

In response, Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Corporate Services, said cases of persistent barking is a violation of the noise bylaw and would require a resident to keep a log of when the dog is barking to aid in a bylaw investigation. Complaints, she added, could also be relayed to the OSPCA if care is a concern.

Nevertheless, Councillor Gaertner welcomed the changes on ?dangerous dog? acts and leashes.

?This has been a problem for the Town and I think it is a problem for most municipalities about dogs being on leash and people being either scared or injured, and a lot of people do not adhere to the bylaw even though it is posted,? she said. ?Of course, we can't control every single area, but I am glad to see we've tightened it up and we're following Toronto's lead in this.?