
MEETING DATE: January 13, 2026
FROM: Nicky Kunkel, CAO Clerk-Treasurer
SUBJECT: Animal Control Bylaw

RECOMMENDATION: That Council accept the proposal for reducing stray/feral cat colonies within the community and authorize staff to take the necessary actions to implement; and Further that this proposal be reevaluated, if necessary, in April 2027.

BACKGROUND

In the early to mid 2010's the Township worked with a number of agencies to assist with the feral cats within the hamlet of Bonfield. At that time, all cats were removed from the hamlet and one resident was given a court order prohibiting them from owning or harbouring cats for a period of 10 years, that order expired in 2024. Agencies involved included the Animal Welfare Services and the Humane Society. The cats that were removed were not well. The uncontrolled inbreeding led to serious illness and weakened immune systems that spread through each generation. The main cause for concern was noted to be Feline Respiratory Viruses - (Herpesvirus and Calicivirus) which is highly contagious and requires veterinary care and treatment.

In 2019 the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act (PAWS) was enacted, it is the first fully provincial model of its kind in Canada and changed how animal welfare, investigations and enforcement of animal cruelty and neglect are addressed. The Act falls under the Solicitor General and it includes strict minimum standards for animal care and provides a legal basis for the removal of animals in distress. PAWS also sets the procedures for pounds, rescues and nonprofits requiring a structured approach to animal care. The Township has formerly had a contract with the North Bay Humane Society for pound services and animal control. The introduction of this Act and its requirements are when the services for assistance with cats through the Society was terminated as there was no capacity to manage all the cat populations within the region.

The Township does not receive many official complaints regarding feral cats on an annual basis. In 2025, there were four different complainants and several non documented complaints. There is an awareness of a colony of feral cats developing in recent years within the hamlet of Bonfield, again.

In the past two years staff have talked to several communities within Ontario that also have cat colony concerns. Many smaller communities do not have the resources to deal with the situations, so they do not. Some small communities are fortunate to have pet rescues that do accept cats, though it was reported that there are capacity issues with that as well and the private fundraising for private rescues is constant. Larger urban areas, with more resources, can implement Trap and Neuter Programs. Staff have investigated this option. It entails, trapping the cat, taking it to a vet to determine if it is healthy enough to have surgery and then when/if it is healthy authorize the spay/neuter procedure. It is expensive and the Township must have an end point "home" for the cat that provides the appropriate shelter and food for the remaining life of the animal.

With concerns for public safety and contagious diseases, the Health Unit was contacted for assistance in 2024. They received the letter and determined no action was required on their part. Staff have been in contact with Animal Welfare Services several times. They have attended the Township on at least three occasions, spoken to residents and tried to monitor the colony. To date they have not taken any enforcement action or provided concrete assistance with resolution options. It is felt the Township has exhausted external resources.

The fundamental concern is that no one owns the cats. There is no proof of ownership to hold anyone responsible. Another issue was that the Township's Animal Control Bylaw did not prohibit cats from being at large, only dogs and did not require cats to be tagged for any type of enforcement. In 2024 the Animal Control Bylaw was amended to include these as a measure to assist with the cat population and to ensure pets returned home. The Township has communicated that responsible pet ownership includes obtaining a tag for cats, this is important to distinguish between a stray nuisance cat and a pet. To date the Township has issued 2 cat tags. It is understood that there are many more cats and some residents do allow their cat to run at large off their property. However, knowing and proving, are two different things when trying to enforce the bylaw.

This has contributed to the growth of the colony within the hamlet and potentially to rural areas as well. The issue needs to be resolved. Given the stray/feral cat colony in the hamlet was cleared in 2014 and it has now returned, it can not be resolved without the community's support. Well intentioned people feeding the cats in open public places encourages the cats to congregate and breed. One female unaltered cat can birth 70-100 kittens. Then with those female kittens, the growth continues. Action is required before the colony grows too large. The size of the colony is unknown at this time. Reports are typically 10-12 cats visible at one time.

Reports have also come in that the cats are affecting businesses within the hamlet. Staff have been working and researching long term solutions. When the contract for dog enforcement and pound services expired at the end of 2024, the Humane Society informed the Township that they were refocusing their core services and not renewing contracts for the enforcement of municipal animal control bylaws. The contract with the Township was not renewed. The Society's mission is to help animals in need so it is understandable that all organizations reevaluate their services as capacity and resources become more limited. Since this time, the Township Bylaw Enforcement Officer has taken over the calls for animal enforcement. In 2025 there were 3 official complaints about animal control that were resolved. It must also be noted that there is an increased presence on social media when dogs are at large or missing and the community is tending to those amongst themselves.

With that said, the Humane Society, has been working with the Township and providing advice/best practice options to assist with the management of the colony.

The Proposal

- a) There is a stronger community engagement / education campaign regarding cats; impacts of running at large, obtaining tags, and proper adoption options for when pets need to be rehomed.
- b) The Bylaw Enforcement Officer will trap and impound cats from the colony within the hamlet. It is highly recommended that the Township blitz one colony at a time before the breeding season. The focus will be in the hamlet.
- c) The cats will be housed at the municipal pound located at the Public Works Yard. The pound has been preliminary inspected to prepare for a final inspection through OMAFRA who issued the previous pound certification. There is work that needs to be done to prepare such as painting porous surfaces that the animals will encounter, pest control arrangements, and an additional heater installed. The Bylaw mandates the cats be housed for a period of 72 hours.
- d) The Township will have a page on the website that will identify the cats that have been captured from running at large and are being held in the pound so they can be reclaimed by their owners.
- e) An arrangement with a veterinary service will be set up whereas any cat that requires immediate medical attention must have a veterinarian exam to determine their condition. Expenses for these exams and attention will be the expense of the Township. The Township will not seek to have the cats in the pound vaccinated. Should a cat be friendly and a person comes forward for adoption, the new owner will be responsible for vaccinations, spay/neuter costs and pound fees.
- f) The Humane Society will offer the Bonfield community a discounted rate for spay and neutering at their clinics for cat owners. The Township may also be able to collaborate with them for vaccination clinics in the future.

These measures will take time and consistent effort to reduce the colony sizes for stray/feral cat populations within the community. Costs for this program will include additional pet enclosures of \$1,000, updates to the pound at an estimated cost of \$3,000. There will be veterinary expenses but the fees are unpredictable as they relate to the health of each cat. The expenses may include euthanasia when recommended as an outcome of any exams. It is estimated at \$7,000. In addition, there will be staff time to capture the cats, transportation, daily cleaning and feeding, and website updating administration. Daily costs at the pound will be \$13,000 for the year. For this year it is reasonable to expect the costs to be approximately \$25,000.00.

Respectfully submitted.

Nicky Kunkel
CAO Clerk-Treasurer