

To: Corporate Services Committee

From: Tracy Adams, Commissioner,  
Corporate Services Department

Report Number: CORP-21-48

Date of Report: September 29, 2021

Date of Meeting: October 4, 2021

Subject: Coyotes in the City of Oshawa

File: D-2200

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## **1.0 Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to respond to the following September 13, 2021 Corporate Services Committee (“Committee”) direction:

“That staff report back to Corporate Services Committee at its October 4<sup>th</sup> meeting outlining relevant legislation, roles and responsibilities related to coyotes and wildlife in the community, actions taken to date and actions to be taken in the future.”

## **2.0 Recommendation**

That the Corporate Services Committee recommend to City Council:

1. That, as detailed in Section 5.6 of CORP-21-48, “Coyotes in the City of Oshawa”, dated September 29, 2021 that Municipal Law Enforcement be directed to:
  - a. coordinate a virtual community information session on co-existing with coyotes; and,
  - b. develop a Coyote Education and Response Strategy, in consultation with the Oshawa Animal Care Advisory Committee and report back to Corporate Services Committee.

## **3.0 Executive Summary**

Not applicable.

## **4.0 Input From Other Sources**

The following were consulted in the preparation of this report:

- Community Services: Parks Services and Animal Services
- Legal Services
- Coyote Watch Canada (C.W.C.)
- Durham Regional Police Services (D.R.P.S.)
- Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (N.D.M.N.R.F.)
- Oshawa Animal Care Advisory Committee

Staff reviewed the Coyote Response Strategies from the following municipalities:

- Brampton
- Burlington
- Collingwood
- Mississauga
- Oakville
- Ottawa
- Toronto
- Vaughan

## **5.0 Analysis**

### **5.1 Background**

The City of Oshawa has received an increase in reports of coyote sightings in the community. There have been three (3) confirmed bites by coyotes in two (2) different areas.

#### **5.1.1 About Coyotes**

Coyotes are a natural part of the urban environment across Southern Ontario and North America and are found in every urban centre. They are foragers and hunters who are able to thrive in urban areas where they find an abundance of food and shelter. The City's extensive and healthy greenspaces and creek systems commonly act as homes, food sources and travel pathways for coyotes.

Coyotes play an important role in controlling the population of rodents and other small animals which make up eighty (80) percent of their diet. They also eat the decay of other dead animals which helps to keep the environment clean and free of disease.

It is common for residents to be uncomfortable or nervous when they encounter a coyote. It's also common for coyotes to have a negative interaction with dogs that are off leash, especially throughout the spring and summer when coyotes may be raising pups. While raising pups, coyotes may view other animals as a potential threat to their territory or family, or may be considered prey.

Coyotes mate for life but are not true pack animals. They have pups in the spring and those pups usually disperse in the fall to find their own territory, while some may remain together longer.

### **5.1.2 Coyote Attractants**

There are a number of attractants that can lure coyotes into a certain area including a backyard, residential area, shed, etc. These include:

- **Food:** Coyotes eat a diet of grubs, insects, rodents and other small animals, animal cadavers, fruit and vegetables. Improperly stored garbage, bird feed, debris in yards and accumulations of yard waste are attractants for coyotes because they attract small rodents which are good prey for coyotes. Keeping pet food indoors, securing waste containers and not putting them out earlier than the scheduled pickup, removing fallen fruit from trees and protecting gardens can help limit the number of coyote interactions.
- **Water:** Both coyotes and their prey can be attracted by water. In urban areas water can be found in storm water gathering apparatuses, backyard ponds, and pet water dishes. Removing water bowls set outside for pets, watering cans, and other water containers can help reduce coyote encounters.
- **Shelter:** Coyotes often seek safe and accessible cover close to people, pets, homes, and other attractants. They may access parks, greenspaces, ravines, as well as take advantage of available spaces under sheds or decks.
- **Pets:** Coyotes may view pets as potential prey, threats to their families or competitors. Domestic and feral cats who roam without a leash may attract coyotes, and dogs are also vulnerable to coyote confrontations. Small dogs may be viewed by coyotes as prey, where larger dogs may be seen as threatening their territory. Pets should always be kept on leashes when outdoors, and never left unattended.

### **5.1.3 Applicable Agencies**

A number of agencies contribute to the role of wildlife management in the City of Oshawa. An overview of roles and responsibilities related to coyotes is provided below.

