

## There may be as many as 300 illegal pit bulls in London, city official estimates

Banned dogs are eating up animal-control budget

By JOE BELANGER, SUN MEDIA

Pit bulls — banned in Ontario since 2005 — are taking a huge bite out of the city's animal-control budget.

Although they represent about four per cent of the city's licenced dogs, pit bulls chew up 25 per cent of animal-control hours.

And costs associated with handling pit bulls, including control and pound services, total about \$170,000, 10 per cent of the city's \$1.7 million animal-control budget.

"It's truly amazing what's happened since 2005," said Jay Stanford, manager of environmental services.

"Pit bulls have basically dominated animal-control services. We're averaging 10 service calls a day and another 10 enquiries."

Stanford made the disclosure today at board of control in response to a question from Controller Gina Barber about \$103,000 budgeted for pit-bull control under a new five-year contract with London Animal Care and Control.

"The reason I'm concerned is nowhere do I see what the size of the problem is," said Barber.

"We're being asked to approve a contract now and get the facts later. That's backwards. And I have difficulty seeing growth in the number of pit bulls. We're going to see a diminishing problem over time."

Stanford explained he was preparing a report on pit bulls for next month, but promised to provide additional information in support of the contract before Monday's council meeting.

In a later interview, Stanford said there are an estimated 100 unlicenced pit bulls in the city and upwards of 300 more that could be here illegally.

One ticket is being issued every two days related to pit bulls, said Stanford, also noting that many pit bull-related complaints actually involve other breeds.

"People are spotting animals that are not necessarily pit bulls," said Stanford.

"We're getting more calls, hearing more concerns because they are a target breed. And when pit bulls make the news, it brings additional awareness and concerns. So the problem is going to be with us for a number of years yet."

The board is recommending approval of the new contract, which was lauded by animal-welfare advocates for changes in the way the city handles stray pets.

The changes include:

- Specifying standard operating procedures, which the existing contract does not.
- Leaving decisions about enforcement to the city, which would get all revenue from licensing and fee renewals. The existing contract left those decisions to London Animal Care and Control and gave it half the revenue.
- Requiring residents to turn in stray cats or dogs found in people's properties rather than have them collected by the company, resulting in fewer cats in the pound.
- Focusing more resources to spay and neuter pets.

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