

**STRATEGIC INITIATIVE****Cat Shelter Pilot Project Evaluation Report****Report Purpose**

To provide Priorities Committee with an evaluation report on the Cat Shelter Pilot project.

**Our Prioritized Strategic Goals**

Goal 2 - Healthy and Safe Community

Goal 4 - Municipal Excellence

Goal 2 Priority - Social supports that enhance community well-being and safety and build community connection.

Goal 4 Priority - Relationships with all levels of government and key stakeholders that are strategic, purposeful, and productive.

**Background**

- The licensing of domestic cats is currently not required in Strathcona County; however, stray cats were identified as an ongoing issue.
- Following a competitive process, The Greater Edmonton Animal Rescue Society or GEARS, was awarded a \$100,000 grant to operate a cat shelter in Strathcona County as a one-year pilot project.
- Grant funding was provided for start-up costs including a lease, which expires on August 31, 2023.
- The project term is from July 2022 to July 2023. Sheltered Paws opened its doors to the public on October 1, 2022.
- The shelter provides care for cats in distress or those who have been abandoned.
- Sheltered Paws houses cats until they can be returned to their owner, or a local foster home is found from which the cat can be adopted.
- Services provided include:
  - Promote responsible cat ownership.
  - Promote cat identification.
  - Support spay and neuter programs.
  - Offer animal care education to cat owners; and
  - Collect operational data to share with the County.
- Data and information collected over the one-year pilot will inform Council on the scope and nature of the stray cat problem, feasibility of a permanent cat shelter and offer insight regarding responsible cat ownership strategies.

**Report**Animal Summary

As of May 15, 2023, 87 cats were brought into the shelter (37 females and 50 males). Only 11 cats of these were spayed/neutered on intake and 36 were kittens under one year of age. Many cats taken into the shelter have been injured or ill.

- One cat required a hind leg amputation, many have frostbitten ears and feet, many were skinny and dehydrated, and quite a few have had upper respiratory infections.

- One cat passed away while in the shelter probably due to head trauma after being found in a ditch likely after he was hit by a vehicle in rural Strathcona County.
- One cat found in Ardrossan had suspected calicivirus, which is a highly contagious virus that causes respiratory infection and oral disease. This cat had a mouth full of ulcers and was unable to eat. She was the most dehydrated cat GEARS has ever seen and it was determined that euthanization was the most humane option.
- One cat found in Sherwood Park was severely dehydrated, was not eating, and was very anemic. Blood work determined liver failure or had cancer; she was euthanized.
- One cat estimated to be 13-14 years old also came in from Sherwood Park and was humanely euthanized. He had hyperthyroidism among other abnormalities in bloodwork, was dehydrated, had severe dental disease, and tested positive for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. He came into care with mats in his fur, and urine-stained feet. This cat was very skinny on intake and lost almost two pounds during his short-term stay at the shelter due to his illness.

The shelter has geolocated [found cats](#) in Strathcona County. There is a reasonably even distribution throughout the rural area of the County with approximately half of the cats found in Sherwood Park and the other half found outside the hamlet.

#### Adoption/Reunification

Only three cats were reunited with the owners while on their 10-day stray hold. One cat was reunited after being seen on social media; a feral barn cat from rural Strathcona County and a house cat from central Edmonton were returned thanks to a microchip. One cat was returned after being seen on social media after she had gone to a foster home and had given birth to a litter of kittens. A total of 56 cats were transferred to GEARS foster homes and 21 were transferred to partner organizations. The number of cats adopted from GEARS from October 1, 2022, to May 15, 2023, was 23.

#### Volunteer Operations

Shelter Paws is 100 per cent volunteer run and has enlisted the support of 35 volunteers working two shifts per day totaling 1,431.9 hours between October 2022 and May 15, 2023. In addition to transporting cats to veterinarians for treatment, and general warehouse and office cleaning duties, services provided include:

- Intake/administration 112 hours,
- Cat cuddler 54 hours; and
- General shelter duties such as litter box cleaning and feeding 1222 hours.

