

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE**Cat Shelter Update****Report Purpose**

To provide Priorities Committee with an update on the cat shelter pilot project

Our 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

- Stray cats have been a topic of conversation in Strathcona County over the last number of years. More recently, the conversation has shifted away from the need to regulate or license cats to supporting viable options to limit and rehouse stray and abandoned cats and promote responsible pet ownership.
 - In the first three quarters of 2024, there has been only one resident complaint via County Connect concerning the nuisance of stray cats.
- Following a competitive process in July 2022, the Greater Edmonton Animal Rescue Society or GEARS was awarded a \$100,000 grant to operate a shelter in Strathcona County as a one-year pilot project.
 - The original project term was from July 2022 to July 2023. Gears opened “Sheltered Paws” to the public on October 1, 2022.
 - The shelter provided care for abandoned cats and those found in distress.
 - Sheltered Paws housed cats until they could be returned to their owner, or a local foster home from which the cat could be adopted.
 - Although the shelter was provided sufficient funding to operate until December 31, 2023, the building leased by Sheltered Paws was sold to a new owner resulting in the service closing doors to the public on August 31, 2023.
 - The organization continued to serve the community through Sheltered Paws using the remaining grant funds.
- In November 2023, Council approved \$160,000 in Budget 2024 to continue the project for another year with the expectation GEARS would find a new storefront location in Strathcona County and continue to provide services that included:
 - House stray or abandoned cats brought to the shelter
 - Promote responsible cat ownership
 - Promote cat identification
 - Support spay and neuter programs
 - Provide animal care education to cat owners
 - Collect operational data to share with the county

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Storefront Location

- After extensive searching, GEARS secured a new location under a sublease at 8921-20 Street on March 5, 2024, with a possession date of March 15, 2024.
- On March 13, 2024, the landlord withdrew consent to sublease vacating the bid.
- GEARS secured another location at 244 Sioux Road on June 5, 2024, with possession on August 1, 2024, but after reviewing the terms and condition, GEARS was not able to sign the 18-month lease noting the overall rent of \$8,600 per month (plus tax and utilities) would exhaust the grant provided and leave insufficient funding to support programming.
 - The landlord also requested that GEARS install a specialized air system prior to obtaining possession of the building at a minimum cost of \$20,000.
- Limited options were found in Strathcona County to secure a storefront location even with the support of two different realtors. Available rental space was either too expensive, limited to the retail market or landlords were not interested in the use or leasing for a one-year term without a guarantee of renewal with continued funding.
- Despite this setback, GEARS continued to serve county residents using a warehouse space in south central Edmonton acquired in November 2023 following the merger with another rescue organization that also housed found cats in transition to foster care/adoption.
 - Since January 2024 GEARS has brought into care 35 cats from Strathcona County including 29 cats sheltered at the Edmonton-based location:
 - Two cats that were spayed/neutered/returned
 - One kitten that was euthanized due to severe injury
 - Two cats that were reclaimed
 - Four cats that were transferred to partner organizations
 - In the first three quarters of 2024, 16 county residents have accessed the Edmonton-based location and received services.
- GEARS does not plan to open a storefront space in Strathcona County.
- GEARS intends to maintain their Edmonton location as a shelter and warehouse space with a view to expanding through renovations and upgraded cat housing.
- GEARS also intends to continue providing enhanced services to Strathcona County residents under the program name Sheltered Paws.

Sheltered Paws

- From August 1, 2023, to August 1, 2024, \$64,824 in grant funding (inclusive of the original grant and a portion of the new 2024 grant) has been spent on the following:
 - \$25,697 on veterinary expenses
 - \$21,391 on rent
 - \$6,869 on operations
 - \$4,211 on filters and purifiers
 - \$3,088 on storage for supplies from the previous building
 - \$1,380 on pest control
 - \$844 on supplies
 - \$732 on utilities
 - \$611 on insurance and bank charges
- As of August 26, 2024, GEARS maintains a balance of about \$145,000 from the grant provided in 2024.

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- GEARS has started a spay/neuter/return program for feral cats in Strathcona County that are found in rural areas and where the property owner is willing to provide food, shelter and care.
 - This program helps to mitigate the overall feral cat population while freeing up space at the holding facility in Edmonton. In general, feral cats are difficult to place in foster care and later adopted.
- GEARS has partnered with a local veterinarian to hold their first microchip clinic in the fall 2024 for county residents.
 - A temporary facility application to the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association is pending approval to hold this event outside of a veterinary clinic.
- GEARS has promoted Sheltered Paws on CTV news, shared several “Shelter Sunday” social media posts and held multiple craft markets at the Agora with funds going to support Sheltered Paws.
- An ongoing grant relationship between Strathcona County and GEARS will ensure ongoing intake and rehoming of cats found in distress in Strathcona County and expand public education and spay/neuter/return programs to help reduce the feral cat population in the broader community.

Recommendation

GEARS has sufficient grant funding to continue the Sheltered Paws program to benefit Strathcona County residents, even in the absence of a local shelter space, throughout the remainder of 2024 and throughout 2025.

To maintain services specific to County residents, it is recommended an ongoing grant relationship with GEARS be revisited in Budget 2026.

Council and Committee History

November 15, 2023 Council/Committee approval THAT Council Driven Initiative 2024-CDI-12, Strathcona County Cat Shelter, as set out on page 90 of the 2024 Multi-Year Recommended Budget, be added to the operating budget with funding from municipal taxes.

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

Communication Plan

Enclosure

1 Cat shelter pilot project update 2024 presentation