

RELIEF AND REHABILITATION OF AGGRESSIVE DOGS

Presentation to Mayor and Council

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- Current context
- Council direction
- Jurisdictional scan
- Stakeholder consultation
- Guiding principles
- Recommendations to Council
- Implementation



VAS plays many roles, including as:

- a) **A protector of public safety** from aggressive and dangerous dogs through investigation, enforcement and impoundment of animals;
- b) **A regulator** through the licensing of dogs, registration of domestic hens and policy updates to the Animal Control By-law;
- c) **A care provider** for impounded dogs and other small animals to ensure their welfare and to find long-term homes through adoption; and
- d) **A public educator** of responsible pet ownership and animal care.

VAS data snapshot (2021):



23,356 dog licences



822 calls about possible aggressive dog incidents



24 aggressive dog determinations



185 aggressive dog with licence



1 municipal animal shelter caring for **490** animals



19 staff members, including 10 Animal Control Officers and 1 Manager (i.e. Poundkeeper)

- On March 3, 2020, Council directed staff to:
 - ☐ Prepare by-law change to allow owner of aggressive dogs to apply for relief after working with an animal behaviourist to assess and modify the behaviour of the dog, at no cost to the City;
 - ☐ Prepare by-law change to redefine the definition of “aggressive” such that an aggressive dog is one that a qualified veterinarian and/or animal behaviourist believes is an aggressive dog, after an assessment is done by that behaviourist and a full investigation is conducted by the City’s Animal Control department;
 - ☐ Report back with recommendations, including considerations of other jurisdictions where modernized, progressive animal control by-laws have been enacted, including New Westminster, Coquitlam and the Fraser Valley Regional District; and
 - ☐ To consider people that cannot afford the services of qualified veterinarians and/or qualified animal behaviourist and report back with findings and recommendations.

	Vancouver	BC SPCA Model By-law, Surrey, New Westminster, Coquitlam
Tiers of aggressive dogs	Single “aggressive” tier	Multiple escalating tiers (aggressive, vicious and dangerous)
Process	Investigation conducted internally, assessment sought for more complex cases	Investigation conducted internally, assessment sought for more complex cases
Restrictions on aggressive dogs	Muzzling on public spaces, enclosures	Muzzling, enclosures, permanent identification, shorter leashes, show proof of neuter/spay, liability insurance (>\$500K), etc. <i>Restrictions depend on tier.</i>
Rehabilitation	No process for relief; Internal appeal not authorized under the <i>Vancouver Charter</i> .	Owners of aggressive dogs can apply for relief; No relief for dogs that caused serious injuries or deaths (i.e. vicious and dangerous dogs), but owner can appeal the decision.

- Staff consulted with a broad range of stakeholders, including the BC SPCA, the Society of BC Veterinarians, animal behaviourists, dog trainers and animal rights lawyers.



Agreement on:

- ☐ Many aggressive dogs can be rehabilitated;
- ☐ The inflexibility of the City's current bylaw on aggressive dogs;
- ☐ The current restrictions on aggressive dogs is not comprehensive enough;
- ☐ Owner accountability and responsibility is key.



Different opinions on:

- ☐ Which professions are qualified to assess and rehabilitate aggressive dog behavior;
- ☐ Dog training philosophies and methodologies;
- ☐ Whether the role of professions should be codified in by-law because of lack of regulatory oversight for some professions, access and cost.

1. Increase public safety through better prevention of future dog bites and/or attacks;
2. Safeguard the welfare of dogs designated as “aggressive” through the possibility of appeal and/or rehabilitation;
3. Prioritize the responsibility of dog owners through risk-based regulations;
4. Enable access to the appeal or rehabilitation of aggressive dogs for owners of all socio-economic backgrounds; and
5. Ensure cost-recovery of municipal animal services functions.

