



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: General Purposes Committee

Date: March 28, 2019

From: Todd Gross
Director, Parks Services

File: 11-7200-01/2019-Vol
01

Re: Rabbits in Richmond

Staff Recommendation

That the staff report titled "Rabbits in Richmond," dated March 28, 2019, from the Director, Parks Services, be received for information.

Todd Gross
Director, Parks Services
(604-247-4942)

Att. 3

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Sustainability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Community Bylaws	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT / AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

At the General Purposes Committee meeting held on February 19, 2019, staff received the following referral:

That correspondence dated February 18, 2019 from Rabbitats Rescue Society be referred to staff to provide general remarks and information regarding what other jurisdictions are doing.

The purpose of this report is to respond to this referral, to provide an overview of the legislative framework under which rabbits are governed, and to provide information on how other jurisdictions have addressed rabbit management challenges.

Analysis

Background

Rabbits are a common sight in Richmond. These free living rabbits are considered “feral” as they are domesticated animals that have been abandoned or escaped outdoors (or are the offspring of such animals).

The rabbits found in Richmond and throughout the region are European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), a species that is originally from southwestern Europe (i.e., Spain, Portugal, and France). The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRO-RD) considers European rabbits as an invasive species as they are not native to British Columbia and can have a significant impact to local ecosystems and biodiversity due to their high levels of reproduction. European rabbits can begin breeding at four months old and have a gestation period of 28-30 days. They can produce five or more litters in a year, with up to five young per litter.

Impacts

Richmond’s feral rabbits tend to favour residential neighbourhoods with well-established gardens, as well as parks and landscaped business areas where they have access to food and can find shelter from predators. When not foraging, these rabbits spend most of their time in networks of burrows, called warrens.

Rabbit “hot spots” with the largest visible concentrations of rabbits include the Minoru area, Dover Park area, Capstan area, Ironwood area, Cambie/Jacombs area, and the Richmond Auto Mall.

Many community members view the feral rabbits positively as wildlife that form part of Richmond’s unique landscape. For others, they are seen as a nuisance due to the following impacts:

- **Damage to landscapes.** Rabbits cause damage to plants, grass, trees, and soil by burrowing, eating, and defecating in gardens and parks.
- **Damage to crops.** Rabbits can create a financial burden to farmers by eating crops.
- **Increased rodent activity.** Some visitors to Richmond parks, particularly Minoru Park and Dover Park, are bringing food for the rabbits. The food is not always eaten immediately by the rabbits and the leftovers are a potential food source for rodents.
- **Clashes with vehicles.** There are a number of rabbits struck by cars each year. These are picked up and handled by the Regional Animal Protection Society (RAPS) as part of their agreement with the City for operation of the Richmond Animal Shelter.

The actual number of rabbits in Richmond is unknown. Rabbits spend much of their time in warrens when not foraging making them difficult to count. The full impact of the Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) in 2018 is also not known, nor is the impact of this past cold winter. It is suspected that these events have naturally curbed the population to some degree.

Rabbit-related concerns from the public are received by the Parks Department, Richmond Nature Park, and the Richmond Animal Shelter. The volume is infrequent to moderate, relative to other communities where rabbits have posed a similar challenge. Staff are logging these concerns to identify trends and to monitor the situation.

Legislative Framework

In British Columbia, all species of the family *Leporidae* (hares and rabbits) are considered “wildlife” under Schedule A of the *Wildlife Act*. Under this designation, human interaction with these animals is regulated under provincial legislation.

More specifically, the European rabbit is recognized under the *Wildlife Act Designation and Exemption Regulation* as a Schedule C animal. Schedule C animals can be captured or killed anytime in British Columbia without a license or permit as they are seen to be a nuisance, invasive, or otherwise problematic species.

Under this regulation, a captured feral European rabbit cannot be transferred to another party (e.g., via adoption or sanctuary placement) without a permit. That permit is required for the person receiving or wanting to adopt the animal.