#### **Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry**

The Ministry does not provide direct wildlife control including coyote control. Instead, they provide support to landowners and municipalities dealing with problem coyotes by providing advice and information on:

- How to prevent conflicts with coyotes by making private property uninviting
- What to do if you encounter a coyote
- Actions landowners can take to protect their property
- How to find a licensed trapper
- Actions municipalities can take to address conflict situations on municipal property

### **Durham Regional Police Service (D.R.P.S.)**

While prioritizing their calls for service, D.R.P.S. may respond to reports of coyotes when an individual feels their safety is threatened. In a recent incident involving a coyote bite in Oshawa, Officers set up a perimeter in an attempt to secure the coyote but it fled into the ravine. Officers have the authority and ability to dispatch an animal if they feel it is necessary to ensure public safety, or if there is an injured/ill animal that is incapacitated or suffering, but will not do so for an animal displaying normal, non-aggressive behaviour.

### **Municipal Law Enforcement (M.L.E.)**

M.L.E. Officers respond to reports of ill or injured wildlife by capturing the animal if they are able to and taking it to Animal Services or a local veterinarian for assessment. M.L.E. also monitors sightings of coyotes in order to determine if targeted communication should be distributed within a neighbourhood and also to conduct aversion conditioning techniques as described in Section 5.3.1.

### **Animal Services**

Animal Services assists by distributing communications and education materials to the public. Animal Services staff also receive injured wildlife collected by M.L.E. and conduct an assessment to determine if referral to a rehabilitation facility or euthanasia is appropriate. They then arrange the transfer to a facility or euthanasia as required.

### **Coyote Watch Canada (C.W.C.)**

C.W.C. is an all-volunteer Not-For-Profit organization that advocates positive human-wildlife experiences with a focus on coyotes. Community outreach is offered through education, research, mediation, intervention, and conflict resolution. C.W.C. collaborates with a broad range of stakeholders to develop and implement non-lethal, sustainable human-wildlife conflict solutions. They provide educational programming, a first-response team, on-site field investigation, assessment and mitigation directives, wildlife rescue and release assistance, private, municipal-and provincial-level consultation, digital mapping programs, training, educational resources, and municipal wildlife framework models.

#### **5.1.4 Applicable Legislation and City By-laws**

##### **Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997 (“Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act”)**

The Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry manages fish and game through the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act provides the municipality the authority to use Wildlife Control Agents to attempt to resolve wildlife control problems. Municipalities can hire licensed hunters or trappers to help deal with furbearing mammals (coyotes) within their municipal boundaries. A municipality does not need a special permit or authorization from the Ministry to do this. These animal control activities can only be carried out during the open season unless the animal is damaging or about to damage property. Hired hunters or trappers must comply with the conditions of their licence, follow hunting and trapping rules

and follow any local by-laws. If the animal is live trapped and captured, release or relocation must happen within one (1) km from the trapping site.

### **Hunting and Firearms By-law 126-97 (“Hunting By-law”)**

The City of Oshawa Hunting By-law sets out regulations for hunting and the use of firearms in the City of Oshawa. With some exemptions, it is an offence for a person to discharge a firearm within Oshawa. Hunting is prohibited in most areas, as shown in Schedule “A” of the By-law, generally speaking as South of Winchester and in the areas immediately surrounding the communities of Raglan and Columbus.

Hunting is defined as to include “chasing, pursuing, following after or on the trail of, searching for, shooting, shooting at, stalking or lying in wait for, worrying, molesting, taking or destroying any animal or bird, whether or not the animal or bird be then or subsequently captured, injured or killed...”

While residents are regulated under this By-law, The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act provides municipalities the ability to carry out these activities.

### **Nuisance By-law 65-2009 (“Nuisance By-law”)**

The Nuisance By-law prohibits the feeding of wildlife either advertently or inadvertently through the leaving of food or attractants. Specifically, attracting rodents (e.g. mice, rats) or predatory wildlife (e.g. coyotes) to a premises would constitute a violation of the Nuisance By-law.

### **Lot Maintenance By-law 127-2007 (“Lot Maintenance By-law”)**

The Lot Maintenance By-law aims to ensure that properties are maintained in a way that keeps them free of long grass, weeds and debris, and discarded bird feed; things that can be common attractants to rodents and therefore coyotes.

### **Boulevard By-law 136-2006 (“Boulevard By-law”)**

The Boulevard By-law aims to ensure that boulevards (part of a highway, curb, street, sidewalk, etc.) are maintained to be free of long grass, weeds, shrubs, hedges, debris, waste, refuse and litter, and discarded bird feed. All things that can be attractants to rodents and wildlife such as coyotes.

### **Responsible Pet Owner By-law 14-2010 (“Responsible Pet Owner By-law”)**

The Responsible Pet Owner By-law ensures animals are kept and treated in a humane and responsible manner. One relevant standard is that animals are prohibited from running at large, and must be restrained by a leash not exceeding two (2) metres in length. This helps create a safe coexistence between pets and coyotes by restraining dogs and other pets. Additionally, the by-law restricts the keeping of livestock (including chickens) to farms which assists in preventing the attraction and depredation of such species by coyotes in urban settings.

