

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, September 19, 2023

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: DISCONTINUATION OF THE KEEPING OF PIGEONS IN THE
CITY OF VAUGHAN

FROM:

Gus Michaels, Deputy City Manager, Community Services

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

This report recommends the cessation of the keeping of pigeons on residential properties in the City and proposes the immediate termination of the licence category.

Report Highlights

- The keeping of pigeons is regulated by Animal Control By-law 066-2020.
- The recommendations in this report align with previous Council direction to end the pilot program to keep backyard hens due to public health concerns and the current highly pathogenic (H5N1) Avian Influenza pandemic.

Recommendations

1. THAT amendments be made to Animal Control By-law 066-2020 to repeal the ability to obtain a new licence for the keeping of pigeons;
2. THAT amendments be made to the Animal Control By-law 066-2020 to provide that any person lawfully keeping pigeons be permitted to do so until the birds' death, provided they maintain a valid licence and remain in compliance; and
3. THAT Animal Services make contact with any person who is presently licensed to keep pigeons as of September 19, 2023, to provide information on the ending of the licence category, next steps, and disease mitigation.

Background

The City first introduced licensing for pigeons in 2018, however regulations pertaining to the keeping of pigeons first began in the late 1980's.

In May 2023, considering the recent highly pathogenic (H5N1) Avian Influenza pandemic, and acting upon staff recommendation, Council directed that the pilot program permitting backyard hens on residential properties be ended with immediate effect, in the interests of public health and zoonotic risk mitigation. For the same rationale that the domestic hen population cannot be safeguarded against the H5N1 avian influenza virus, staff are further recommending that the keeping of backyard pigeons no longer be permitted in residential areas as an additional measure to mitigate potential sources of transmission.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of June 20, 2023](#)

(Item 12, Report No. 25 of the Committee of the Whole)

[City of Vaughan Animal Control By-law 066-2020](#)

Analysis and Options

Present Situation

Pigeons are kept primarily by those who engage in racing or showing of the birds; those who are licensed to keep pigeons in the City must also be members of the Canadian Racing Pigeon Union and/or the Canadian Pigeon Fancier's Association, respectively.

The current regulations specify requirements for flock size, flight frequency, identification of birds, and habitat standards and location.

Presently, there are seven individuals licenced to keep pigeons in the City. The most recent new licence to keep pigeons was issued in 2021.

Two complaints regarding the keeping of pigeons have been received in the past year.

Jurisdictional Scan

The keeping of pigeons is permitted in many municipalities across Ontario; however, of the standard comparator municipalities, only the City of Brampton has a licensing requirement, whereas the others only have flock size restrictions. The Township of King does not permit pigeons to be kept, aligning with the recommendations of this report.

Municipality	Licence	Regulations
Township of King	No	Pigeons are not permitted to be kept
Brampton	Yes	Flock size, flights, habitat standards
Toronto	No	Flock size
Mississauga	No	Flock size
Markham	No	Flock size
Richmond Hill	No	Flock size
Oakville	No	Flock size

Provisions for Current Licensees

There are currently six licensed pigeon lofts in the City, in good standing. Similar to backyard hens, any person currently keeping pigeons shall be permitted to do so after the licensing category is removed, with the following conditions:

1. No new birds be added to the flock after September 19, 2023;
2. A valid licence must be maintained if birds are being kept;
3. The licensee must remain in compliance with all applicable provisions of Animal Control By-law 066-2020.

Financial Impact

The cessation of pigeon licensing will not have any immediate financial impact.

Operational Impact

Staff do not anticipate any operational impacts.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

There is a risk of avian-related viruses, such as avian influenza, which may require interventions (such as testing) from partners at regional and provincial agencies.

Conclusion

Based on Council direction to discontinue the backyard hen pilot program, staff reviewed other avian-related matters to identify and mitigate any risks to the health of local bird, mammal, and human populations. Continuing to permit the keeping of pigeons in Vaughan could result in significant zoonotic risks given the rapid global spread of Avian Influenza, and notably the increasing incidences in pigeon populations.

For this reason, staff cannot support the keeping of backyard pigeons at this time.

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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Approved by



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