The *Wildlife Act Designation and Exemption Regulation* provides certain exemptions that allow a person (this “person” could be a natural person, a corporation, a society, or a local government) to trap, transport, and possess feral European rabbits without the need for a permit. For instance, property owners do not need a permit to live trap and relocate Schedule C animals found on their property if the wildlife is captured and transported a distance no greater than 10 kilometers from where the animal was trapped. These animals must be released on Crown land or on the person’s private property within 24 hours from when they were captured. FLNRO-RD is currently reviewing the Schedule C exemptions as they pertain to European rabbits as the relocation or release of these animals has the potential to spread the problem to other areas.

City of Richmond Actions to Date

While local governments are limited in their ability to manage feral rabbit populations under the provincial legislation, the City has taken the following actions to address public concerns:

- Banning the sale of rabbits in pet stores in 2010;
- Prohibiting the feeding of animals (including rabbits) in any public park or school ground through the *Public Parks and School Grounds Regulation* (Bylaw No. 8771);
- Prohibiting the depositing or release of animals (including rabbits) in any public park or school ground through the *Public Parks and School Grounds Regulation* (Bylaw No. 8771);
- Encouraging the surrender of pet rabbits to the Regional Animal Protection Society (RAPS) for re-adoption at the Richmond Animal Shelter;
- Providing information and resources for the public on the City's website at www.richmond.ca/urbanwildlife; and
- Providing Rabbitats Rescue Society ("Rabbitats") with a \$1,000 City Grant in 2019.

This approach has been consistent with the City's Urban Wildlife Management Framework, which has a focus on monitoring and research, public education, and scaled intervention.

Jurisdictional Scan

Attachment 1 presents a summary of actions taken by other municipalities facing similar rabbit challenges. This jurisdictional scan reveals that there are five main tactics in a scaled intervention approach to managing rabbits. These tactics are identified below:

- **Monitor.** This tactic involves logging and mapping complaints to determine "hot spots" within the community.
- **Enact bylaws.** This tactic involves passing municipal bylaws prohibiting the sale of rabbits, the feeding of feral rabbits in the wild, and the depositing or abandonment of rabbits.
- **Public awareness.** This tactic involves educating community members about the bylaws in place so as not to exacerbate the problem through feeding rabbits or abandoning them in public parks.
- **Trap and relocate to a sanctuary.** This tactic involves trapping rabbits and relocating them to a rabbit sanctuary operated by a rescue organization. This would require a permit if the sanctuary is greater than 10 kilometres from the point of capture, or if there is a transfer of ownership involved.
- **Cull.** This tactic is generally a last resort and involves hiring a professional wildlife management consultant to kill the rabbits. A culling program is best administered in the winter, when the populations are lower and the food is scarce. The culled rabbits can be sent to wildlife rehabilitation centres to feed rescued animals.

The more drastic control measures of relocation or culling were undertaken in communities where there were major impacts to infrastructure or risks to public safety. Due to their prolific rates of reproduction, there is a significant risk of a rebound or return of rabbits once the intervention is stopped. This suggests that a sustained and integrated approach is required to ensure that the problem is effectively managed for the long term.

Rabbit Control Proposal from Rabbitats Rescue Society

Rabbitats is a not-for-profit society that seeks to work with communities challenged by large populations of free living rabbits. It operates on a volunteer model and relies on funding from grants and service agreements with property owners and municipalities. Rabbitats envisions all free living rabbits to be housed in enclosed sanctuaries, which they term “rabbitats.” These sanctuaries can be indoors, outdoors, or a combination of the two. They are designed to hold small to large numbers of rabbit colonies to keep them away from predators such as coyotes or birds of prey, and to prevent them from causing damage to property and local ecosystems.

On February 18, 2019, the City received correspondence from Rabbitats titled “City of Richmond Feral Rabbit Action Plan: Introduction” (Attachment 2). Rabbitats is requesting City funding for rabbit control services. Staff met with Sorelle Saidman, the founder and President of Rabbitats, on March 7, 2019, and on March 25, 2019, to discuss the matter further and obtain more information on the proposed initiatives.

Staff subsequently received correspondence from Rabbitats with a revised proposal titled “City of Richmond (Revised) Rabbit Action Plan” (Attachment 3). The two proposed projects as outlined in the revised document are summarized below.