## 5.2 Coyote Sightings in the City of Oshawa

Residents are encouraged to report coyote sightings to Service Oshawa by phone, email, live chat or through Service Oshawa online. Sighting reports are used to monitor activity and determine if neighbourhood-specific educational campaigns are required. They are also used to dispatch M.L.E. Officers for investigation. **Table 1** below provides statistics on coyote sightings in Oshawa over the last five years.

**Table 1 – Coyote Sightings**

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Coyote Sightings	19	139	55	128	507

It is important to note:

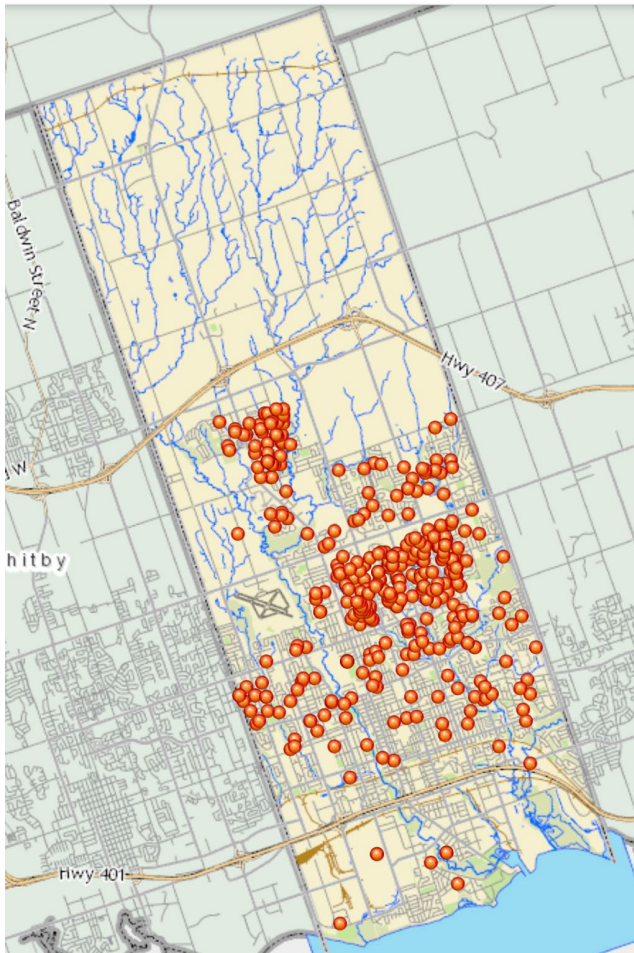
- Each sighting does not represent one (1) coyote. A single coyote is often reported multiple times.
- Reports have increased significantly since late 2020 and into 2021 when the City began encouraging residents to report sightings through Service Oshawa.

Not all coyotes were reported due to a concern with the animal. Many sighting reports are accompanied by comments that demonstrate normal coyote behaviour, for example:

- “Walking down the street”
- “In the ravine area”
- “Appeared to be healthy, no abnormal behaviour”
- “I saw one in the park last Tuesday”

Sightings have been reported all throughout the City, not specifically in areas near development, as depicted in the following map which plots 2021 sightings.

## 2021 Coyote Sightings



### 5.3 Coyote Response Options

A number of options are available to municipalities in response to negative coyote interactions in the community.

#### 5.3.1 Aversion Conditioning

Coyotes can adapt to urban environments and lose their fear of humans often due to food sources being readily available in our neighbourhoods. Aversion conditioning is a method that helps to move an animal out of an area by creating a fear of humans, deterring them from our neighbourhood spaces such as playgrounds, parks and trails.

Techniques include:

- Standing tall, making yourself big, waving your arms and shouting
- Using a noisemaker such as horn or whistle, banging pots together
- Snapping a large plastic garbage bag
- Snapping open and closing an umbrella
- Throwing items toward, but not directly at, the coyote (sticks, small rocks, tennis ball)
- Spraying a garden hose towards the coyote

## **Benefits**

- Coyote has a renewed/new fear of humans and avoids interactions
- Coyote is able to continue to co-exist in the environment

## **Risks**

- Coyotes can eventually become desensitized to this type of conditioning

### **5.3.2 Capture and Relocate**

Relocating coyotes is generally not an option. Live trapping and relocation of wildlife is regulated and requires release/relocation within one (1) km from the trapping site. Live trapping of coyotes is rarely effective/successful except for juveniles. The Ministry does not grant exceptions for a coyote to be relocated more than one (1) km from its place of capture. The intent of the restricted release distance is:

- To prevent the spread of diseases and parasites to populations in other areas;
- To ensure the animal has the best possible chance of survival by releasing it as close as possible to its home range;
- To prevent or reduce the potential for problem activity in other areas;
- To prevent exchange of genetics between different wildlife populations and ensure carrying capacity is not surpassed within a specific area.

