

Summary of Market Research

Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw Review

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Prepared for The City of Calgary by:

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Executive Summary

Context and Method

- In Fall 2019, The City of Calgary contracted Leger to conduct a city-wide phone survey and focus group research with citizens.
- The research was designed to uncover public awareness and opinions about responsible pet ownership, including perspectives on:
 - Responsible pet ownership
 - Pet licensing and microchipping
 - Satisfaction with the RPO Bylaw overall, and with specific provisions for dogs and cats
 - Suggested changes to the RPO Bylaw
- Leger completed n=800 telephone interviews and four in-person focus groups with Calgary residents in early 2020.

Pet Ownership

- Just over half of Calgarian households own a pet. Including 27% who own dogs, 15% who own cats, and 11% who own both.
- Many non-owners have owned pets in the past (56%) and/or are likely to own pets in the future (38%).

Pet Activity

- The large majority of dog owners let their dog run free in the back yard (91%) or walk their dog in the neighbourhood (95%).
- Many also take their dogs to City facilities, including City parks (74%) and off-leash dog parks (67%).
- Most cats are indoor-only (71%), while others go outside at least sometimes (29%).



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Pet Licensing

- Generally, pet licensing is considered important, more so for dogs than for cats. Dogs have more interactions outside the home and thus have higher potential to become a nuisance or threat to the public. In contrast, most cats stay indoors and do not interact with other animals, pets, or the public.
- There is opportunity for The City of Calgary to communicate the benefits of pet licensing to owners, as many (particularly cat owners) fail to see the value in licensing their pet. Some see licensing as an “unnecessary tax” and are unclear on how licensing revenues are used.
- Some of the benefits that may resonate with Calgary pet owners include locating lost pets faster (compared to tattoos or microchips alone); avoiding fines; and supporting City planning and animal services.
- The City can encourage some owners to license their pets by offering incentives and perks to do so, such as discounts on vet services or pet supplies. There is also interest in multi-year licensing, suggesting that there may be some element of hassle that could be removed from the annual renewal process.

- Some believe that not all licenses should cost the same and that not all pets need a license. On this point, The City may consider having different license requirements for different types of pets. For example, more stringent licensing for outdoor cats and large dogs while relaxing the requirement or fee to license indoor-only pets.

Responsible Pet Ownership

- When asked what “responsible pet ownership” means, citizens tend to think about animal welfare just as much as they do about bylaw matters.
- Two issues that appear to be both important to citizens and easy to address (in their view) are (1) picking up after pets, including both dogs and cats; and (2) keeping dogs on leash. More enforcement on these two fronts would be appreciated, although citizens recognize the need to consider the costs of increasing enforcement. Stiffer penalties (especially for repeat offenders) may be better received than increasing the number of bylaw officers ticketing pet owners.



Executive Summary

Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw

- There may be opportunity to raise awareness of Calgary's Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw, as there are indications that Calgarians are not aware of it. Less than one-in-ten mention the bylaw as a source of information about the rules for pet ownership; and most Calgarians have not consulted the bylaw. In addition, some of the focus group participants were surprised to learn that cats must be licensed in Calgary.
- Given that many have not consulted the RPO Bylaw, it is not surprising that many do not have an opinion about it.
- Among those who do have an opinion, most tend to be satisfied overall with the RPO Bylaw. Satisfaction increases with pet ownership.
- Calgarians also tend to be satisfied rather than dissatisfied with enforcement of the RPO Bylaw, although there is opportunity to increase satisfaction with enforcement regarding free-roaming cats.

Responsible Dog Ownership

- For the most part, public encounters with dog attacks, free-roaming dogs, and barking dogs appear to be low.
- Citizens appear to be satisfied with how The City regulates dogs, including: regulations for off-leash parks; holding times for stray dogs; and a potential \$100 fine for free-roaming dogs.
- Calgarians are less satisfied with how aggressive dogs are dealt with under the current bylaw, and would like to see more education, training, and stiffer penalties.
- Other suggested changes to the bylaws related to dogs include: regulating dog walkers; mandatory vaccinations; stricter penalties; and more clarity around how "excessive barking" is defined.

Responsible Cat Ownership

- Calgarians tend to agree with a mandatory spay / neuter protocol for cats.
- For the most part, free-roaming cats are not a problem for Calgarians. Citizens are divided on whether cats should be able to roam freely outdoors and whether a \$100 fine is fair.
- Other suggested changes to the bylaws related to cats include: additional licensing requirements for breeders; mandatory clean up after cats; and different rules for outdoor cats.



Other Bylaw Suggestions

- Citizens believe that the number of pets should be limited; with most suggesting two to three pets per household. This range is the same for dogs and cats.
- Citizens also believe there should be limits on the number of dogs being walked by professional dog walkers at any given time, particularly in off-leash areas.
- Calgarians tend to support urban beekeeping and would like to see provisions for: licensing and regular inspections; notifying and warning the community; limiting the number of hives based on the type of property; having proper housing for bees; and keeping bees a specified distance away from schools.
- Calgarians would also like to see strict guidelines for urban hen keeping, including provisions for: licensing and regular inspections; limiting the number of hens based on the type of property; and having proper housing structures.
- Citizens tend to support the addition of bylaw provisions for keeping pigeons and feeding wildlife.