

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, September 19, 2023

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: UPDATE ON COYOTE RESPONSE AND COEXISTENCE STRATEGY

FROM:

Gus Michaels, Deputy City Manager, Community Services

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

This report provides an update on the effectiveness of the [City of Vaughan Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy](#) since its implementation by Animal Services, and provides an analysis of the alignment between the City's response to urban coyotes and the provincial framework.

Report Highlights

- The Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy was implemented in 2022 in response to increased sightings and interactions between residents and coyotes.
- The goal of the Strategy is to provide a program for reporting and reducing human-coyote conflicts, while prioritizing human safety.
- The Strategy details measures to increase citizens' knowledge of coyote behaviours and methods to reduce or eliminate conflicts with coyotes.
- The City's response to urban coyotes exceeds any other similar strategy at the both the municipal and provincial level.

Recommendations

1. THAT this report be received for information.

Background

Member's Resolution

At the January 17, 2023 Committee of the Whole meeting, by way of a Member's Resolution, staff were directed to report back on the Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy no later than Q3 2023, and that the report should include the following:

1. A status update on the effectiveness of the City's Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy since its inception; and
2. The existing provincial legislation, and how the City can make improvements to its strategy within that framework.

City of Vaughan Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy

In 2020, during the pandemic, Vaughan Animal Services staff noted an increase in reports of coyote sightings and interactions, due to more residents working from home and increased use of outdoor amenities. Additionally, media reports of incidences involving coyotes in other municipalities similarly caused a heightened awareness of coyotes in our community, further contributing to increased reporting. At that time, Vaughan Animal Services was in the midst of formalizing its coyote response, resulting in a made for Vaughan, Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy, which has proven to be an effective tool in raising public awareness, mitigating negative interactions with coyotes, and documenting and responding to interactions with urban coyotes in Vaughan since its implementation in early 2022.

Collaboration with the University of Toronto

In 2021, utilizing capital funds, Animal Services initiated an ongoing partnership with the University of Toronto to complete a study of urban coyotes in Vaughan in support of the development of the Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy. The study included:

- Comparative analysis of coyotes in Thornhill to other natural areas with less human presence (namely Koffler Scientific Reserve)
- Photo identification and cataloguing of individual coyotes through camera footage and direct observation
- Gathering of ecological data on coyote population in Thornhill, including habitat preferences, trends of travel (why, where, how, when) and litter sizes
- Scat analysis to collect dietary information about individual animals, prey species identification along with other food sources, and health information
- Urban sustainability review including GIS tracking to assist in developing an online coyote sighting dashboard and to better understand activity patterns

The study analyzed calls received from the public to gain insights on sighting and reporting trends. It was found that the frequency of coyote-human sightings and interactions varies significantly depending on location, time of year and human behaviour (intentional or unintentional feeding). The review of calls also revealed inconsistency of direct reporting from residents, which decreases staff's ability to draw statistical conclusions from call data.

To inform effective enforcement and mitigation measures, the study heavily focused on broadening staff's understanding of coyote movements and activities. To gather this information, 18 motion-activated cameras were placed in both rural and urban settings from January 2019 to June 2022. In general, coyote sightings were most abundant during the night in Vaughan. Daytime sightings primarily occurred in rural parts of the City. Overall, coyote activity levels decreased from 8am to 6pm in the City of Vaughan, indicating that the coyote population in the City is predominantly human avoidant.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Members Resolution, Opportunities to Improve the City's Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy, January 17, 2023.](#)

[Report, Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy, April 12, 2022](#)

(Committee of the Whole (2), Item 7)

Analysis and Options

Successes of the Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy

To mitigate negative interactions between the public and urban coyotes, the Strategy relies on public outreach and in-field response. Both have proven to be effective tools, resulting in a decrease in negative coyote interaction since the implementation of the strategy, and a demonstrated increase in resident awareness.

Public Outreach

Through successful public outreach, residents are playing an active role in deterring coyotes in urban areas. Staff held ten outreach events regarding urban coyotes to provide residents with insights on the behaviours of coyotes, and how to take an active role in appropriately responding to the behaviours of coyotes through mitigation measures. Owing to successful public engagement, staff have observed fewer instances of attractants being left out (i.e. food waste) as residents are more aware of the instinctual, natural behaviour of coyotes to be drawn to feeding sources. There has also been a decrease in reported instances of domestic animals being injured or killed by coyotes, which is directly attributable to public outreach and enforcement efforts.

In collaboration with Corporate and Strategic Communications, staff introduced a [dedicated coyote webpage](#) that includes information and educational videos, relevant links, and targeted seasonal public service announcements.

