

New OSPCA contract will address public safety response

By Brock Weir

Aurora will work with the OSPCA on a new response plan to situations where there's a public safety concern as the Town renews its contract with the Society for animal control services.

The Town is set this week to renew its contract with the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for a further year, through to the end of December of 2017, a renewal which will bring with it additional patrol service to meet the needs of a growing community.

According to Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Corporate Services, the Town will be working hand in hand with the OSPCA to develop and improve upon processes in place when public safety is a concern. She was responding to issues brought forward by Councillor Tom Mrakas who said he was approached by a resident with report of a racoon in broad daylight and children approaching the animal.

“They put a call into the OSPCA and they were told that they don't come after hours,” he said.

Ms. van Leeuwen said she was aware of the incident, noting that the contract doesn't cover a response to wildlife, but this case raises an exception.

“We have a meeting with the OSPCA to work through these issues.”

Over the next year, pending ratification this week, talks between the Town and the OSPCA will look into expanding current service levels by increasing the number of service hours provided to the community. To meet demand, staff estimate this will cost an additional \$45,000.

In the meantime, both staff and Council members are looking at other options down the road to save money when it comes to animal control. Aurora is one of three York Region municipalities to contract their services to the OSPCA.

The balance of York Region's Northern Six (N6) communities use the services of K9 Pest Management Group, which is set to delegate to Council this week asking for the opportunity to submit a proposal to the Town of Aurora.

“Newmarket, Georgina and Whitchurch-Stouffville are currently in our third year of a five year contract with the option of renewal for an additional five years,” say the delegates in their submission. “The Town of Aurora would have the opportunity to piggy-back on this tender award and receive the service stipulated within the contract for the pricing currently in place.”

In the end, they say they estimate they can help Aurora achieve “an 11 per cent reduction in contracted service costs along with 29 more patrol hours per week being provided during the busy summer months.”

“For as long as I have been on Council, we have done the contract renewal and typically whenever it comes before us it has been that one year renewal with that caveat that we would consider and look at the N6 options to try and find some solutions that work for several municipalities [and reduces] costs,” said Councillor Michael Thompson on ongoing efforts to explore a contract that could save money by having one provider oversee animal control services for the N6.

Georgina is still leading that effort, said Ms. van Leeuwen, but they are “not in a position to make recommendations” because the existing contracts run out in December.

Nevertheless, Councillors said they are appreciative of the work organizations like the OSPCA provide and the resources required to make it happen.

“On the surface, it seems like a lot of money, but if I put it into the context that if we were to build a facility and then staff it and pay the maintenance, that would be a lot higher and we would have to be sure we have the best trained,” said Councillor John Abel of the Newmarket-based OSPCA. “There are a lot of pet owners in Aurora and I have heard people say they have never seen so many pets per capita. If we [spread that cost] over every household, I think we're serving the residents well.”

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: “My children run the SPCA in Fort McMurray and it is such difficult work, expensive, it requires so much attention to detail because they don't want to have any outbreaks of any diseases and it is incredible what goes into it. From what I know, our OSPCA has done a good job, so maybe we don't want to rock the boat.”