- **Determining aggressive dogs:**
 - ☐ Do not recommend requiring a medical diagnosis and/or behavioural assessment from a licensed veterinarian and animal behaviorist for every aggressive dog determination because of costs and impact on turnaround time on enforcement;
 - ☐ Recommend amendments to the By-law that:
 - a) The Poundkeeper may issue a Notice to an owner notifying them of the aggressive determination and the conditions on their dog licence; and
 - b) The Poundkeeper must take into consideration the available history of the dog and dog owner, any available signed witness statements, and available reports from qualified professionals.

- **Licensing approach to aggressive dogs:**
 - ☐ Expand definition of aggressive dogs to include dogs displaying aggressive behavior;
 - ☐ Require owners of aggressive dogs to acquire an Aggressive Dog Licence;
 - ☐ Authorize the ACO or Poundkeeper to place conditions on the licence of the aggressive dog that match the severity and underlying causes of an aggressive dog incident, including but not limited to:
 - a) Muzzling and shorter leashes (i.e. 1 metre) in public spaces;
 - b) Dog must have permanent microchip identification and information provided to the City;
 - c) Owner must hold liability insurance of no less than \$500,000; and/or
 - d) Retaining a dog trainer for the purposes of behaviour modification training.
 - ☐ Enable the Chief Licence Inspector to recommend to Council the suspension or revocation of a dog licence if the conditions on the licence are breached.

- **Rehabilitation of aggressive dog:**
 - ☐ Allow the owner of an aggressive dog to apply to the Poundkeeper for a determination under the By-law that the dog is no longer aggressive, 12 months after the issuance of the Notice, subject to the following conditions:
 - a) The City receives no further complaints of aggressive dog incidents;
 - b) The owner complies with all conditions imposed on the licence; AND
 - c) The owner provides documentation proving the dog has completed an animal training course that is acceptable to the City; OR
 - d) In cases where the dog is aggressive because of injuring a person or domestic animal, the owner provides documentation showing that a qualified professional has assessed the dog and concluded that it is no longer aggressive.
 - ☐ If the an aggressive dog that has been granted relief “reoffends”, no further applications for relief will be allowed.

- **Other considerations for by-law amendments:**

- ☐ Updated definitions for “muzzle,” “permanent identification” and “running at large.” that align with the BC SPCA Model By-law
- ☐ No dog owner can permit, suffer or allow their dog to display aggressive behaviour.

- **Consideration of low-income dog owners:**

- ☐ Staff did not identify any direct financial supports for low-income dog owners at this time.
- ☐ The Poundkeeper can direct dog owners to available community supports (e.g. PAWS for Hope) that offers some financial assistance for owners to access dog training.

- **Resourcing**

- ☐ No capacity currently for additional services in Vancouver Animal Services - anticipate that at least one additional Clerk is needed to implement the recommended approach.
- ☐ Current online dog licensing system is limited and new functionality maybe required to meet needs of aggressive dog licensing processes.
- ☐ Further analysis needed to determine full staffing and resourcing impacts.

- **Cost-recovery**

- ☐ Increases to dog licence and other animal fees needed to pay for new staffing and resource needs.
- ☐ Options for funding mechanisms include:
 - a) Incremental revenue from year over year increase to dog licence volume (i.e. no fee increase needed);
 - b) Broad increases to all dog licence and other animal fees;
 - c) Only recover costs from owners of aggressive dogs through a new aggressive dog licence fee; or
 - d) Combination of volume increases, broad increase to all animal fees, and a new aggressive dog licence fee.

- **Report back on fee increase:**
 - ☐ Every year, staff bring forward an administrative report in the second half of the year with recommendation on licensing fee increases (scheduled for **July 2022**).
 - ☐ Staff to report back on full implementation costs and recommended increases to dog licence and other animal fees in the licensing fee administrative report.

- **Development of SOPs and staff training:**
 - ☐ Additional work needed to develop new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and train staff in VAS to ensure consistency and objectivity in the proposed enforcement and relief processes for aggressive dogs.

- **When will by-laws come into effect:**
 - ☐ Approval of amendments to the Animal Control By-law is subject to approval of recommended increases to dog licence and other animal fees.
 - ☐ If recommended fee increases are approved, by-laws will come into effect **on January 1, 2023**.

THANK YOU!

Questions?

