
Recommendation to Amend Bylaw 37-2017 – Responsible Dog Ownership Bylaw**Report Purpose**

This report provides information for Council to consider amending the Responsible Dog Ownership Bylaw to remove the dog licensing requirement and replace it with a requirement for dog identification and associated fines for failing to comply.

Recommendation

THAT Administration prepare, for Council's consideration by the end of Q1 2024, draft amendments to Bylaw 37-2017 Responsible Dog Ownership to remove the licensing requirements and to add requirements for dog identification and associated fines for failing to comply, as set out in the September 19, 2023 RCMP and Enforcement Services report.

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 - Optimal use of resources that meets the community's needs

Report**Background:**

The purpose of dog licensing is to support the reunification of lost dogs with their owners. The licensing section under the Responsible Dog Ownership Bylaw, and its corresponding exemptions and fee structure, is designed to incentivize licensing. Analysis has shown neither the purpose, nor the intended outcome of this section, has proven effective. Further, maintaining this process bears considerable cost and requires ongoing staff effort. Removing licensing from Bylaw 37-2017 is an opportunity to eliminate low-value and low-priority work, while maintaining service levels, public safety and providing a financial savings to law-abiding residents.

The current Responsible Dog Ownership Bylaw came into effect in January 2018, with the goal of increasing dog licensing compliance and encouraging responsible dog ownership. The expected increase in dog licensing has not materialized. At the same time, responsible dog owners remain largely responsible, while the behaviours of less responsible owners have not been influenced by the current licensing requirement. The present fee structure, renewal date and notices, grace periods, and exemptions have also contributed to confusion and an elevated level of administrative burden.

Since the bylaw's implementation, an average of 8,000 dogs are licensed and approximately 2,000 dogs are exempted. While the number of dogs licensed in the County has remained stable, the number of unlicensed dogs has steadily increased and is estimated to exceed 4,000. This estimate is partly based on the number of dog files investigated by Enforcement Services each year with 204 in 2019 rising to 348 in 2023 (projected) a 55% increase. It is also based on the belief that after the free license period, many owners are not renewing, and thus not paying for an annual license. Dog owners are currently required to license their dogs on an annual basis (by April 1) for a fee of \$35 for spayed or neutered or \$70 for

unaltered animals. An owner of a dog who fails to comply with a provision under this section is guilty of an offence subject to a fine of \$250 for a first occurrence.

Unlike cities such as Edmonton and Calgary who implement licensing to generate revenue, Enforcement Services observes a passive enforcement strategy, whereby enforcement only occurs when a dog ownership offence occurs. It is important to note, all other occurrences and associated penalties including the most common (excessive barking and dog at large) are not affected by the recommended changes and will continue to be integral to the bylaw.

Most responsible dog owners ensure the safety and identification of their pet regardless of the bylaw ensuring the use of subcutaneous microchips, tattoos, and/or static or digital identification tags. These identifiers, along with social media, assist in the safe return of a dog to its owner, regardless of whether the dog is licensed or not. Along with proven and successful efforts by surrounding communities to reunite owners and lost dogs, the department has implemented a shareable spreadsheet identifying all lost and found pets. The information allows for cross-referencing and expedited reunification. Enforcement Services will continue to prioritize dog reunification with pet owners. Every dog must visibly wear identification when the animal is in a location other than the owner's property, and the identification must include the owner's contact information. To ensure compliance, we are proposing the following fines and recommending the following increases to impound fees:

Failure to Attach Dog Identification – Proposed Revised Fees
\$150 – first offence
\$300 – second offence
\$500 – third offence

Current Impound Fees	Proposed Revised Impound Fees
\$80 Dog displaying identification tag	\$150 Dog displaying identification tag
\$100 Dog NOT displaying identification tag	\$250 Dog NOT displaying identification tag

Financial Considerations:

By eliminating dog licensing, the County will experience a gross revenue shortfall of about \$280,000. When program administration costs (\$83,500) are included, expected revenue is reduced to approximately \$196,500 per year. This figure does not include the enterprise software cost for the current Bellamy platform, which reaches its end-of-life cycle in 2024. In December 2021, an Information and Technology (ITS) led opportunity analysis and subsequent business case identified Oracle-based Tempest as a competent software solution to replace the current platform. The estimate of transitioning to a new system was \$1.2 million over four years. A revised analysis without system customization (needed to accommodate the current bylaw) and using internal resources, the expected cost was reduced to about \$300,000 over four years.

	2024	2025	2026	2027
Revenue (past 4 yr. avg)	280,000	280,000	280,000	280,000
Expenditures				
Program Administration	83,500	83,500	83,500	83,500
Amended Bylaw with Tempest	175,000	42,000	42,000	42,000
Annual Profit (Deficit)	21,500	154,500	154,500	154,500

A revised ITS analysis will be needed ahead of any new software implementation and may yield additional/unforeseen costs that will further erode expected revenue. Customization of the system to accommodate the current bylaw, given the estimates originally provided by ITS, results in a sizable expenditure and negates any revenue for at least four years. The figures noted for an uncustomized system are best-case scenarios and require amendments to the bylaw to be achieved (primarily eliminating free-license incentives and simplifying the fee structure).

The benefit of eliminating dog licensing entirely is not just the avoidance of IT and system costs, but a lower cost for residents who own dogs. It also results in administrative and staff savings without affecting service levels or community safety. Furthermore, a recent trend shows municipalities are moving away from dog licensing. Spruce Grove eliminated dog licensing in 2016, while maintaining their dog bylaw and has received positive feedback from residents. Similarly, Lloydminster removed its dog licensing requirement in 2020 and replaced it with mandatory identification tags largely for the same reasons identified in this report.

Key Messages:

- Enforcement Services is essential in promoting responsible dog ownership.
- Proposed amendments only change the requirement to license dogs. All other responsible dog ownership provisions remain the same.
- Dog licensing is not an effective tool in animal reunification efforts.
- Reunification is the primary goal and will not be impacted by the proposed changes.
- The proposed amendment seeks to modernize and streamline the program and move away from low priority areas while reducing costs to residents.

Council and Committee History

September 5, 2017 Bylaw 37-2017 received three readings

Other Impacts

Communications: Communication strategy required to inform the public about the reasons for removing dog licensing, the cost savings for residents, and the ongoing focus on reunification and responsible dog ownership.

Legislative/Legal: Review of bylaw and amendments.

Utilities: Will no longer have to process payments made incorrectly to their department.

Information and Technology Services: Software review and costing.

Financial/Budget: With the removal of Part II of the bylaw, the County will experience an average gross revenue shortfall of about \$121,250 per year over the next four years using an uncustomized Oracle-based Tempest solution.

Enclosure

1 Proposed Amendment – Bylaw 37-2017 Responsible Dog Ownership – 2023 presentation