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**Date** April 16, 2024 **Report No.** 2024-26

**To** Chair and Members  
Committee of the Whole –Planning and Administration

**From** Michael Bradley  
Commissioner – Community Development

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## 1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item ☐  
Item For Consideration ☒

## 2.0 Topic Domestic Animal Licensing Program

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## 3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Council RECEIVE Report 2024-260 pertaining to the Domestic Animal Licensing Program;
- B. That City of Brantford enter into an agreement with DocuPet for the provision of animal licensing services for a five year term commencing July 1, 2024;
- C. THAT Council approve the voluntary licensing of cats to assist in the safe and expeditious return of pets to their owners.

## 4.0 Executive Summary

In June 2023 Animal Control transitioned from the Clerks Department to the Bylaw & Security Department. Part of this transition included dog licensing in accordance with the provisions of the Animal By-law (Chapter 206).

Dog licenses have traditionally been sold at City Hall and are available for purchase online on the City's website. Dog licenses are currently valid for the calendar year, regardless of when the license is purchased. With few

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exceptions, anyone who owns a dog in the City of Brantford is required to have the dog licensed. The DocuPet licensing program being proposed assists in the return of lost dogs, helps recover costs associated with animal care and control, provides for enforcement related to aggressive dogs, and assists in the compliance of rabies vaccinations required by provincial legislation.

## **5.0 Purpose and Overview**

This report provides information on DocuPet, an improved customer service option for pet owners, to increase the number of dog licenses and voluntary cat license registration, that impacts the speedy return of dogs and cats to their lawful owners. In addition, it reduces the administrative work associated with notification and renewals based on the one year expiration of the dog license on the date of purchase, rather than the end of the calendar year.

A key benefit associated with the recommended change will be the ongoing communications administered directly by DocuPet, leading to increased compliance and higher rates of annual renewals. DocuPet employs a reminder and awareness campaign as part of their regular practices that involves both email and regular mail messaging to clients. Reminders will include communications at local pet food stores and veterinarian offices. The Municipality will support this effort as needed and the municipal website will be updated accordingly.

## **6.0 Background**

Historically, compliance with dog licensing requirements in the City of Brantford has been low, due mainly to the inconvenience associated with the licensing process. The current practice of having dog licenses valid for the calendar year leads many residents to opt out of purchasing dog licenses towards the end of the year given that they expire on December 31<sup>st</sup> regardless of the date of purchase. There is a general lack of knowledge associated with dog licensing requirements in the City of Brantford despite significant efforts to educate and create awareness. With the recent change in the provision of animal care and control, a review of dog licensing processes is timely and a more modern solution is required.

City of Brantford By-law Chapter 206 regulates the keeping of dogs and requires that a license is obtained by January 1<sup>st</sup> of each calendar year. Currently, pet owners can manually fill out a form and submit the license fee either in person at City Hall or by mail to license their pet and receive their tag. Staff enter license data which is then shared with our Animal Control provider. This process is

labour intensive and costly, involving manual data entry, tag ordering and distribution, mail-out co-ordination, and resident interaction. Changing to a rotating expiry date of one year from the date of purchase of the animal license, will require an update to the fees and charges bylaw.

Staff have observed a significant decline in dog license sales over the last few years which can partly be attributed to the lack of convenient methods available to cost effectively license their pets. Table 1 lists revenue and number of licenses sold from 2017 to 2022.

**Table 1 – Revenue and number of licenses sold 2017-2022**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Revenue</u></b>	<b><u>Licenses Sold</u></b>
<b>2017</b>	\$157,404.46	5,637
<b>2018</b>	\$150,275.33	4,974
<b>2019</b>	\$138,044.99	4,670
<b>2020</b>	\$115,744.76	3,886
<b>2021</b>	\$109,786.48	3,658
<b>2022</b>	\$101,503.03	3,811

While exploring alternative approaches to enhance service for pet owners and streamline operations, the DocuPet solution was identified. DocuPet offers a model that will further modernize and streamline the City's pet licensing program.

## **7.0 Corporate Policy Context**

2. Focus on productive and collaborative partnerships.

## **8.0 Input From Other Sources**

Considerable information was received from the City of Guelph who engaged with DocuPet approximately seven years ago, and continue to use them for all their pet licensing needs.

## **9.0 Analysis**

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DocuPet is a service provider that specializes in dog licensing and has 45 client municipalities throughout the province including Guelph and Peterborough. DocuPet is a solution provider that manages every aspect of the dog licensing process and would provide for a more modern solution that significantly increases convenience for residents and provides improved management of licensed animals. Adopting the DocuPet system would provide the following additional benefits to the community including but not limited to:

- Online registration and payment including simpler annual renewal process;
- Dedicated services related to returning lost pets and customer support;
- Annual dog licenses valid for 365 days, rather than a calendar year;
- Improved external communication and awareness specific to dog licensing;
- Personalized dog licenses mailed directly to customers; and
- No additional cost to residents required to license their dog(s)

DocuPet is an industry leader that has a reputable track record of increasing awareness of licensing requirements that has been shown to greatly improve compliance among pet owners.

By utilizing DocuPet, residents would no longer be required to attend in person at City Hall or the animal shelter to purchase new licenses or annual renewals and will be able to do so from the comfort of their own home. For those not comfortable with online options, a direct mail option will still be available for use and will also be expanded to many other locations such as veterinarian offices and pet food stores.

