

A City Official's Perspective



Accessible Spay/Neuter

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A City Official's Perspective on Accessible Spay/Neuter

"Progressive approaches to municipal bylaws and sterilization programs have the ability to create healthier animals, better citizens, and stronger communities."

This is the perspective of Mr. Lorne Chow, manager of Bylaw and Licensing at the City of Regina. Mr. Chow is a champion of the City's long-standing partnership with the Regina Humane Society (RHS), which he says benefits the City, the humane society, the animals, pet guardians, and veterinarians. The City and the RHS collaborate closely in implementing an integrated animal program under the Regina Animal Bylaw, whose mandate is "to promote the safety, health and welfare of people and the protection of people, animals and property in the City of Regina and to ensure the humane treatment of animals." One pillar of this partnership is the Low Income Spay/Neuter Program.

Program description:

The City of Regina and the RHS offer fully and partially subsidized spay/neuter services targeted to companion animals living in financially disadvantaged households. To qualify for the Low Income Spay/Neuter Program, participants must be resident of the City of Regina, at least 18 years of age, the guardian of the animal to be spayed or neutered, and they must be able to offer proof of eligibility for social assistance, of qualifying family income, or of status as a charitable animal rescue organization.

Sterilization surgery and related procedures are either fully subsidized (no cost) or partially subsidized (low-cost at \$60) under two income qualifying levels. Each animal sterilized under the program is also given permanent identification and a license.

Background:

The City and the RHS have been working together since 1988 when the RHS began providing animal control, animal impounding, and kenneling services for the City. In 1990, they implemented a subsidized spay/neuter program, but by 2008 the original spay/neuter program was no longer having the intended impact on pet overpopulation in the community. An assessment of the community showed that the most serious pet overpopulation, care, and control issues arose in neighbourhoods with limited access to education and veterinary care due to limited financial resources. All stakeholders agreed that targeting funding to pets living in financially disadvantaged households in those neighbourhoods would have the greatest impact in reducing the number of unwanted animals.

Resources provided by partner organizations:

The City provides a subsidy payment of \$147,300 per year that is funded from animal licensing and general tax revenues. The RHS provides full marketing and administration of the accessible spay/neuter programming. This includes verification of applicant qualifying income levels or status as a registered non-profit animal rescue charity as well as providing transport, assistance completing the application, education about pre- and post-surgery care, and provision of after-hours emergency veterinary care.

More broadly, each partner contributes toward the integrated animal program. The City administers the bylaw and pays the RHS its monthly budget. The RHS provides animal control and enforcement services associated with the Animal Bylaw. The RHS also delivers comprehensive public companion animal responsibility, bylaw, and school humane education programming.

Through licensing promotion and compliance the RHS is able to work with the City to increase revenue relative to an approach that relies upon enforcement alone. Additional costs can be saved because, as a registered non-profit organization, the RHS is able to access supplies and services at donated or discounted cost in support of animal care or control functions.

Program success:

Since implementing the targeted Low Income Spay/Neuter Program in 2008, the number of homeless animals taken in by the RHS has diminished every year, along with euthanasia rates. In 2008, the RHS cared for a near record-breaking 5,380 animals. Incoming animals have trended downward each year to 4,337 in 2013 – a 19% decrease from 2008.



Mr. Chow recognizes many additional benefits from the introduction of subsidized spay/neuter: the City invested in public health and safety while reducing impound and animal control spending, and more animals were adopted.

Through its partnership with the RHS, the City has been able to meet its mandate of educating citizens and enforcing bylaws consistently and respectfully to ensure a safe and healthy community. “Humane approaches to animal protection and animal control are foundational to overall public safety and good community citizenship,” says Mr. Chow. “In addition to the benefits of public safety and satisfaction, practical and progressive animal control bylaws and sterilization programs can be cost effective for the municipality. [Unsterilized animals] cost tax payers money through impound costs, investigation of complaints, and pet overpopulation.”

Recommendations:

Mr. Chow recommends open and respectful communication between partners as key for success.

Mr. Chow’s own respect for his RHS partners is evident from his comments. In addition to the contributions described above he feels the RHS provides valuable input to City Administration in the development and revision of Animal Bylaws to support the health and safety of the public and animals, and recognizes the RHS’s creativity in finding solutions.