

Professional Dog Walker Permit within the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Community Development Committee recommends that Council give three readings to the proposed bylaw amendment to the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw 47M2021 which will allow Administration to permit qualified professional dog walkers to walk more than six dogs off-leash at a time.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The proposed changes to the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw will allow professional dog walkers with adequate skills and knowledge to obtain a permit to walk more than six dogs safely in off-leash parks. The proposed bylaw changes respond to concerns expressed by Council when the Responsible Pet Owner Bylaw was approved on 2021 May 31 regarding the potential impact of the six dog limit in off-leash parks to the dog walker industry. The permit will be provided free of charge to reduce barriers to business while supporting safety in off-leash parks across the city.
- **What does this mean to Calgarians?** The proposed bylaw amendment balances the need to support public safety in off-leash areas with the needs of the dog walker industry.
- **Why does this matter?** The limit to the number of dogs that can be walked in an off-leash area was based on engagement results from the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw review that identified that public and internal stakeholders had concerns with larger numbers of dogs not being in control by their owner/handler in off-leash parks. Many professional dog walkers walk more than six dogs in an off-leash area at a time and the upcoming limit would cause loss of income, reduced client-base or extra work, and/or increased prices to account for lost revenue.
- The permit program will allow dog walkers who can control larger numbers of dogs off-leash to continue to do so while enabling Administration to address issues with dog walkers who are not able to. Permits will be awarded to professional dog walkers who can articulate experience working with dogs, agree that they will comply with the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw and agree they will ensure that dogs they walk off-leash are wearing City licence tags and have good recall. Community peace officers will work with dog walkers to achieve bylaw and permit compliance through education and will only deny or revoke a permit as a last resort.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A city of safe and inspiring neighbourhoods.
- Background and Previous Council Direction is included as Attachment 1.

DISCUSSION

An off-leash dog limit was proposed as part of the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw update due to feedback heard during engagement from the public and internal stakeholders. Feedback included concerns of people bringing larger numbers of dogs to off-leash areas and letting them off-leash without adequate control over the dogs. Inadequate control over off-leash dogs can lead to safety concerns such as dogs inadvertently cutting off cyclists or runners, dogs jumping on park patrons or negative interactions with other dogs. Limiting the number of off-leash dogs

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per handler improves the ability for the handler to identify and clean up defecation, respond to nuisance behaviours and maintain voice and sight command with each dog.

Administration conducted a municipal scan to see how off-leash parks and professional dog walkers are regulated across Canada included in Attachment 2. Other municipalities with professional dog walker regulations tend to have limits on the number of dogs walked, both on and off-leash. Other municipalities charge licence/permit fees and commercial general liability insurance is required, and some require a valid business licence. Most municipalities require that dogs being walked are licenced.

Administration sought to address safety concerns while balancing the business needs of professional dog walkers. The proposed bylaw amendment would allow Administration to grant free permits to professional dog walkers to walk more than six dogs off-leash at a time. This program will allow professional dog walkers with adequate skills and knowledge to continue to walk large numbers of dogs safely in off-leash parks throughout the city.

Feedback from the group of individuals forming a dog walkers association indicated that they would prefer no limit on the number of dogs that they are able to walk off-leash at one time. The proposed permit system allows for this, but Administration will be able to limit the number of dogs a permitted dog walker can walk off leash should safety concerns arise and a solution is not able to be found through education. As the safety concerns are addressed within the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw and proposed permit, it was determined that a business licence would not contribute to enhanced safety in off-leash areas. Administration opted to not require commercial general liability insurance as engagement showed us it was standard within the sector and did not provide any benefit to off-leash area safety nor the City of Calgary.

There may be instances where permit holders are not following the requirements of the permit or the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw. If Administration is not able to achieve compliance with the permit holder through education, then Administration may revoke the permit as a last resort. In cases where a permit application is denied or an existing permit is revoked, we anticipate the decision can be appealed through the Licence and Community Standards Appeal Board. Proposed changes to Bylaw 50M2011 to accommodate these appeals will be presented to Committee and Council in 2022 Q1.

As we anticipate that it will take some time to implement the program and approve permits, the proposed bylaw amendments include delaying the off-leash dog walking limit and subsequent dog walkers permit from coming into effect until 2022 June 30. This will ensure that the off-leash limit does not come into effect until professional dog walkers have time to obtain a permit.

Proposed wording for a bylaw to amend the Responsible Pet Ownership bylaw is included as Attachment 3.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)

- ☐ Public Engagement was undertaken
- ☐ Public Communication or Engagement was not required
- ☐ Public/Stakeholders were informed
- ☒ Stakeholder dialogue/relations were undertaken

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Administration conducted engagement with professional dog walkers through an online survey to learn more about dog walking businesses, the impacts that the off-leash limit will have on them, and any recommendations they had for finding a balance between business needs and safety for Calgarians.

The engagement opportunity was communicated to professional dog walkers through targeted ads on Facebook and LinkedIn as well as emails to members of the dog walking community to share with their networks. In total, online engagement saw 682 unique visitors to the web page.

Further conversations were had with a group of people forming a professional dog walking association to refine the proposed permit program discussed in this report. While the people forming a professional dog walking association do not support a permitting program, we were able to refine some permit requirements based on their input. The individuals forming a professional dog walking association advocated to eliminate the off-leash dog limit, increase enforcement and work collaboratively with them in championing campaigns that inspire change through education. A summary of the engagement is included in Attachment 4.

IMPLICATIONS

Social

The Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw is enforced using an education first approach through a lens of empathy and compassion to achieve bylaw adherence. Ticketing and permit revocation are done as a last resort.

Environmental

Dog walkers holding dog walking permits will need to ensure they have adequate bags to pick up dog waste which attracts predators and poses environmental risks including water contamination and the spread of parasites.

Economic

The proposed permit program for professional dog walkers allows qualified individuals to walk more than six dogs off-leash in off-leash parks. This permit will be provided free of charge to reduce barriers to business while supporting safety in off-leash parks across the city. The City will ensure that permits are evaluated on a priority basis before the off-leash dog walking limit comes into effect so as to not hamper business operations.

If this bylaw amendment is not approved, professional dog walkers will only be able to walk up to six dogs off-leash at one time. While some dog walking businesses indicated that this would not affect their operations, other operations indicated that the rule affects their ability to make a decent living or forces them to increase prices for their customers.

Service and Financial Implications

No anticipated financial impact

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RISK

Administration is recommending this permit program to allow dog walkers with adequate skills and knowledge to be allowed to walk large numbers of dogs off-leash. This will help mitigate the risks of walking large numbers of dogs off-leash while balancing the needs of small businesses.

If the proposed changes are not approved, professional dog walkers will only be able to walk up to six dogs off-leash at a time which will force businesses to increase their prices or decrease their profitability. Increased prices would affect the affordability of dog walking services to dog owners in Calgary. Exercising dogs encourages good health and reduces behavioural problems.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
2. Summary of Canadian Municipalities with Bylaws Regulating Professional Dog Walkers
3. Proposed Wording for a Bylaw to Amend Bylaw 47M2021 The Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw
4. Dog Walker Engagement Summary
5. Public Submissions

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Jill Floen	Law	Consult