## **9.1 DocuPet Online Portal**

DocuPet creates an online portal for residents that will be available via the City's website (Brantford.ca) but separate for all other purposes. The provision of animal licensing will shift the maintenance and collection of information to DocuPet and payments will be made directly to the service provider instead of the City, freeing up customer service and licensing staff from additional and costly administrative efforts.

A comprehensive and customized website is provided, branded as the City of Brantford and housed on the City's website that allows for:

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- online pet licensing and registration;
  - enhanced pet and pet owner data collection;
  - the provision of a 'Lost Pet Alert' service and "Lost Pet" reports, which relevant City Staff would have access to;
  - the provision of a "Found Pet Alert" service assisting found pets to be reunited with their owners, sometimes before the pet is reported as missing
  - the presentation of local deals for registered pet owners;
  - pet owner education;
  - centralized customer service support;
  - enhanced functionality and reporting for the municipality; and
  - other features to promote pet licensing.

When a pet owner registers their pet online using this service, DocuPet sends the pet owners a mailed package including their smart pet tag, rewards card, and an information package. Each pet tag has a unique identifier that will allow enforcement officers to look up pet information from any location. It also creates an online profile for the pet which the owner has the option to make public should they report their pet lost.

Administrative staff, enforcement officers (including the Animal Control Officers) would also have access through an administrative portal that will permit them to directly license pets and process payments and renewals. The option for pet owners to automatically renew licenses will also be available.

## **9.2 DocuPet Privacy and MFIPPA**

DocuPet has privacy policies and safeguards in place that provide for confidentiality as it relates to the maintenance of records and personal information submitted through regular licensing processes. This is also true for DocuPet payment systems that have been entrusted by hundreds of municipalities across North America with a history of ensuring that appropriate safeguards to protect privacy are in place.

DocuPet is fully compliant with all relevant data protection and privacy legislation, including the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. DocuPet will take on the responsibility of managing and

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administering licencing data on a day-to-day basis, however, the data remains the property of the City. Once implemented, the DocuPet team maintains the technology, handles customer service inquiries, manages awareness and compliance programs, schedules and sends reminder emails/letters, orders and mails out all licenses, and prepares monthly performance and remittance reports.

### **9.3 Fees**

The cost to purchase a dog license is \$45 for an altered dog, and \$75 for an unaltered dog. Discounts are currently provided to those that purchase a dog license prior to the new year. With the new annual fee, this discount will no longer apply. However, the reward program provided by DocuPet for pet owners will be greater than the early renewal fee discount. Accordingly, residents will see an overall savings over prior years when they license their dog using DocuPet.

DocuPet owners over the age of 65 will receive a reduced dog licensing rate (\$25 for altered and \$30 for unaltered) which, when combined with DocuPet's rewards program, would cost less than current fees for altered dogs.

### **9.4 Cat Licensing**

It is also recommended that voluntary licensing of cats within Brantford be considered. The cost to license a cat is suggested to be \$10.00 to cover any expenses and to assist with the animal control program. The proposed DocuPet software allows the creation of a portal that cat owners can conveniently and cost effectively register their cat in a similar way that dogs are licensed.

Among animal shelters, the average number of days that cats are left unclaimed (49 days) exceeds that of dogs (30 days), that results in a large cost to the municipality. Although licensing cats has never been available in the City of Brantford, the ability to have a lost cat returned if found is possible if cats are licensed. Currently in Guelph, the licensing of cats outnumbers the licensing of dogs.

## **10.0 Financial Implications**

DocuPet's unique business model sees that municipalities are not charged set-up or monthly fees for licensing services. The City retains 100% of the revenues

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up to the baseline except for credit card fees and mailing costs. DocuPet only earns income by offering optional, personalized animal licenses in different designs and colours

Although the cost of licensing a dog will decrease, it is anticipated that the number of dogs licensed will increase dramatically once the City engages DocuPet, based on the experiences of other municipalities who have used this service. Accordingly, the engagement of DocuPet to provide the City's pet licensing program is anticipated to be cost neutral with the potential for increased revenues.

The staff time recuperated on reminder notices, administration of the licensing, in addition to the fast reuniting of pets to their owners will lessen the amount of time staff spend on picking up animals at large.

## **11.0 Climate and Environmental Implications**

There is no climate or environmental implications.

## **12.0 Conclusion**

The Bylaw & Security Department are confident that this new model will offer improved customer satisfaction and the necessary incentives to increase licensing sales and compliance. It would also improve data collection and access, permitting better tracking of licensing information, and provide efficiencies with regards to staff time allocated to this service and dog complaints (dog attacks, dogs at large, barking, etc).

The DocuPet solution will allow the City to fully outsource pet licensing while increasing ease of use and convenience for pet owners. It provides the pet community with enhanced services while offering rewards to offset license cost. It also benefits the City by improving enforcement capabilities and awareness, increasing efficiency, encouraging 'shop local' initiatives, educating the community, and increased pet license compliance. It is anticipated that over time, the service could be expanded by offering self-service kiosks for this service as well as other e-commerce opportunities. Staff recommend Council approve the contracting of dog and cat licensing through Docupet for a 5 year contract.



Michael Bradley  
Commissioner of Community Development

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Attachments (if applicable)

N/A

Copy to:

N/A

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required [ X ] yes [ ] no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk [ X ] yes [ ] no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? [ ] yes [X ] no