Project One – Feral Rabbit Control Services (\$45,000 + \$100 per rabbit)

Rabbitats is seeking City funding in the amount of \$45,000 to contribute to sanctuary construction and operating costs. Rabbitats would also approach residential and business property owners with rabbits on their properties for additional funding and resources.

Once the society is prepared for the intake of rabbits, they would initiate a pilot project to clear a geographical area of rabbits. Rabbitats is requesting additional City funding of \$100 per rabbit for sterilization and vaccination. Rabbitats would target the trapping of 200 to 400 rabbits in the winter of 2019/2020. The total one-year project cost ranges from \$65,000 (200 rabbits) to \$85,000 (400 rabbits). If the pilot project is successful, Rabbitats is seeking a five-year contract to trap, neuter, and contain rabbits, with an option for a five-year renewal.

The trapping activities would be performed by Rabbitats volunteers and the spaying/neutering would be performed by veterinarians. The rabbits would be housed in enclosed sanctuaries on privately owned lands (such as farms) operated by Rabbitats volunteers.

Project Two – Housing for Unwanted or Abandoned Pet Rabbits (City-Owned Facility)

Rabbitats is also requesting City resources to house unwanted pet rabbits that cannot be accommodated for surrender at the Richmond Animal Shelter. The Richmond Animal Shelter,

which is operated by RAPS through a service agreement with the City, has a capacity to house eight domestic rabbits, which is higher than other municipal shelters in Metro Vancouver. However, the shelter is often at full rabbit capacity as the demand for rabbits as companion animals is low relative to their supply. In this circumstance, rabbit owners are asked to hold on to their animal until space becomes available. These rabbits are at risk of being abandoned in a park, which only compounds the rabbit challenges in Richmond if the animals are unsterilized.

Rabbitats is requesting warehouse or temporary modular space from the City to establish a sanctuary to house this “overflow” of surrendered or abandoned pet rabbits. They are requesting this space be provided free of charge in exchange for their organization’s volunteer efforts. They are also requesting City funding for the sterilization and vaccination of each rabbit taken in at a rate yet to be determined (projected to be approximately \$100 per rabbit).

Staff Comments

As they are considered wildlife, feral rabbit control is currently not part of the City’s animal control mandate. Rabbits are regulated under the Province of British Columbia’s *Wildlife Act*, which considers European rabbits as an invasive animal species due to their impacts to ecosystems and biodiversity. The intent of the legislation is to prevent the spread of rabbits to areas where there is no problem. As such, culling of European rabbits is permissible under this legislation. Trapping and transfer of feral rabbits to another party, however, requires a permit.

The Province is supportive of measures that effectively remove European rabbits from the environment. The Province is not supportive of any measures that seek to relocate or re-release them back into the environment where the problems can spread. Rabbitats would only require a provincial permit if the feral rabbits were to be adopted out or placed in sanctuaries not operated by their organization, which represents a transfer of ownership. In the future, there is potential for changes to this section of the regulation as part of the Province’s current review.

The BC Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA) is supportive of non-lethal and humane approaches to the management of feral rabbits. However, there are concerns about the well-being and quality of life for rabbits housed in large colonies. Close confinement in small enclosures has the potential to increase stress on the animals and increase the spread of sickness and disease.

With respect to Rabbitats’ proposal for feral rabbit trapping, sterilization, and relocation, there is currently no existing funding source to fund the rabbit control pilot project of \$65,000 to \$85,000. Should Council wish to implement this type of program, a formal tender process would be required to award the animal control contract. With respect to Rabbitats’ proposal for space to house unwanted pet rabbits, there is currently no City-owned facility available that is suitable for such a purpose.

A contributing factor to the problem is public awareness of existing municipal bylaws against feeding rabbits and abandoning unwanted pet rabbits into parks and public spaces. Staff will work with Rabbitats and RAPS to explore opportunities for a coordinated communication and public awareness program on these municipal bylaws, which has been an approach taken in other municipalities.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Rabbits are considered wildlife under the provincial *Wildlife Act*, which places constraints on actions taken by local governments to manage their populations. The European rabbit is considered a non-native, invasive species due to its ability to impact local ecosystems and biodiversity. Within the parameters of the provincial legislation, the City has taken actions to curb the overpopulation and spread of rabbits through municipal bylaws prohibiting the sale of rabbits and prohibiting the feeding and abandoning of feral rabbits in parks and public spaces. The current number of feral rabbits is unknown as the impacts of the RHD virus and this past winter is yet to be determined. The City will continue to monitor the situation and explore opportunities to work with local animal organizations to raise awareness on municipal bylaws.



