
CITY OF KELOWNA

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 6, 2008

File No.: 6130-07

To: City Manager

From: Urban Forestry Supervisor

Subject: Management of feral European rabbits

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT staff be directed to bring forward the necessary amending bylaws, as outlined in the report from the Urban Forestry Supervisor dated March 6, 2008, for reading consideration including:

- (a) a prohibition on the sale of pet rabbits unless they are neutered or spayed;
- (b) "no feeding" of feral rabbits or other wildlife in public spaces; and
- (c) a bylaw compelling property owners to control uncontained European rabbit populations or clean up breeding sites that occur on private properties.

AND THAT staff issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) as soon as possible, seeking a community partner(s) or business(es) that will handle the feral rabbit problem on public and private properties, on the City's behalf, according to the criteria outlined in this report;

AND THAT staff investigate the feasibility of starting a City animal control function in the future, and report back to Council;

AND FURTHER THAT any immediate budgetary requirements be brought forward to City Council for approval as soon as the RFP process is complete.

BACKGROUND:

On January 21, 2008, City Council approved a motion to "forward a recommendation to the Board of the Regional District of Central Okanagan, that the Regional Animal Control function be expanded beyond the existing dog control contract, to include the investigation, control and enforcement of nuisance animal complaints, including rabbits". The RDCO Board recently responded that "the City of Kelowna's request for the management of European rabbits and other wildlife be referred back to the City of Kelowna as the regional district does not have the statutory authority to provide such a service and that no other municipality or electoral area within the Central Okanagan has a similar problem". City Council subsequently asked staff to report back on additional options.



Since the January meeting, staff have also received additional phone calls indicating that the problem is more widespread than originally thought. In addition to Enterprise Way, feral rabbit populations have been reported in the Glenmore area, McKinley Landing, Bulman Road, downtown, the Mission area (including a farm off Gordon Drive), and portions of Rutland and SE Kelowna. However, populations appear to have decreased recently in many locations, likely due to winter conditions.

Two interested parties have also come forward offering assistance, and some work has apparently been initiated by these groups to raise funds, get necessary permits from the Ministry of Environment, and find relocation sites, etc.

Feral European rabbits have caused severe damage in other areas around the world. These rabbits could be particularly damaging to Kelowna's agricultural community. Therefore, staff are recommending an approach that includes regulatory solutions (bylaws), an immediate control program, as well as investigation of longer term solutions such as a City-operated animal control division.

BYLAWS:

It is recommended that the following changes to the appropriate City bylaw(s) be drafted and presented to Council for approval:

- A prohibition on the sale of pet rabbits that are not spayed or neutered: All feral European rabbits in the City originated from the dumping or escape of domestic rabbits. A wildlife consultant who examined the problem in 2007 found evidence this practice is still occurring today. A single unsprayed female rabbit and her descendents could produce up to 1,300 offspring in a year¹. A bylaw prohibiting the sale of rabbits unless spayed or neutered would help to prevent further problems in the future. Spayed and neutered rabbits also have fewer behavioural or health problems, and make much better pets¹. This bylaw would significantly increase the cost of purchasing and owning a pet rabbit, which may in turn significantly reduce the sale of rabbits. A preliminary discussion with the managers of three local pet stores who sell rabbits, however, indicated that rabbits are a small component of the local pet business . and that a reduction in sales would not have much impact on these businesses.
- No feeding bylaw: A change to City bylaws prohibiting the feeding of rabbits and all wildlife in parks and public spaces is recommended.
- Control of uncontained feral rabbit populations and/or removal of breeding sites on private properties: If rabbits are allowed to live and breed in uncontained areas on private properties, this would hamper overall control efforts and could cause significant problems for neighbouring properties. Changes to City bylaws that prohibited uncontained rabbit populations, or required the clean-up of breeding sites on private properties are recommended. Even if the City or a private party offered to help control rabbit populations on private properties, some property owners may be unwilling to participate without such a bylaw.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL PROCESS:

A variety of options exist for immediate control of the problem, however the Parks and Bylaw Divisions lack the resources to directly implement such a program. Staff are therefore recommending an immediate "Request for Proposal" (RFP) process, seeking solutions and the necessary budget. An agency or business that can conduct removal of rabbits from both public and private properties, as

¹ "Spay or Neuter my Rabbit?" by Dana Krempels, PhD. <http://www.bio.miami.edu/hare/spay.html>

well as handling the majority of calls, complaints, and public education efforts (e.g. through a website or hotline) is desired.

The recommended criteria for evaluation of these proposals, is as follows:

- Program cost (50%)
- Probability of success, based upon the total number of rabbits to be removed before December 31, 2008 (30%)
- Experience conducting similar work / References (20%)

The City may wish to award multiple contracts if a single group or bidder is unable to handle the whole program. A team of staff will score proposals according to the recommended criteria and report back to City Council as soon as possible. Award of contract(s) would be contingent on Council approval and funding availability.

INVESTIGATION OF A CITY ANIMAL CONTROL FUNCTION

Rabbits are only one of myriad complaints that the City receives every year for problem animals or wildlife, and many residents have become frustrated as they don't know where to turn. In many cities these types of issues are handled by the Animal Control division but in Kelowna this responsibility is subcontracted to the RDCO and only involves dogs. Therefore staff recommend that the Bylaw Division work together with the City Clerk's Division to examine the feasibility of starting up a City animal control division, in the future.

INTERNAL CIRCULATION TO:

Bylaw Services; City Clerk's Division

LEGAL/STATUTORY AUTHORITY:

ss. 8 & 9 of the *Community Charter*, and the accompanying Spheres of Concurrent Jurisdiction – Environment and Wildlife Regulation, allow for the regulation of animals, including wildlife, and specifically including alien invasive species which includes European rabbits.

FINANCIAL/BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS:

Budgetary considerations for 2008 will be known after completion of the RFP process.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS:

Approval of the recommendation will help to ease pressure on staff, by adding the necessary resources to deal with this issue.

CONSIDERATIONS THAT WERE NOT APPLICABLE TO THIS REPORT:

LEGAL/STATUTORY PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS:

EXISTING POLICY:

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

EXTERNAL AGENCY/PUBLIC COMMENTS:

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS:

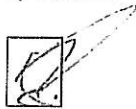
ALTERNATE RECOMMENDATION:

Submitted by:



Ian Wilson, Urban Forestry Supervisor

Approved for Inclusion:



Cc: David Graham, Director of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Services
Joe Creron, Parks Manager
Al Dixon, Bylaw Enforcement Supervisor
Stephen Fleming, Deputy City Clerk