

Corporate Report

REPORT NUMBER 112-2025-Corporate Services-Licensing & Enforcement

DATE

PREPARED

April 14, 2025

FILE

MEETING DATE

April 28, 2025

SUBJECT

Update – Animal Services Review

RECOMMENDATION

For information only.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

This report aligns with the Growth pillar identified in “Maamawe, Growing Together: City of Thunder Bay Strategic Plan 2023-2027.” The actions presented in this report support the goal to make it easier to access City services by implementing better ways of serving the public that focus on continuous improvement and delivering positive outcomes for clients.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update of the review of the City of Thunder Bay’s Animal Services. During the ongoing review, several gaps have been identified by community partners. To fill the void and build capacity in Animal Services, the Licensing & Enforcement Division will:

- Reinstate response to calls for animals at large and accept surrendered animals.
- Re-establish an online presence to reunite lost pets with their owners and to provide information to the community.
- Implement a process to work with local rescues to move animals that have been in care into more suitable placements.
- Review and modernize standards of care.
- Create a taskforce to discuss gaps and provide recommendations with regards to animals in the City of Thunder Bay.

In the medium term, work is underway to modernize the City’s animal by-laws, policies, procedures, and training to ensure best practices and appropriate service levels. Outreach to the local shelters, rescues and other agencies is also underway, in order to

re-establish partner relationships and develop formal agreements. Long-term plans will be determined through the taskforce and brought to City Council.

DISCUSSION

In December 2020, City Council approved the restructuring of the Licensing & Enforcement Division. This plan amalgamated the Animal Services Section into Municipal Enforcement Services (MES). A key component of this plan was a heavy reliance on community partners to deal with stray and injured animals and to help find them homes. This shift also resulted in the cessation of adoption services, surrender services, and limited the types of animal complaints responded to by Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEO). No substantive changes were made to by-laws, policies and procedures as a result of the change.

Since restructuring, the relationships with non-profit and rescue organizations, as proposed in the plan, have been strained. This has had a negative impact on the community, and the animal services system as a whole.

Administration's review of the current state of animal services in the Licensing & Enforcement Division, as well as the gaps in animal services provided within the City of Thunder Bay, is ongoing, however it has been determined that the current system is falling short of intended outcomes.

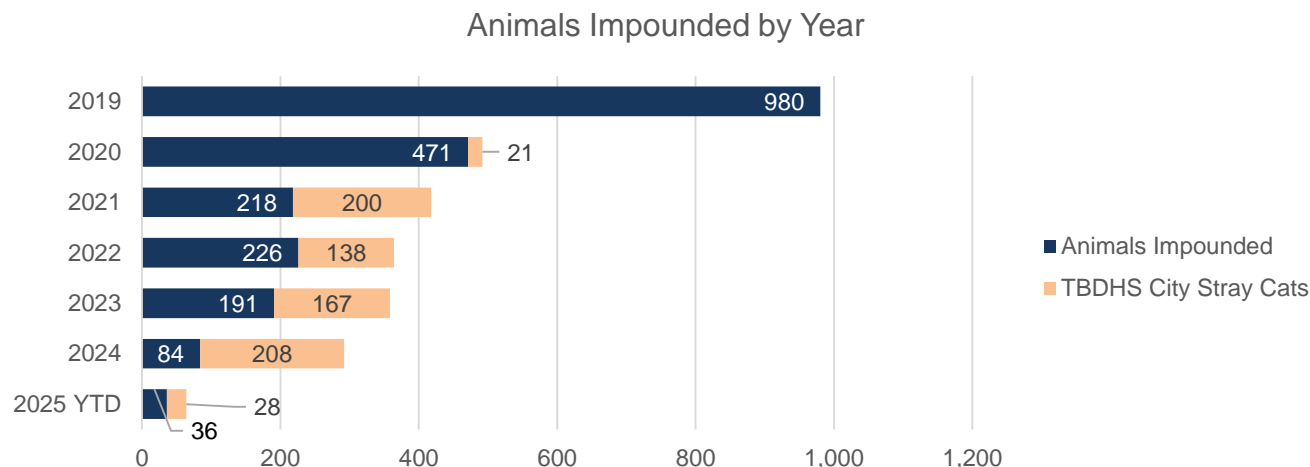
The City does not currently have the resources to return to a fully operational animal shelter with adoption services at this time. Administration is working to resume some services to fill the most immediate needs using available resources.

Animal Services: Current Capacity

With the changes implemented since 2020, there has been a sharp decline in the number of animals being impounded. It is important to note that this does not reflect a decline in the number of stray animals or animals running at large; it is more due to the direction to limit enforcement activity to animals actively running at large on public property.