Enforcement Response

Although mitigation measures to prevent altercations with coyotes are the cornerstone of the Strategy, staff have also undertaken key enforcement activities in support of urban wildlife coexistence, including increased proactive patrols in sighting areas that

include neighborhoods, parks and open spaces. Monetary penalties are issued in instances where by-law offences are identified that may lead to interactions with coyotes, such as the leaving of attractants and feeding wildlife.

Public Spaces

To reduce attractants in public spaces, Animal Services coordinated with Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations to replace conventional waste receptacles with wildlife-resistant receptacles in certain City parks to deter wildlife in areas frequented by the public.

Permanent signs were also posted at entrances and corridors in areas of the City known to be frequented by coyotes that alert the public to the presence of coyotes. Where and when appropriate, additional temporary signage has, and will continue to be, erected to advise of coyote mitigation strategies, such as proper waste disposal, animal waste pick-up, and keeping dogs on leash.

Provincial Response to Urban Coyotes

Existing provincial legislation

Provincial legislation governs coyotes in urban areas with respect to prohibiting coyotes being removed and translocated from urban areas and the ability of municipalities to independently manage populations. This legislation is not intended to regulate normal instances of coyotes being observed in urban areas and the responsibility for delivering appropriate, measured responses to mitigate wildlife conflict remains with the municipality.

Provincial framework/strategy

As municipalities are responsible for responding to human-coyote encounters that occur within City boundaries, the province does not have a formalized coyote response framework. Rather, the province provides support to municipalities by providing advice and expertise on actions that can be taken to resolve situations of conflict. This support includes the [Best Practices Guide: Coyote-Human Interactions](#), and other educational tools for animal control professionals and residents.

As part of the development and review of the Strategy, and in response to specific situations involving coyotes, staff have consulted with provincial and local partners, who unanimously support the City's approach to resident coyote populations in Vaughan.

Jurisdictional Scan

Coyotes are present in urban municipalities across Ontario, with differing levels of interactivity with the local human population.

The City of Vaughan was one of the first municipalities to introduce a formalized coyote strategy and our response remains one of the most robust in the province.

Municipality	Formal Strategy/By-law	More Information
City of Vaughan	Yes	Vaughan Coyote Strategy
City of Niagara Falls	Yes	Information about living with Wildlife
City of Markham	Yes	Markham's Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy
City of Toronto	No	Coyote Website
City of Brampton	No	City of Brampton Animal Services Coyotes
Town of Oakville	No	Coyotes (oakville.ca)
City of Mississauga	No	Coyotes – City of Mississauga

Financial Impact

A modest capital budget balance (for the University of Toronto study) of approximately \$13K remains and will be utilized to conduct scat analysis, which will assist staff in understanding the dietary habits of coyotes in our community, and to install additional wildlife cameras in key areas. Further investigation on the impact of specific human activities on coyote behaviours and interaction patterns will be done by observing direct coyote behaviour through further camera data.

Ongoing costs associated with Animal Services' response to urban coyotes is included in the division's annual operating budget.

Operational Impact

Animal Services continues to liaise with staff in other City departments to provide a timely and effective response to coyotes in our community, including collaboration with Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations, Environmental Services, and Facility Management.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

To maintain a coordinated and effective response to urban coyotes, Animal Services has worked with partner agencies at the local and provincial levels, including York Region, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, York Regional Police, Coyote Watch Canada, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Conclusion

The coyote strategy focuses on increasing Vaughan residents' awareness of how to mitigate and respond to the presence of coyotes in urban areas. Decreased calls relating to the feeding of wildlife indicates that the messaging of the strategy, along with targeted enforcement, has been successful. Decreased negative interactions between domestic animals and coyotes is a strong indicator that the City of Vaughan Coyote Response and Coexistence Strategy is an effective tool in mitigating coyote conflict.

Staff will continue to work with local, regional, and provincial partners to update and revise the Strategy to ensure that the most current and effective practices are employed to address disruptive coyotes in our community and to educate the public on the role everyone can play in supporting non-disruptive behaviours from the animals. A public survey is planned to gather additional information about resident interactions and experiences with urban coyotes in Vaughan.

Vaughan Animal Services will also continue to work in partnership with University of Toronto to further study the behaviours of coyotes in Vaughan. The 2023/2024 program will include scat analysis and comparative analysis of coyote diurnal (daytime) and nocturnal activity patterns in urban and rural environments.

Animal Services remains encouraged by the strong response to, and uptake of, the Strategy by the public and will continue to take every opportunity to interact with and provide support to the community toward ensuring a safe and healthy environment for both humans and animals.

For more information, please contact: Susan Kelly, Director and Chief Licensing Officer, By-law and Compliance, Licensing and Permit Services, extension 8952.

Attachments

N/A

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