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- Att. 1: Rabbit Management - Jurisdictional Scan
2: Correspondence from Rabbits Rescue Society dated February 18, 2019
3: Rabbitats “(Revised) Rabbit Control Action Plan” dated March 29, 2019

Rabbit Management – Jurisdictional Scan

Kelowna, BC

In 2008, Kelowna hired a wildlife management contractor to cull Kelowna's rabbit population, which was causing significant damage to parks and landscapes. The public outcry against this intervention was escalated when the contractor was seen stepping on a rabbit's head after shooting it with an air pistol. The incident was reported to the RCMP, which investigated the incident to determine if there was evidence of animal cruelty. The City of Kelowna stopped the cull and redirected their strategy towards trapping and rehoming approximately 800 rabbits in sanctuaries in the Okanagan.

Victoria (University of Victoria), BC

Approximately 2,000 rabbits were estimated to inhabit the University of Victoria's ("UVic") campus at its peak in 2008. The rabbit problem originated with unwanted pet rabbits being abandoned on the university campus, where they quickly bred and expanded. The tipping point for UVic was when the amount of damage to landscaping, trees, and sports fields became costly and unmanageable. The majority of the rabbits were sent to a sanctuary in Coombs, others were sent to sanctuaries in Texas and Washington. Some of the rabbits were culled. The issue was a hotly debated topic on campus and in the media. UVic has drawn a hard line against the dumping of rabbits and, as a deterrent, has taken a stance that any new rabbits seen on campus will be put down humanely. Victoria also established a bylaw banning the sale of rabbits in stores.

Delta, BC

The City of Delta faced challenges in its municipal precinct with rabbits causing significant property damage to building and landscaping around City Hall and its recreation centre. In 2012, Delta Community Animal Shelter staff and volunteers captured, sterilized, and relocated 400 rabbits to Ladner Harbour Park. Most of these rabbits have since fallen prey to natural predation.

This intervention cost approximately \$25,000. Damages to buildings and property caused by the rabbits were estimated to be \$350,000. The Province was critical of Delta's actions as it was conducted without a permit. The Province is not supportive of interventions that involve the re-release of rabbits into the wild (even if sterilized) due to their impacts to local habitats.

Richmond (Richmond Auto Mall), BC

In 2012, the Richmond Auto Mall Association contracted Rabbitats Rescue Society to trap, sterilize, and contain feral rabbits that were causing challenges at the Auto Mall site. Rabbits were causing damage to the landscape and running underneath vehicles. Space to house the rabbits was temporarily provided in a vacant dealership office. The Richmond Auto Mall Association also provided a van to help facilitate the rescues. Of the 250 rabbits that were trapped and sterilized, 120 rabbits were moved to a sanctuary in South Surrey. The remaining 130 rabbits were adopted out in smaller groups.

Canmore, AB

In 2012, the Town of Canmore became concerned that their burgeoning feral rabbit population was attracting predators such as coyotes, cougars, and bears, and putting citizens at risk. A contractor was hired to trap the rabbits and rehome them in sanctuaries operated by rescue societies. The sanctuaries became full and the remaining rabbits were culled and sent as feed to wildlife rehabilitation centres. Canmore has spent approximately \$382,000 over the past 6 years and caught 1,275 rabbits (which works out to approximately \$300 per rabbit). While the number of rabbits has been reduced, they still pose a challenge.

Victoria (Helmcken Interchange), BC

Unwanted pet rabbits were abandoned at the Helmcken Road overpass, near the Victoria suburb of View Royal. The rabbits quickly bred and created a sizable colony. The rabbits became an attraction on the side of the highway where people would stop to look at and feed the rabbits. Other unwanted pet rabbits were dropped off at the site which compounded the problem. The rabbits began burrowing into the highway overpass embankment, creating safety problems. In 2016, rabbit rescue groups coordinated the spay/neuter and shipping of 110 rabbits to a sanctuary in Texas. The Province has installed signs and a security camera on Highway 1 at the Helmcken interchange to discourage the abandonment of rabbits.