With the move from dedicated Animal Services Officers to MLEOs, direction was provided to narrow the focus of enforcement to public safety and animals running at large on city-owned property only. MLEOs have not been collecting animals found at large on private property, animals contained by community members (in yards or on leashes), or voluntary surrenders.

The chart below depicts the number of animals impounded by year from 2019.



In early 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, Licensing & Enforcement Division removed public access to the facility, and worked with local rescues to rehome the cats in care. This led to the closure of the cat specific rooms (approximately 100 spaces). When City services resumed post-pandemic, Licensing & Enforcement Division entered into a fee-for-service relationship with the Thunder Bay District Humane Society (TBDHS) to shelter stray cats. The relationship was never formalized with an agreement, which has led to inconsistency in service responses from MES. MES has the capacity to house 18 cats, but MLEOs have been directed to bring all cats to TBDHS. Administration is working with TBDHS to establish service levels and define responsibilities through a formal agreement.

The Animal Services facility has 33 kennels for dogs, however, the current comfortable capacity at the facility is 15. This allows each dog to have a comfortable amount of space, and the quarantine and isolation rooms to remain available for dogs that have a medical or aggression concern. At the time of writing, Animal Services is caring for 11 dogs (73% of comfortable capacity). To date in 2025, 36 dogs have been impounded; 18 have been returned to their owner, and 7 were transferred to local rescues for rehoming.

Short-Term/Immediate Measures for Capacity Building

Administration acknowledges that the reduction in services has caused challenges for community partners and residents. To better serve the community, Licensing & Enforcement Division will be implementing the following actions:

- **Respond to At-Large Animals Calls and Accept Surrenders:** In accordance with the City's animal by-law, MES will respond to animals running at large which includes animals that are:
 - Running around off the owner's property

- May be contained in another person's yard because the stray was running around off the owner's property, but that person is not the caretaker or owner
 - May be contained by leash or in a vehicle because the stray was running around off the owner's property, but that person is not the caretaker or owner
 - Includes stray dogs that have been held by people trying to find the dog's owners for a period of time.
- **Re-establish an Online Presence:** Posting animals on the City's website and social media channels to reunite lost pets with their owners. A lost pet page has been added to the City's Animal Services section on the website; the content has been modified to reflect resumed services, and to include other helpful information for residents.
 - **Establish a Process for Rehoming:** Implement a process to partner with local organizations with the goal of assisting impounded animals in finding new homes in situations where they are not claimed.
 - **Modernize Standards of Care:** Review and update standards of care to reflect current best practices.
 - **Create a Taskforce:** Call out for membership for a taskforce to identify and discuss gaps and provide recommendations with regards to animal services in the City of Thunder Bay. The goal of the taskforce will be to provide valuable feedback to Administration to ensure services align with community needs as well as provide an opportunity for various animal-based resources to provide a continuous spectrum of animal care in the City.

Recognizing the limited staffing resources and space, these interim measures set the City up as an intermediary organization to house lost and stray animals, allowing the time to gather resources through community partners to transfer impounded animals to better situations such as foster homes.

Enforcement priorities have shifted to ensure animal related calls are attended to with appropriate urgency. Staff resources are also being considered.

Medium-Term Measures

In the coming months, Administration is committed to the following medium-term actions:

- The continuation of the fulsome review and modernization of animal by-laws, policies, procedures, and training to ensure best practice and appropriate service levels.

- Reviewing statistics and creating dashboards for better day to day monitoring and opportunities for continuous improvement.
- Restoring relationships and developing formal agreements with community partners.
- Ongoing consultation with stakeholders.

Long-term measures will be determined through discussions with the taskforce and Administration will report back on the progress of the review and solutions as required.

CONSULTATION

Administration has met with various stakeholders to review the status of current relationships and to assess gaps in animal services in the City of Thunder Bay. To date, stakeholders have included local animal rescues, such as New Hope Dog Rescue and Murillo Mutts, the Thunder Bay District Humane Society, the Thunder Bay Police Service, and the provincial Animal Welfare Service. These conversations will continue in order to re-establish relationships and promote community collaboration.

To ensure appropriate ongoing consultation, Administration will form a taskforce, led by an independent facilitator, inviting members that include representatives from local animal shelters and rescues, veterinarians, as well as a representative from another municipality with expertise in animal services. Several stakeholders have already expressed interest in being part of the taskforce. The goal of the taskforce will be to provide feedback to Administration to ensure services align with community needs. The call for taskforce members will be public in May 2025.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

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

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the short- and medium-term actions in this report are being implemented to address needs in the community with respect to animal services. Administration will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure community needs are met.

BACKGROUND

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 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

None.

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REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

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

04/22/2025 (MM/DD/YEAR)