#### Shelter Costs

During the first 7 months of operations (September 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023) the operating costs were as follows:

Rent	49,731.99
Startup supplies	17,930.00
Veterinary costs	<u>14,338.77</u>
Total costs	\$82,050.76 (Average of \$11,725 per month)

As more community members find out about the shelter and it gets busier, veterinary costs continue to rise. From October 1, 2022, to March 1, 2023, veterinary costs for animals that went through Sheltered Paws were \$14,338.77 (Average of \$2,048 per month). Many supplies such as laundry detergent, litter scoops and humidifiers were donated. Office furniture, computers, washing machine and dryer, food and litter were all donated.

Many local businesses support GEARS Sheltered Paws by providing discounted vet care, donations of items for operation or fundraising efforts, and donations of cat food and litter. Residents of Strathcona County have also dropped off miscellaneous cat supplies used in the shelter, given monetary donations and most of the shelter volunteers live in Strathcona County.

### Shelter Operations

On average, sheltered cats spent 25 days at Sheltered Paws. Unlike some shelters, GEARS will not euthanize for time or space so cats remain in shelter until they can be transferred into foster care or partner organizations.

Since October 2022, GEARS has held two open house events at the shelter where members of the community were invited to see the shelter, ask questions, and learn more about the project. These events have been well received, and have brought in donations of supplies, bottles for refund, new volunteers, and new foster homes. GEARS will continue to offer opportunities for community members to visit, get involved and ask questions. GEARS is planning to host ongoing education through social media and in-person events. There are plans to hold a microchip clinic soon and are working with a local veterinarian to ensure the best medical practices for the shelter are followed.

Volunteers are encouraged to take part in a no cost 'Fear Free Shelter' course to learn how to reduce stress in the shelter. A local animal trainer with a special interest in cats has started volunteering at the shelter, and cats are regularly provided with enrichment and are allowed out of cage time to help provide mental and physical stimulation.

### **Evaluation**

Shelter Paws has clearly responded to a need in our community. Not only has the shelter provided a safe and caring environment for stray cats in need, but it has also facilitated re-housing and permanent adoption arrangements for over half of all cats found in distress. For cats that do not meet the intake criteria, Sheltered Paws routinely posts found cat notices to reunify pets with their owners.

Since Sheltered Paws opened its door, community complaints regarding stray cats have been minimal and largely focused on information requests about the shelter. The shelter has typically run near capacity but has not exceeded it. It can be reasonably concluded shelter availability and efforts to educate the public on responsible cat ownership, have proven successful in addressing a longstanding community concern.

Clear intake criteria, shelter availability, community partnerships including a direct relationship with animal rescue organizations and public education are believed to be the

determining factors for success. As such, legislative measures including the requirement to license domestic cats is not recommended. Doing so would be costly and place an undue burden on residents, while having little impact on addressing the underlying issue.

The Shelter's continued operation beyond the pilot phase is recommended. A multi-year grant commitment (\$160,000 annually) will be brought forward for Council's consideration as part of budget 2024. The recommended amount is in response to the average monthly cost of approximately \$12,000, a need for upgraded equipment (to maximize capacity and improve efficiency), and provide a contingency for unexpected costs. A multi-year arrangement is preferred, as it will offer stability and lower administrative costs (including leasing costs). Budgeted department funding has been provided to Sheltered Paws to ensure its operation to December 31, 2023.

Should Sheltered Paws continue operating in Strathcona County, the partnership and associated grant funding provided to GEARS will move from RCMP and Enforcement Services to Agriculture and Environment under Planning and Development Services. This program has been identified within the Environmental Framework and aligns with the biodiversity outcome given the impact stray cats have on bird and small mammal populations.

### **Council and Committee History**

June 29, 2021	THAT Administration provide a business case for a pilot project on partnering with a non-profit organization to establish an animal shelter in Strathcona County for consideration during the 2022 Budget Process.
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### **Other Impacts**

**Policy:** n/a

**Financial/Budget:** Grant funding in future years to support ongoing operations.

**Legislative/Legal:** n/a

**Interdepartmental:** n/a

**Master Plan/Framework:** Environmental Framework

### **Enclosure**

1	Cat Shelter Pilot Project Evaluation Report 2023 presentation
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