Australia

European rabbits were introduced to Australia in the 18th century with the First Fleet of European settlers. The invasive rabbit population spread rapidly throughout Australia, causing millions of dollars of damage to crops and the environment.

Various methods in the 20th century have been attempted to control the Australian rabbit population. Conventional methods include shooting rabbits and destroying their warrens, but these had only limited success. In 1907, a rabbit-proof fence was built in Western Australia in an unsuccessful attempt to contain the rabbits.

The release of the myxoma virus in 1950 led to a dramatic reduction of Australia's rabbit population but the impact of myxomatosis gradually declined over time as both the myxoma virus and rabbit populations changed genetically. The RHDV1 strain of the rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD), also known as the calicivirus, was introduced in 1996 to combat a decline in the effectiveness of myxomatosis. Over time, the effectiveness of the RHD virus also decreased, which led to the release in 2017 of the new variant RHDV1 K5.

The rabbit population in Australia is currently estimated to be 200 million.



City of Richmond

FERAL RABBIT ACTION PLAN: INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY DRAFT

February 18, 2019

Proposed Actions (Summary)

Project One: Feral Rabbit Control (2019 – 2029)

Rabbitats is given a five-year contract to trap, neuter and contain the rabbits already loose in Richmond, with a five year renewal.

- Rabbitats' volunteers initially trap the rabbits with subsequent rabbits picked up by animal control.
- City pays \$100 per rabbit for sterilization and vaccination.
- Rabbitats approaches neighbourhood stratas, home owners and businesses with rabbits on their properties for additional funding and other assistance.
- The rabbits are housed in large secure enclosures on farms and sanctuaries.

Project Two – Abandoned Rabbit Control (perpetual)

NOTE: Rabbitats has been positioning itself to undertake feral rabbit control, however with most BC shelters shutting down to rabbit intake over most of 2018 and the Richmond shelter opting for a drastically reduced capacity from 2019 on, a new crisis now has to be resolved.

- Rabbitats opens a shelter/indoor sanctuary to take unwanted rabbits and traps and houses Richmond strays at a rate to be determined.
- A warehouse or a suitable indoor/outdoor rural location will be required raising operating costs thus additional support needs to be explored.

Rabbitats is not looking for rescue handouts from the taxpayer, we are looking to re-allocate escalating funds spent on repairs and lost product (along with some other fiscally responsible proposals).

Richmond's rabbit damage should be substantial. This is in addition to the losses suffered by property owners and gardeners. This can escalate to farmers as it did in 2006.

Case Studies Synopsis:

Corporation of Delta

The Corporation of Delta said in 2012 that *"To date, Delta has incurred approximately \$350,000 in costs to repair damages caused by the rabbits to the buildings and grounds in the civic precinct. Similarly, in 2011, the Delta Hospice spent approximately \$70,000 to repair landscape damage caused by rabbits."*

They budgeted \$60,000 to spay/neuter their rabbits and released 400 to 500 in Harbour Park, which is mostly surrounded by water. They passed a rabbit spay/neuter bylaw, animal control picked up all ensuing stray rabbits and they remained rabbit free until the shelter closed for intake in 2018.

Richmond Auto Mall

In 2012, the Richmond Auto Mall's landscaping contractors estimated the rabbits on their property had caused \$32650 in current damages and estimated pending damage that could be over \$60,000 as the rabbits had begun compromising the trees.

The Auto Mall awarded a contract worth \$60,000 to Rabbitats for rabbit control which saw 400 rabbits taken in by the society.

The Auto Mall continues to sponsor the society with a vehicle and other perks, and the society continues to pick up strays with RAM covering the sterilization costs.

Kelowna

Kelowna paid \$54,000 to EBB Environmental Consulting initially to kill 1000 rabbits. After several hundred were exterminated and a public outcry ensued, a rescue group stepped in to rehome the remaining 800 with additional funding from the City of Kelowna.

Kelowna also passed a bylaw allowing for the sale of sterilized rabbits only.



