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Date: November 21, 2016
To: Mayor and Council
Author: Jennifer Alexander-Deputy Clerk – Administrative Services
RE: 2017 Cat Spay and Neuter Voucher Program

AIM

To provide a report to Council with an update on the Cat Spay and Neuter Voucher Program ("Voucher Program").

BACKGROUND

Since 2014, the Town has participated in the Voucher Program in an effort to control the overpopulation of feral cats. Last year, the Town allocated \$8,000 in the animal control budget towards the Voucher Program. Administration allocated funds between feral cats (\$6,000) and low income families (\$2,000). Each voucher is worth \$75.00 and is valid for 90 days.

The voucher is redeemed at participating veterinarian offices and the remaining amount owing is the responsibility of the resident. Most costs associated with the surgery are covered by the voucher. Veterinarians honoring the vouchers are required to authenticate the voucher through the identification of the applicant. The veterinarian must invoice the Town with the signed voucher attached, within 30 days of service completion.

DISCUSSION

The Voucher Program is advertised through the Town's website, digital sign, social media and the newspaper when the vouchers are available for feral cats. The overall response from residents has been positive; however, the funds allocated to low income families is consistently underutilized. In 2016, the Town allocated \$8,000 towards the Voucher Program. Feral cat voucher numbers are not finalized as the remaining vouchers issued have an expiry of December 31, 2016. It is anticipated that all the remaining vouchers will be used. This program continues to be in high demand with residents. Low income voucher use is minimal and continues to be on a downward trend with this year being the lowest rate of participation.

If Council decides to continue with the program, administration recommends modifying the allocation of funds and further reducing the amount assigned to low income families as follows: \$5,750 to feral cats and \$750 to low income families. In the past, if the low income funds have not been used, this money would not be reallocated within the program. For 2017, if the low income funds have not been used by September 1, administration recommends that the remaining funds be reallocated to the feral cat category due to the high demand from residents. Administration will continue to raise awareness for low income vouchers through advertising to residents in an effort to increase participation.

Furthermore, in discussion with some of the participating veterinarian clinic it has come to the Town's attention that vouchers are being redeemed for cats that do not meet the program requirement of being feral and instead appear to be resident pets. The clinics have assumed a vetting process has been implemented by the Town and are reluctant to decline service. Melanie Coulter, the Executive Director of the Windsor Essex County Humane Society, has been consulted about this issue and recommended ear tipping as a solution.

Ear tipping is an effective and universally accepted method to identify a spayed or neutered feral cat. The procedure is completed during the neutering surgery while under anesthesia, where one quarter of the cat's left ear (3/8 inch) is removed. The benefits of ear tipping include: identification that feral cats are being cared for within our community, reduction of stress on the cat in being recaptured; and financial control and accountability of the Voucher Program. There is no additional cost to add ear tipping to our voucher. The Windsor Essex Humane Society already has implemented this practice. For all the above reasons, and to ensure that the Voucher Program is being used as intended, administration recommends that ear tipping be implemented.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Maintain and improve health, safety and the well-being of residents.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The financial consideration is for \$6,500 be allocated in the Animal Control Budget for 2017 for the Cat Spay and Neuter Voucher program.

CONSULTATIONS

The Senior Management Team
Windsor Essex County Humane Society

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive the 2017 Cat Spay and Neuter Voucher Program for information and postpone consideration of the 2017 Program, in the amount of \$6,500 and the requirement for ear tipping for all feral cat vouchers, to upcoming budget deliberations.

Jennifer Alexander

Jennifer Alexander, M.P.A
Deputy Clerk- Administrative Services

Jennifer Astrologo

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Director of Corporate Services/Clerk

Peggy Van Mierlo-West

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