



Municipality of Port Hope

Staff Report

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Report Title: DocuPet Dog Licensing Program

Report to: Corporate Services Committee

Date of meeting: March 7, 2023

Report Author:

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Department responsible:

Corporate Services

Report Number: CS-04-23

Recommendation:

That a resolution be presented to Council to authorize the execution of an agreement with the Northumberland Humane Society to implement the DocuPet dog licensing program; and

That a by-law be presented to Council to amend the Animal Control By-law as necessary to implement this change.

Highlights:

- Residents will benefit from greater convenience and online access
- No changes recommended related to costs of dog tags for residents
- Improved licensing program will provide greater compliance with Animal Control By-law and generate additional revenue
- Change will free up staff time and create internal efficiencies

Background:

In 2022, the Municipality of Port Hope entered into an agreement with the Northumberland Humane Society (NHS) for the provision of animal control and care services. At the same time, the former Joint Animal Control Municipal Service Board (Municipal Animal Services) was dissolved, and the associated shelter property sold to the NHS. Since that time, the NHS has provided animal care and control services for the Municipality of Port Hope and the same services the Township of Hamilton, and the Township of Alnwick/Haldimand. The change in provider has been well received by the community and has significantly lowered annual costs.

Since the transition, the Municipality has maintained the same dog tag processes in accordance with the provisions of the Animal Control By-law (By-law 60/2022). Dog tags have traditionally been sold at Town Hall and are available for purchase directly from the shelter. Dog tags are currently valid for the calendar year, regardless of when they

are purchased. With few exceptions, if you own a dog in the Municipality of Port Hope, you are required to have them licensed. The licensing program assists in the return of lost dogs, helps recover costs associated with animal care and control, provides for enforcement related to aggressive dogs, and assists in the compliance of rabies vaccinations required by provincial legislation.

Historically, compliance with dog licensing requirements in the Municipality of Port Hope has been low, due mainly to the inconvenience associated with licensing. The current practice of having dog tags valid for the calendar year also leads many residents to opt out of purchasing dog tags towards the end of the year given the fact that the expire at the same time regardless of the date of purchase. Finally, there is a general lack of knowledge associated with the dog licensing requirements in the Municipality of Port Hope despite past efforts to create awareness. With the recent change in the provision of animal care and control, a review of dog licensing processes is timely and a modern solution is required.

Discussion:

The Northumberland Humane Society is supportive of moving its partner municipalities to dog licensing through DocuPet Inc. and has approached the Municipality about this opportunity. DocuPet is a service provider that specializes in dog licensing and has 45 client municipalities throughout the province including Clarington, Cobourg, Whitby, and Peterborough as local examples.

DocuPet is a solution provider that handles every aspect of the dog licensing process and would provide for a modern solution that increases convenience for residents and provides for improved management of licensed animals. Moving to the DocuPet system would provide the following additional benefits to the community including but not limited to:

- Online registration and payment including simpler annual renewal
- Dedicated services related to returning lost dogs and customer support
- Annual dog licenses valid for 365 days, rather than a calendar year
- Improved external communication and awareness specific to dog licensing
- Personalized dog tags mailed directly to customers
- No additional cost to residents licensing dogs

DocuPet is an industry leader that has a reputable track record of increasing awareness of licensing requirements that in turn has been shown to greatly improve compliance. Residents would no longer be required to attend in person at Town Hall or the animal shelter to purchase new licenses or annual renewals and will be able to do so from the comfort of their own home. For those not comfortable with online options, a direct mail option will still be available for completion at either location and will also be expanded to many other locations such as veterinarian offices and pet food stores.

DocuPet has privacy policies and safeguards in place that provide for confidence as it relates to the maintenance of records and personal information submitted through regular licensing processes. This is also true for their payment systems, that have been

entrusted by hundreds of municipalities across North America with a history of ensuring safeguards are in place.

DocuPet creates an online portal for residents that will be available via the Municipal website but separate for all other purposes. The provision of animal licensing will shift the maintenance and collection of information to DocuPet and payments will be made directly to the service provided instead of the Municipality, freeing up staff from additional administrative efforts. For more information on the DocuPet service and its associated benefits, please see **Attachment 1**.

The Northumberland Humane Society and municipal staff are supportive of this opportunity and have met to discuss the transition anticipated to take effect, if supported, in April 2023. Until that time, dog license sales have been paused with current tags having their validity extended until the transition can occur.

The service agreement required will not be between the Municipality of Port Hope and DocuPet directly, but instead with the Northumberland Humane Society. It is proposed that the Municipality execute a simple agreement with the NHS for the provision of this service that covers how costs will be shared, amongst other minor requirements that are being finalized. Minor amendments to the Animal Control By-law will also be required to reflect the change in service provider and to identify NHS as the administrator of the associated information. Staff are finalizing those proposed amendments.

Any minor adjustments as it relates to customer service will be worked out by staff throughout the transition. The needs of residents will be kept top of mind and staff will work with the NHS and DocuPet to adjust practices if necessary.

Financial Considerations:

Staff are not recommending a change to the cost of a resident to license a dog. The Fees and Charges By-law sets the annual cost of licensing a dog at \$20 for a spayed/neutered animal and \$35 for one that is not spayed or neutered.

The one-time startup fee to begin the DocuPet program is \$4,999 and is to be split amongst the Municipality of Port Hope, Township of Hamilton, and Township of Alnwick/Haldimand. An ongoing monthly fee of \$272 for the provision of this service will also be split accordingly and invoiced by NHS to partner municipalities.

In terms of revenue generated through this new dog licensing program, which is anticipated to increase from current amounts due to higher compliance, the NHS proposes to retain 20% of the revenue with the remainder to be provided to the Municipality directly. Staff are supportive of this request and believe it to be a fair proposal given that significant municipal staff administrative time will be freed up with NHS taking on administration of the new service.

One of the additional benefits of the DocuPet program is that it will additionally allow residents to pay for licenses with a credit card. The small fee associated with credit card payments is proposed to be absorbed by the Municipality through the proposed revenue splitting agreement as a means to maintain the status quo relative to the current cost of licenses for residents. Given the expected increase in revenue through higher

compliance, this offset is easily absorbed and provides a greater incentive to those registering as required by the Animal Control By-law.

Communication and Public Engagement:

A major benefit associated with the recommended change will be the increased communication effort coming directly from DocuPet that will lead to higher compliance and higher rates of annual renewals. DocuPet has a reminder and awareness campaign as part of their regular practices that involves both email and regular mail messaging to clients.

Additionally, the NHS will be leading a major communications effort related to spreading the word locally about this transition that will include communications at local pet food stores and veterinarian offices. The Municipality will support this effort as needed and the municipal website will be updated accordingly.

Conclusion:

The Northumberland Humane Society strongly supports the transition to dog licensing services being provided by DocuPet. Staff agree with this approach as a modern solution that is forward thinking in nature and will benefit our residents through increased awareness and greater convenience. As with any service migration, it is anticipated that there will be adjustments along the way, and staff will ensure resident needs are kept top of mind.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Additional DocuPet Information