

## North Saanich adopts spay, neuter bylaw

### New rules aim to reduce region's rising abandoned cat population

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Times Colonist

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North Saanich is the first municipality in the region to adopt a spay/neuter bylaw for domestic cats, a move animal crusaders say is necessary to reduce an abandoned cat population that has reached crisis proportions.

"We're thrilled North Saanich is the first to take the initiative and have the courage to do this," said Val Boswell, chairwoman of the spay/neuter bylaw action committee.

The group has been trying to get a spay and neuter bylaw in place for two years for both dogs and cats. But the uproar from the dog community, particularly breeders, was such that they pulled back and focused on cats, which are far more prolific in the region.

The precise number of cats is hard to track, Boswell said, but it's enough that shelters and foster homes are overburdened and running out of room.

The No. 1 killer of cats in North America is homelessness, she said.

The SPCA has had as many as 265 adult cats in its Napier Lane facility in the past, in a space meant to accommodate 100. They've recently doubled their adult cat space, knowing kitten season is just starting.

When the little balls of fluff arrive, the adult cats are even more overlooked, said Penny Stone, manager of the SPCA.

"It's hard to look at an eight-week-old kitten and then choose a three-year-old cat, even when the adult temperament might be perfect," said Stone, who is also an advocate for the bylaw, which several municipalities on the Lower Mainland have.

It's a problem that happens every year. Local shelters don't euthanize animals unless they are too aggressive or so stressed they cannot cope in any home. Few are killed, but many are abandoned in the region, meaning the numbers are always on the rise.

As well as the SPCA and CRD shelters, numerous volunteer organizations offer foster homes for cats -- one woman has 20 foster cats in her home because there are so many felines in need and not enough homes.



CREDIT: Debra Brash  
Lynsay Bailey animal welfare officer, Victoria SPCA shows off some of the cats that are up for adoption.



CREDIT: Debra Brash, Times Colonist  
Victoria SPCA's Lynsay Bailey spends time last week with some of the many cats that are up for adoption in the city.

So the spay/neuter action committee formed, with the aim of controlling the cat population. They've gone to several municipalities, most of which have said they're considering it but haven't made a decision. Only View Royal has rejected it: One councillor worried it would put an end to kittens.

"That's ridiculous," said Boswell. "It will take years before the bylaw, if adopted by other municipalities, will be 100 per cent effective."

She said there's also a "ludicrous belief that there's going to be a vigilante force going up and down the street, looking for unneutered pets."

Rather, Boswell and North Saanich see it starting slowly.

The bylaw says that all cats over the age of five months should be spayed or neutered, unless the owner is a registered breeder, or the surgery presents a surgical risk due to age or illness.

Any impounded cat at the SPCA or CRD shelter won't be released to its owners unless they get the animal spayed or neutered.

The penalty would likely be in the \$200 range, Boswell said, although warnings and opportunities to comply would be given before that.

"It's not a punitive bylaw. We just want people to take responsibility," Boswell said.

North Saanich Mayor Ted Daly said the bylaw is educational as much as anything at this point. He doesn't see bylaw officers searching out pets, but rather letting people know about it.

Local animal welfare groups support the bylaw. These groups, run by volunteers and donations, spend about \$300,000 each year trying to help abandoned or unwanted animals. This is in addition to the service provided by the SPCA and CRD shelters.

The compassion is there, Boswell said, but groups are overburdened and cats are suffering. Several provide funding toward spaying and neutering for those who can't afford it.

The SPCA also provides vouchers to pet owners who can't afford to spay or neuter a pet.

"There are no excuses for not spaying or neutering," Stone said.

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