

City Council Report

REPORT NUMBER 023-2026-Corporate Services-Licensing & Enforcement

DATE

PREPARED

December 17, 2025

FILE

**CITY COUNCIL
MEETING DATE**

January 13, 2026

SUBJECT

Animal Services Taskforce Update

RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUCIL

WITH RESPECT to Report 023-2026-Corporate Services-Licensing & Enforcement, we recommend that the action plan be approved as presented within the report;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an update on the Animal Services Taskforce and its recommendations.

The Taskforce identified five priority focus areas to fill gaps in animal services in the community:

1. Strategic Planning - Rebuilding and Strengthening Animal Services as a Core Municipal Function
2. Building and Managing Sustainable Rescue Partnerships
3. Staffing, Training, and Internal Structure
4. Securing Consistent and Accessible Veterinarian Care
5. Community Programs, Public Education and Outreach

Within these priorities, the Taskforce presented a number of goals and recommendations. This report outlines a proposed action plan developed from the Taskforce recommendations.

DISCUSSION

While the Municipal Services Pound was never closed, its function was altered during the early years of COVID. In response to public calls for change, through Report 112-2025 – Update – Animal Services Review, Administration committed to forming an Animal Services

Taskforce to gather feedback and conduct a gap analysis on services for animals in the City of Thunder Bay.

The Task Force

In June 2025, there was a callout for membership for the Taskforce. Twenty-seven (27) applications were received, and twelve (12) members were chosen through a review process. Members included representatives from past and current rescue groups, as well as residents with an interest and background in animal well-being in the community. Two City staff members also participated.

To ensure focussed, impartial, and respectful conversations, and in accordance with Supply Management By-law 359-2024, Administration recruited Kari Chiappetta Consulting to facilitate Taskforce discussions, lead activities for strategic analysis, and provide a report summarizing the consultation. Kari Chiappetta Consulting has been providing facilitation, training, and staff development services since 2006, is certified in a range of facilitation techniques, and comes highly recommended in the social services sector.

The facilitator's role was to establish a safe and respectful place for open discussions and to consolidate the information provided by the members of the Taskforce; recommendations presented in the final summary report relied only on the expertise of the Taskforce members.

The Taskforce met three times throughout September 2025. To ensure respectful and focussed discussion, the first meeting began with the members setting explicit conduct guidelines, including being respectful and kind, concentrating on current solutions, and maintaining confidentiality of the work of the Taskforce. Members were not to discuss their participation or post online about Taskforce activities in any capacity, and the City would be the voice of the Taskforce. The majority of members stated their preference to keep their identities confidential regarding their work with the Taskforce. All members agreed to these guidelines, and the guidelines were appended to every subsequent meeting agenda. The remainder of the initial meeting was spent discussing the history of Animal Services, current state of Municipal Pound services, gaps in the system, and answering questions.

During subsequent meetings, the Taskforce conducted a SWOT Analysis: a strategic planning activity where members identified perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to animal services and well-being in the City of Thunder Bay. From this analysis, five priority focus areas were identified:

1. Strategic Planning - Rebuilding and Strengthening Animal Services as a Core Municipal Function
2. Building and Managing Sustainable Rescue Partnerships
3. Staffing, Training, and Internal Structure
4. Securing Consistent and Accessible Veterinarian Care
5. Community Programs, Public Education and Outreach

Within these priorities, a number of goals and recommendations were provided. Upon review by Administration, some Taskforce recommendations were determined to be unachievable or too imposing on community partners. For example, it was recommended that the City create a by-law requiring animal rescues to be licensed, akin to a kennel business, setting out requirements for operation. It is Administration's position that this would be directing the work of other community organizations and could potentially create hardship for smaller rescues, leading to more gaps in the system.

Discussions at the meeting were focused on actions to take in the short-term to minimize gaps in the system, with longer-term actions to result in the re-establishment of the shelter model. It should be noted that the recommendations provided by the Taskforce were in pursuit of opening a fully functional animal shelter, including full adoption practices.

Administration is not recommending a return to full shelter-based services at this time, as there is substantial work to do to update policies, procedures, and by-laws to adhere to best practices. There are also resourcing restrictions in the short-term, including staffing and facility availability that will not allow for the service levels required to run a full animal shelter at this time.

Other Taskforce recommendations have been modified and included in the Action Plan. For example, it was recommended that the City set up a donation reserve fund to support rescue activities. As the Animal Control Donation Reserve already exists, the recommendation has been modified to amend the eligible withdrawals to be more inclusive.

The full list of Taskforce recommendations and Administration's responses are included as an attachment to this report.

