

King adopts animal control bylaw

By Mark Pavilons

King Township has a new animal control bylaw, giving staff the tools to manage King's four-legged residents. After struggling with semantics and provisions contained in the bylaw, councillors gave it their stamp of approval recently. The animal control bylaw is the latest effort to revamp outdated bylaws. All bylaws related to animals in King were consolidated to create a single, all-encompassing document which contains clear, concise provisions. The final version was based on staff's presentation to council back in June, and included some outstanding issues. When councillors expressed some apprehension regarding policies and wording, Director of Clerks Kathryn Moyle pointed out the new bylaw is a consolidation of all previous rules, enhanced by some new ones. The bylaw has seen legal review so staff are confident it's a very sound document. Definitions have been revamped and the scope of the bylaw has been extended. She admitted there are some sensitive issues, but the bylaw is a tool for enforcement officers to respond and do their jobs. Some animals have been added to the bylaw and there is an appeal process. Moyle added King has worked closely with the City of Vaughan's animal services and their input has been valuable. Deputy clerk Nancy Cronsberry said most provisions in the new bylaw have been simply carried forward and there is leeway in the new rules. Mayor Steve Pellegrini said the new bylaw has to be clearly spelled out to citizens. Currently, only dogs are required to be licenced in King and owners are responsible for annual renewal. It was suggested there be an option for lifetime licencing but other than issuing a lifetime tag, staff believe annual licencing provides more accuracy. Savings have been realized through online renewals, which has resulted in increased dog tag compliance. The bylaw has a new enforcement approach to biting and menacing dogs, appropriate to the severity of the incidents. Enforcement officers can issue orders where reasonable grounds exist that the animal may bite. Cats continue to present challenges to Township staff. Without the benefit of cat licencing, staff is limited in their efforts. The staff report pointed out that in 2015, 88 cats were impounded and only one cat in the past two years was ever returned to the owner. Staff would like to see voluntary registration by cat owners and fees will arrive in 2018. Staff did a review of dog and cat tag policies with other municipalities in York to arrive at some benchmarks. Mostly all enforcement measures are reactionary and staff respond to public complaints. Staff is encouraged to speak to the public to mitigate problems and all complaints will be closely monitored. The Animal Control Bylaw reflects current trends and other provisions and is based on the best practices of Animal Control Bylaws of other municipalities, as reviewed by staff, along with a fulsome review of the Township's existing bylaws related to responsible pet owners in the township.