

# City Council Report

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**REPORT NUMBER** 113-2026-Corporate Services-Licensing & Enforcement

**DATE**

**PREPARED**

February 2, 2026

**FILE**

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**CITY COUNCIL**  
**MEETING DATE**

March 3, 2026

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**SUBJECT**

Report Back on Deputation Requesting Exemption from Animal Keeping By-law

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## **RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL**

For Information Only.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Report is provided in response to a deputation presented to the Finance and Administration Standing Committee in October 2025, which requested that ball pythons be exempted from the list of restricted animals under the Animal Keeping By-law 120-1983, as amended, and adopted as Chapter 232 of the City of Thunder Bay Municipal Code.

Administration does not support exempting ball pythons from the list of restricted animals. This position is based on the following considerations:

- Animal Welfare
- Environmental Impacts
- Public Safety
- Administrative and Enforcement Challenges
- Alignment with Other Agencies and Municipalities

The Finance and Administration Standing Committee requested a report be brought to City Council for deliberation.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Animal Keeping By-law 120-1983, as amended, and adopted as Chapter 232 of the City of Thunder Bay Municipal Code, outlines animals that are prohibited for sale, for exhibition, as a pet, or for any other purpose in the City of Thunder Bay. It also describes exemptions to

keeping prohibited animals, such as in the case of a zoo, under the care of a veterinarian, with a provincial or federal license, or in a travelling show.

Schedule A of By-law 120-1983 currently prohibits 21 different species of exotic and domestic wildlife. The list includes bears, eagles, seals, raccoons, venomous spiders, bats, venomous reptiles, and all snakes of the python and boa families, among others (Attachment A).

Ball pythons (also known as Royal pythons) are constrictor snakes originating from Africa. Adult ball pythons grow up to 1.8 metres long and have an average lifespan of 20-30 years.<sup>1</sup> They are prohibited under the Animal Keeping By-law, as a member of the python family.

In October 2025, a deputation was presented to the Finance and Administration Standing Committee requesting that ball pythons be exempted from the list of restricted animals under the Animal Keeping By-law Number 120-1983, as amended, and adopted as Chapter 232 of the City of Thunder Bay Municipal Code.

Administration does not recommend this exemption. Primary concerns include animal welfare issues, environmental impacts, public safety, and administrative and enforcement challenges. The prohibition of pythons and other exotic wildlife is in alignment with other agencies and municipalities.

### **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, or the surrounding area, that is specialized enough to care for exotic animals if a large snake were to be released, surrendered, or escape.

As there is also a shortage of veterinary care in the region, especially for exotic species, there are concerns that an exemption may lead to an increase in the number of ball pythons kept as pets in the community, placing more pressure on a stretched veterinary and animal wellbeing system.

### **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.”<sup>2</sup> They also note that

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<sup>1</sup> Reptilia Zoological Institution. “Ball Python.” <https://reptilia.org/ball-python/>

<sup>2</sup> BC SPCA. Exotic Pets on the Loose. 2024. <https://spca.bc.ca/news/exotic-pets-on-the-loose/>

some species will continue to grow and migrate and 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 are not on endangered lists in Canada, it is only 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).<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup> They are actively advocating to the provincial and federal government to ban importation, breeding, and sale of wild and exotic animals. It should be noted that the Thunder Bay & District Humane Society, now known as the Ontario SPCA and Humane Society Northwest Animal Centre, has recently merged with the OSPCA, and holds the same position.

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,

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<sup>3</sup> IUCN Red List. Ball Python. 2020. <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/177562/220378972>

<sup>4</sup> Ontario SPCA Position Statements. "Exotic Animals." 2025. <https://ontariospca.ca/what-we-do/change-for-animals/>

pose unnecessary health and safety risks to humans and domesticated companion animals, and may adversely impact the ecosystem.”<sup>5</sup>

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

In a sample of 39 municipal animal keeping by-laws in Ontario, 51% of by-laws explicitly prohibit ball pythons as pets. 60% of those municipalities use the same language as the City of Thunder Bay’s current by-law.

### **CONSULTATION**

At the October 14, 2025, Finance and Administration Standing Committee, a deputation was presented requesting an exemption for ball pythons in the Animal Keeping By-law 120-1983. Administration provided a memo in response that did not support the exemption.

The discussion centered on other municipal by-laws, the international and captive-bred exotic pet trade, lack of veterinary care, availability of supplies to care for the snakes, and concerns for resources for animals with longer life spans if they are no longer able to be cared for.

There was a discussion about why a ball python is prohibited, while a corn snake is not. As corn snakes are domestic to North America, they are more adaptable to our environment.<sup>6</sup>

The Finance and Administration Standing Committee referred the matter to Administration to bring forward to City Council for deliberation.

World Animal Protection Canada, an animal welfare non-profit organization, contacted Administration and offered support of more strict regulations on exotic pets. Attachment B is a letter from World Animal Protection Canada in support of the continued prohibition of ball pythons and other exotic wildlife as pets.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION**

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

### **BACKGROUND**

At the October 14, 2026, Finance and Administration Standing Committee, a deputation was presented requesting an exemption for ball pythons in the Animal Keeping By-law 120-1983,

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<sup>5</sup> 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/>

<sup>6</sup> Reptilia Zoological Institution. “Corn Snake.” <https://reptilia.org/corn-snake/>

as amended. The Finance and Administration Standing Committee referred the matter to Administration to report back to City Council.

***REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED***

Attachment A – Schedule A of the Animal Keeping By-law 120-1983

Attachment B – Letter of Support – World Animal Protection Canada

***REPORT PREPARED BY***

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

***REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY***

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

02/22/2026 (MM/DD/YEAR)