



Report to Council From the Office of Councillor Amy Lubik

Date: February 16, 2023

Subject: LMLGA Resolution: Advocacy for Pet-Friendly Housing

Purpose

To propose a resolution regarding pet-friendly housing for 2023 LMLGA consideration.

Recommendation

THAT the following resolution regarding Advocacy for Pet-Friendly Housing LMLGA consideration be endorsed by the City of Port Moody and forwarded for consideration at the 2023 LMLGA convention as recommended in the report dated February 14, 2023 from Councillor Amy Lubik regarding LMLGA Resolution: Advocacy for Pet-Friendly Housing.

WHEREAS companion animals have been proven to enhance physical, emotional and mental wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable British Columbians such as women, young people, households with lower incomes, renters and those experiencing homelessness who identify greater reliance on their companion animals for support and greater difficulty finding affordable, pet-friendly housing;

AND WHEREAS the lack of pet-friendly housing continues to be the primary reason for the surrender of healthy, loved, adult companion animals to the BC SPCA, despite the provincial government's work to increase housing affordability and supply;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT LMLGA ask the Province of British Columbia to direct BC Housing to develop strategies and guidance that support pet-friendly housing in the non-profit sector, and

BE IT RESOLVED THAT LMLGA ask the Province of British Columbia to consider pet-friendly housing in the B.C. Housing Strategy update and to work with stakeholders (including but not limited to landlord's and tenant's associations, animal welfare organizations, public health, mental health and seniors organizations, and poverty reduction and homelessness advocates) to find cooperative solutions to increase the availability and affordability of pet-friendly housing for all British Columbians while providing appropriate protections and mechanisms of compensation for landlords.

Background

We often hear about people having trouble finding places they can afford in our community. Indeed, we know that affordability is a challenge for our community as a recent MacLean's poll rated our city high on livability and low on affordability. We also know that our family, friends, and neighbours consider their pets family and are sometimes hard pressed to find places that will take them.

A 2002 study (and things have gotten worse since then) for MOSAIC BC determined that one of the reasons why people ended up homeless or in substandard housing was because of policies that prohibit pets. Over the past eight years, the BC SPCA has taken in more than 11,000 animals because their families could not take them to a new home. This does not include the animals rehomed privately or surrendered to other organizations. For instance, the Vancouver Orphan Kitten Rescue Association is seeing a [growing number of owners having to give up their cats](#) because they cannot find a place they can afford that will allow their pets. More information can be found [here](#).

Local governments do not have the power to disallow discrimination of stratas or landlords due to pet ownership (though Port Moody has included pet-friendly rentals in our sustainability guidelines); however, we are the closest level of government to our constituents and hear the challenges they face. It is important that we try to do what we can to make sure that all our residents and their furry family members have a safe place to live within our community. That is why advocating through LMLGA to change provincial policies and Acts is vital.

Discussion

Pets are important for the [physical](#) and [mental](#) wellbeing of our residents and for the [social wellness of our communities](#). A 2013 study found that the bond between a dog and their guardian is close to the one shared between [an infant and a parent](#), and yet in the housing crisis people are forced to make heartbreaking choices between the unconditional love and support of their companions and a place to live.

The health and companionship benefits of spending time with pets are widely documented and were collated by [Better Cities for Pets](#):

- The presence of dogs increases the number and length of people's conversations with others in the community. (Jenkinson et al 2010)
- Pet owners are significantly more likely to form friendships in their neighborhood than non-pet owners. (Wood et al 2015)
- Numerous studies have suggested dog walking is a great way to increase physical activity and may help reduce rates of obesity. (Timperio et al 2008)
- Pet owners feel less afraid of being a victim of crime when walking with a dog or sharing a residence with a dog. (Serpell et al 1991)
- Pet owners tend to visit doctors less often and spend less money on medication. (Heady et al 2007)
- Having a pet reduces blood pressure and lowers the risk of heart disease and high cholesterol. (Friedman et al 2010)

- 94% of heart patients with pets survive serious heart attacks, compared to only 72% without pets. (Friedman et al 2010)
- Kids who grow up with pets tend to have greater self-esteem, less loneliness and enhanced social skills. (Purewal et al 2017)
- For those who have lost a spouse, pet ownership and a strong attachment to a pet are associated with significantly less depression. (Garritty et al 1989)

Although close to two-thirds of British Columbians are pet owners, pet-friendly housing is considerably limited across the province. Landlords and stratas can choose whether they will permit pets. They can also restrict the sizes, kinds, or number of pets. Some pet guardians will agree to pay hundreds more a month to have a home with their pets. However, not everyone can afford increased rent to keep their family members. As a result, some vulnerable populations, particularly where socioeconomic status intersects with other identities such as age, gender, and mental health status, are disproportionately impacted by pet bans and restrictions.

While it is true that certain pets might, in uncommon and singular cases, pose safety risks to other building residents that should be addressed, general worries of pets becoming a serious risk to landlords/ stratas are unfounded. For instance, data indicates there is no difference between tenants with and without pets in the amount of damage that these groups, on average, do to rental property.

What's more, allowing pets can be advantageous. Pets help build community, providing a sense of safety and encouraging residents to connect with one another on a regular basis. Pet guardians are the eyes and ears of the neighbourhood during late-night and early-morning dog walks. A dog often stays behind to protect the home when his or her guardian isn't there.

Year after year, a lack of affordable, pet-friendly housing remains the primary reason that animals are surrendered to the BC SPCA. In fact, they account for one out of every four animals surrendered to the organization's 36 shelters across the province. This represents more than 11,000 pets over the past eight years. Roughly two-thirds of British Columbians agree that the provincial government should immediately create policies that improve the availability and affordability of pet-friendly housing, according to a representative poll conducted by the BC SPCA last year.

Change must be made to allow families to stay together with their pets. This resolution does not ask for a top-down solution, but instead requests a multi-stakeholder approach to find cooperative solutions to increase the availability and affordability of pet-friendly housing for all British Columbians while providing appropriate protections and mechanisms of compensation for landlords.

Such changes in legislation would benefit our residents in a market where it is difficult for everyone to find homes.

Other Option(s)

THAT the report dated February 16, 2023 from Councillor Amy Lubik titled LMGLA Resolution: Advocacy for Pet-Friendly Housing be received for information.

Financial Implications

None.

Communications and Civic Engagement Initiatives

None.

Council Strategic Plan Objectives

In submitting a resolution to LMLGA, Council's strategic plan objectives are met by demonstrating dedication to:

- The health and wellness needs of residents;
- Access to housing;
- Social inclusion; and
- Courage to lead and embrace new ideas.