

Corporate Services Department

Memorandum

TO: Krista Power, Director – Legislative Services & City Clerk **FILE:**

FROM: Keri Greaves, Commissioner – Corporate Services & City Treasurer

DATE: 10/03/2025 (mm/dd/yyyy)

SUBJECT: Administration Response to Request for Exemption for Ball Pythons

MEETING & DATE: Finance & Administration Standing Committee - 10/14/2025 (mm/dd/yyyy)

After careful review and consideration, Administration does not support an exemption to the Animal Keeping By-law Number 120-1983, as amended, and adopted as Chapter 232 of the City of Thunder Bay Municipal Code, for ball pythons. The primary considerations are:

Animal Welfare

Municipal staff cannot ensure that private households can consistently meet appropriate housing, husbandry, and environmental requirements for these snakes. If a ball python escapes or is released into the wild because an owner cannot care for them, they will likely not survive the local climate.

There is a lack of rescue or shelter capacity in Thunder Bay that is specialized enough to care for exotic animals if one were to escape, be released, or be surrendered. There is also a shortage of veterinary care in the region, especially for exotic species.

Environmental Impacts

According to the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), “exotic animals can displace native wildlife, including species at risk, by outcompeting and depleting the resources they rely on. They can introduce diseases and parasites, and even alter the very structure and composition of the habitat they now occupy.”¹ They also note that some species will continue to grow and migrate and

¹ BC SPCA. Exotic Pets on the Loose. 2024. <https://spca.bc.ca/news/exotic-pets-on-the-loose/>

damage other areas. If a ball python were to escape or be released and survive for a period of time, it could do damage to the local environment.

It should also be noted that while ball pythons aren't on endangered lists in Canada, it is because they are not a native species. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, they are Near Threatened, with a decreasing population due to poaching/exploitation for exotic pets and medicinal use (last assessed in 2020).² Those that are bred in captivity to be pets are also at risk of exploitation akin to the treatment found in puppy mills.

Public Safety

Even smaller snakes can present risks to pets, children, and others in the household when they act on defensive or predatory instincts. While ball pythons are not venomous, they can still strike and constrict when stressed; although rare, bites do happen and can cause infection and other health complications.

Administrative and Enforcement Challenges

Species-specific exemptions are difficult to monitor and enforce and allowing exemptions could lead to inconsistencies in enforcement and potential public safety concerns. Creating an exemption for ball pythons could create precedent for other species and complicate by-law compliance.

Care of exotic species also requires additional specialized handling and care training to ensure safety of the animal and the staff member.

Alignment with Other Agencies

Administration's position aligns with the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Ontario SPCA) and Humane Society, who "strongly support the elimination of keeping exotic and wild animals as pets and the banning of the sale, breeding, or importation of any exotic creature or wild animal for use as entertainment, display or companionship purposes."³ They are actively advocating to the provincial and federal government to ban importation, breeding, and sale of wild and exotic animals.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) opposes keeping any wild (native or exotic) animal species, or their hybrids, as pets. "Doing so may compromise animal welfare, pose unnecessary health and safety risks to humans and domesticated companion animals, and may adversely impact the ecosystem."⁴

² IUCN Red List. Ball Python. 2020. <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/177562/220378972>

³ Ontario SPCA Position Statements. "Exotic Animals." 2025. <https://ontariospca.ca/what-we-do/change-for-animals/>

⁴ Canadian Veterinary Medical Association Position Statement. "Keeping Wild (Native or Exotic) Animals as Pets. 2025. <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/policy-and-outreach/position-statements/statements/keeping-wild-native-or-exotic-animals-as-pets/>

It should be noted that City's Animal Keeping By-law 120-1983, as amended, prohibits the keeping of all venomous reptiles, and snakes in the python and boa families. There are no other restrictions on snakes.

References

Attachment – Schedule A – Prohibited Animals from Animal Keeping By-law 120-1983