Additionally, coyotes are highly territorial (coyote territories do not overlap), and pairs will defend territories ranging in size from a few km<sup>2</sup> (where food sources are abundant) to up to and more than 100km<sup>2</sup> (where food sources are minimal/scarce). Relocating an animal is difficult because they may end up “relocated” within their original territory, or very likely moved to another pair’s territory and be pushed out. Coyotes are highly mobile, and are known to travel great distances over short periods of time.

Removal of an animal will open the territory up for a new animal to inhabit.

In order to capture and relocate an animal, the City could engage with a pest control contractor or wild animal control company, or have City staff assigned to set and monitor traps.

## **Benefits**

- Removal of a coyote may provide a temporary fix to concerned community members

## **Risks**

- Coyotes are difficult to capture using traditional “live traps”
- Traps may inadvertently capture other wildlife or pets
- It is impossible to capture only the coyotes demonstrating problem behaviours
- Coyotes are likely to return to the place where captured



- Problem behaviour may be moved to another community
- New coyotes are likely to migrate into the empty territory
- Potential objections from animal rights groups and community members

### **5.3.3 Hunting or Culling**

Coyotes can rarely be captured in a traditional “live trap” which attempts to lure the animal in with bait and a door that closes behind. A leg hold trap/foot snare can be used, where the animal is restrained and then harvested by using a firearm. Leg hold traps and foot snares can pose a danger to other animals and pets.

In order to cull coyotes in the community, a licensed hunter or trapper would need to be contracted by the City to undertake this activity.

#### **Benefits**

- Removal of a coyote may provide a temporary fix to concerned community members

#### **Risks**

- Inherent risks associated with the discharge of firearms and the use of traps within urban environment
- Traps may inadvertently capture other wildlife or pets
- It is impossible to capture only the coyotes demonstrating problem behaviours
- New coyotes are likely to migrate into the empty territory
- Potential objections from animal rights groups and community members

### **5.4 Municipal Best Practices**

Coyote management is a concern in many Ontario municipalities. The City of Oshawa’s response is consistent with most surveyed. Some municipalities have developed formal Coyote Management Strategies (e.g. Mississauga, Oakville, Burlington and Collingwood). These strategies may consist of:

- Community education (e.g. how to make your property less attractive to coyotes, what to do if a coyote approaches you, general tips to peacefully co-exist with coyotes and pets)
- Tracking and monitoring coyote activity (e.g. recording sightings, documenting behaviour)
- Amending city by-laws to prohibit wildlife feeding
- Developing coyote response strategies (detailing specific classifications of coyote sightings and/or behaviour and identifying the City’s response to each type of behaviour)

A formal Coyote Response Strategy serves as a tool for residents and staff in clearly stating expectations and fosters an improved coexistence between people, pets, and coyotes.

### **5.5 City of Oshawa Response to Increased Coyote Sightings**

The City has taken a number of measures in 2021 in response to coyote concerns in the community including:

- Amending the Nuisance By-law to prohibit the feeding of wildlife and implementing tiered and escalating Administrative Monetary Penalties for repeat offenders
- Parks staff have erected fencing around naturalized areas in locations of concern to create a barrier between coyotes and the public
- Increased signage warning of the presence of coyotes in the area
- Removal of some community garbage containers that were frequently used for disposal of household garbage and ensuring daily collection from remaining containers
- Communication campaign through Public Notices, social media and website updates, providing information on how to prevent and respond to coyote encounters
- Direct door to door campaigns by M.L.E. Officers providing information and education to residents, schools and some businesses
- C.W.C. has conducted training on aversion conditioning techniques for preventing coyote encounters to M.L.E. Officers and members of the community
- M.L.E. has educated community members on aversion conditioning techniques
- Real time monitoring of sighting reports – M.L.E. works with Service Oshawa to dispatch coyote sightings in an effort to conduct aversion conditioning

### **5.6 Proposed Enhancements to City's Approach to Coyote Management**

- Developing a Coyote Education and Response Strategy, outlining specific situations related to coyote sightings and encounters and how the City will respond to each of them.
- M.L.E. is working with C.W.C. to conduct a virtual community information session in the fall of 2021.
- Parks Services will be reviewing content of coyote signs with the goal of increasing coyote awareness in the community.

## **6.0 Financial Implications**

The approximate cost of \$2,000 for costs associated with a virtual community information session including communications can be funded from existing operating budgets.

## 7.0 Relationship to the Oshawa Strategic Plan

The recommendation in this report responds to the Oshawa Strategic Plan Goals of: Accountable Leadership, Social Equity, and Environmental Responsibility.



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