

Provincial authorities now involved in Heiniu investigation

The Province of Ontario's Animal Welfare Services Branch is among the multi-level bodies that are now investigating the death of Heiniu, a rottweiler that lost its life during an Animal Control call in East Gwillimbury involving Aurora officers.

At issue was an Animal Control call to two dogs running at large in the Holland Landing community on May 4.

The call resulted in the death of Heiniu, one of the two dogs in question, leaving its owners, the family that corralled the two dogs, and community members alike left asking questions and seeking justice.

Earlier this month, photos and videos of the dog lying on a driveway with blood appearing to be coming out of its mouth sparked widespread anger, culminating in a "Justice for Heiniu" rally held at Aurora Town Hall and along Wellington Street East on May 9.

In addition to calls for justice, those who rallied in solidarity called for a more fulsome response from the Town of Aurora.

While some say they are still waiting for that response, Mayor Tom Mrakas offered a formal statement on behalf of Council at last week's General Committee meeting, followed by an update from Municipal Solicitor Patricia De Sario.

"I want to acknowledge the tragic incident that occurred last week and the concern being expressed by members of the public following the death of Heiniu, a rottweiler in East Gwillimbury," said Mayor Mrakas. "Our thoughts are with the dog owners, the witnesses, responders, and everyone affected by this difficult incident."

In her statement, Ms. De Sario noted she has cautioned elected officials from speaking further on the matter as the investigation continues.

"The Town is reviewing the matter and cooperating with the dog owners, appropriate authorities and oversight bodies, including the Province's Animal Welfare Services Branch, Public Safety Division," she said. "As this process is ongoing, the Town is unable to provide additional details at this time. While I appreciate that some members of the public may be frustrated by the limited information that can be shared at this stage, the Town is limited in what information can be publicly disclosed due to legal obligations relating to privacy, employment matters, procedural fairness, and the integrity of the ongoing review process."

"Given the above and the potential for litigation, Mayor and members of Council and staff are advised not to comment further, please, and the Town will provide additional information when appropriate and able to do so."

While Council members are unable to comment at this time, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he appreciated the updates.

"It's important they (the public) know that we're being as transparent as we can on this and what they can expect and when," he said.

In a statement issued by the Town of Aurora following last Saturday's rally the Town confirmed the basic details of the incident.

"Animal Services staff responded to a call involving two dogs at large on May 4 in East Gwillimbury," said Carley Smith, Manager of Corporate Communications for the Town of Aurora. "During efforts to safely secure one of the dogs, an officer sustained a bite injury requiring medical attention. Due to escalating safety concerns and the presence of bystanders, Animal Services Officers contacted York Regional Police for assistance."

"Throughout the incident, staff attempted to safely calm, care for, and secure the dog while protecting public safety. The dog later became medically unresponsive and transported to a veterinary clinic. This was a difficult and upsetting incident for everyone involved, including staff, witnesses, and the owners. The Town is reviewing the incident, and a full investigation is underway."

Witnesses continue to question the details of the statement and, in particular, the conduct of attending officers.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter