

Nanaimo considering cat licence policy

Spencer Anderson / Daily News

November 7, 2014 12:00 AM



Nanaimo SPCA animal care aid worker Isabelle Watkin holds a two-week-old kitten at the branch's Labieux Road location. The city is looking at the feasibility of a bylaw requiring licences and registration of cats. Photograph By Spencer Anderson/Daily News

Nanaimo will look at the feasibility of requiring cat owners to licence and register their felines, as well as a requirement to have all cats spayed or neutered.

The proposed policy has the backing of the Nanaimo District SPCA, which says the changes could go a long way to address problems with unclaimed cats strays and ferals in the city.

On Monday, council heard from Sabrina Hornfeldt of the CatNap Society, a non-profit cat rescue society serving Nanaimo and the central Vancouver island region, and Mayta Ryn, a concerned resident who highlighted the impact of domestic cats on birds and other wildlife.

They argued that identification and neutering and spaying would go a long way to address issues surrounding the local cat population.

Council voted to have staff members prepare a report on a possible licence and cat identification program, as well as a possible amendment to the city's animal control bylaw for a mandatory spay/neuter program. Currently, the city only requires dogs to be licensed, although not spayed or neutered.

The only mention of cats in the city bylaw is a provision restricting anyone from keeping a cat suffering from an infectious disease, unless the cat is in isolation or is being treated.

Nanaimo SPCA branch manager Leon Davis said licensing of cats is not about a "money grab," but a way to re-unite wandering cats with their owners.

"In British Columbia, with cats and dogs that find themselves stray or lost, about 75 to 80 per cent of dogs find their way home," he said. "That's only true of 11 per cent of cats. And the reason for that is, we have more bylaws for dogs, it's more socially-acceptable to licence and tag your dogs, so when dogs come in, we don't have that hard of a time finding owners."

"None of that is normal for cat owners, so they don't find their way home."

Davis said mandatory neutering and spaying, while not in place for dogs, is needed for cats.

"We don't have dogs breeding and litters of dogs being dumped in places into the woods, we don't have 350 stray dogs and puppies coming into the shelter and another 300 going into CatNap," he said. "We do have all these things for cats."

Approximately 900 cats come through the shelter each year.

A growing number of stray and free-roaming cats are also stirring tensions in some neighbourhoods. Davis said a spay/neuter bylaw would allow the SPCA to convince irresponsible cat owners to get their pet cats fixed, but said it must be paired with a fund to assist low-income cat owners. The city already supports such a fund.

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