Action Plan

The following action plan is being recommended by Administration:

Priority 1 – Strategic Planning – Rebuilding and Strengthening Animal Services as a Core Municipal Function

Item Number	Recommendation/Action	Completion Timeline
1a	Set up ongoing communication structures – including a Partnership Table led by the City.	Short Term
1b	Undertake a public engagement/education campaign – highlight what we do and a rebrand away from "Pound."	Short to Medium Term
1c	Revise by-laws, policies & procedures to reflect best practices.	Medium Term

Item Number	Recommendation/Action	Completion Timeline
1d	Launch microchip education and blitz programs (in partnership with vets, community partners, and other city services).	Long Term

Priority 2 - Building and Managing Sustainable Rescue Partnerships

Item Number	Recommendation/Action	Completion Timeline
2a	Modify the allowable withdrawals from the Animal Control Reserve to allow for any programs benefiting the health of animals in the City.	Short Term – Q1 2026
2b	Create an Adoption Pipeline to reduce animal length of stay – collaboration with community partners, adoption events/promotions, with Partnership Table.	Short Term
2c	Clear agreements with partners, outlining responsibilities, communication, and expectations.	Medium Term

Priority 3 - Staffing, Training, and Internal Structure

Item Number	Recommendation/Action	Completion Timeline
3a	Define job roles, mandates and authorities through joint meetings with Provincial Animal Welfare Services and Thunder Bay Police Service.	Short Term
3b	Implement ongoing training and retraining for Municipal Enforcement Officers and Animal Care Attendants for continuous service improvement.	Medium Term

Priority 4 - Securing Consistent and Accessible Veterinarian Care

Item Number	Recommendation/Action	Completion Timeline
4a	Veterinary services continue to be a challenge in the City. Continue work to engage long-term veterinary partners to offer spay and neuter services as well as emergency veterinary care.	Long Term

Priority 5 - Community Programs, Public Education and Outreach

Item Number	Recommendation/Action	Completion Timeline
5a	In response to misinformation and a lack of visible resources, launch public education campaigns – who to call, microchipping, spay/neuter, good pet ownership.	Medium Term
5b	Explore partnerships for mobile spay/neuter days with volunteer drivers in the absence of local availability.	Medium to Long Term
5c	Explore providing funding to a rescue for a TNR program	Long Term

Administration will provide status updates annually to City Council, or more frequently as appropriate.

Animal Control Donation Reserve

The City accepts donations for the benefit of the health and care of animals in the City of Thunder Bay. The Animal Control Donation Reserve was created to deposit these donations and use them for programming, however the withdrawals from this reserve are currently designated only for program costs associated with feral cat Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR) programs. The City does not currently fund a TNR program.

Since 2020, there have been minimal donations received. The estimated uncommitted balance as of December 2025 is \$144,700.

To more effectively support local rescues and foster partnerships, Administration is recommending an amendment to the withdrawals of the Animal Control Donation Reserve to allow withdrawals for programming for the health and care of animals in Thunder Bay.

This amendment does not exclude TNR programs from being funded, as they will remain eligible, but will provide other programs an opportunity to benefit from funding.

This recommendation will be presented to City Council for approval within the Reserve and Reserve Fund Policy update in early 2026.

Improvements to Date

To date, Administration has implemented the following to alleviate gaps in animal well-being services in the City:

- Updated the online presence to include informational resources and a listing of found pets;
- Responding to at-large animal calls in accordance with the City's animal by-law;
- Created a Leadhand Animal Care Attendant position to foster relationships with community partners and establish a rehoming plan for every animal that is brought in;
- Added another Animal Care Attendant and modified shift schedules to 12-hours per day to provide more enrichment opportunities for the animals in care.

Changes to staffing levels were within the complement in the Licensing and Enforcement Division.

CONSULTATION

Report 320-2025- Update – Animal Services Taskforce was presented to the Quality of Life standing committee on December 16, 2025. Representatives of New Hope Dog Rescue delivered a deputation in response to the Action Plan contained in the report.

Discussion centred around the deputants' position that the goals in the plan are achievable, but that the Action Plan will not be successful without an open shelter. Committee members asked for clarification arising from the deputation, noting that while a full shelter-based service is not currently available, the Municipal Pound has continued to house and return animals running at large, and has made a concerted effort to create options for rehoming stray animals. This includes moving some animals to Southern Ontario in partnership with local community organizations.

The impact of moving forward with the Action Plan on municipal by-law enforcement was also discussed, with Administration clarifying that there is no planned impact on by-law enforcement.

Committee members were supportive of the Action Plan contained in the report, and endorsed the recommendations as presented.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

The immediate actions presented in the report do not have any overall financial implications as they can be implemented within the existing budget. Any additional requirements will be brought forward through the regular budget process.

BACKGROUND

Report 112-2025 – Update – Animal Services Review was presented on May 5, 2025 for information, providing an update on the review of Animal Services and actions taken to fill gaps identified by the community.

A memorandum dated November 18, 2024 from City Manager John Collin advised City Council that the Commissioner – Corporate Services Keri Greaves would explore the possibility of finding an independent, third-party subject matter expert to conduct a review of the City's animal services model and enhance communication to the public and stakeholders as to the City's role.

Report 149/2020 – Municipal By-law Enforcement was approved on December 14, 2020, providing Administration with the authority to continue to review and amend the organizational structure of Licensing & Enforcement Division, and to continue to advance partnerships with the non-profit and volunteer organizations in support of the welfare of animals.

In February 2014, City Council approved a shift from the “animal control” model to the “animal services” model whereby the City would be an active participant in providing “animal services” in conjunction with community partners.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Attachment A – Animal Services Taskforce Recommendations and Responses

REPORT PREPARED BY

Kristyn Lovato-Day, Research & Policy Analyst – Corporate Services

REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

Keri Greaves, CPA, Commissioner – Corporate Services & City Treasurer

01/06/2026 (MM/DD/YEAR)