City of Richmond

(REVISED) RABBIT ACTION PLAN: INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY REVISION

March 29, 2019

Summary of Request:

Rabbitats wants to facilitate the rescue and control of the many abandoned pet rabbits in Richmond by first developing infrastructure and housing, and then embarking on a multi-year, innovative relocation plan.

Proposed Actions

- Rabbitats is proposing a feral rabbit control pilot project for the City of Richmond followed by five-year contract with a five-year renewal.
- Additionally, the organization is requesting city resources to house the overflow of unwanted pet rabbits to offset the Richmond shelter's drastically reduced capacity.

Pilot Project: Feral Rabbit Control (2019)

- Rabbitats is requesting \$45,000 in development costs to prepare the society for the intake of rabbits and to do outreach to other funding sources including grants and local businesses and private citizens looking for solutions to their rabbit problems.
- The pilot project will identify, choose and clear one area based on numbers, geography and neighbourhood support.
- Between 200 and 400 rabbits will be trapped over the coming winter at an additional cost of \$100 per rabbit (covering sterilization and vaccination), the additional costs likely to be around \$30,000 for a total project cost of \$75,000.
- The outcome of the pilot project will determine the required support costs going forward.

Project One: Feral Rabbit Control (2020 – 2025 w/renewal options)

- Rabbitats is proposing a five-year contract to trap, neuter and contain the rabbits already loose in Richmond, with a five year renewal.
- An estimated 2000 rabbits are loose in Richmond based on observation and reports to our Abandoned Rabbits tracking map. (abandonedrabbits.com)
- Rabbitats' volunteers initially will trap the rabbits with subsequent strays picked up by animal control.
- The City pays \$100 per rabbit (covering at least the sterilization and vaccination), and a share of the project costs still to be determined.
- The estimated costs to the City of Richmond will likely be between \$50,000 and \$80,000 based on an average of 300 rabbits per year.
- Rabbitats will be approaching neighbourhood stratas, home owners and businesses with rabbits on their properties for additional funding and other assistance.
- Rabbitats will also be approaching other government and non-government agencies for additional support.
- The rabbits will be housed in large secure enclosures on farms and sanctuaries.

Project Two – Abandoned Rabbit Control / Shelter Plan (as needed)

- Rabbitats is requesting cost-free warehouse or modular space from the City to set up an indoor shelter for the surrendered or abandoned pet rabbits beyond the capacity of the city's animal shelter (necessitated by the shelter's reduced capacity going forward in 2019).
- The priority is preventing the rabbits from being released in the wild and breeding.
- A spay/neuter and vaccination budget is also required for all surrendered and stray rabbits.
- Rabbitats currently logs at least two requests per week from Richmond residents wanting to surrender their rabbits or people spotting recently abandoned rabbits.

About Rabbitats: Rabbitats was formed in 2012 after its founder helped with the successful relocation of close to 1000 rabbits from the UVic campus. The organization went on to successfully relocate 400 rabbits from the Richmond Auto Mall among other rescue efforts. The rescue built and maintains a sanctuary in South Surrey and a number of smaller 'rabbitats' around the lower mainland and is building another sanctuary at our newly rented Richmond headquarters. Donors and fundraisers have been covering costs for the 250 rabbits still in our care. Rabbitats remains responsible for the rabbits for life; if a situation doesn't work out, our organization will be tasked with finding alternatives. The society is insured, keeps good records, has active social media accounts, stages a number of fundraisers annually, and cooperates with all other relevant rescues, associations and government departments.



City of Richmond

FERAL RABBIT ACTION PLAN

PILOT PROJECT

Introduction:

- Rabbitats is requesting \$45,000 in development costs to prepare the society for the intake of rabbits and to do outreach to other funding sources including grants and local businesses and private citizens looking for solutions to their rabbit problems.
- The pilot project will identify, choose and clear one area based on numbers, geography and neighbourhood support.
- Between 200 and 400 rabbits will be trapped over the coming winter at an additional cost of \$100 per rabbit (covering sterilization and vaccination), the additional costs likely to be around \$30,000 for a total project cost of \$75,000.
- The outcome of the pilot project will determine the required support costs going forward.

Current Location:

- Rabbitats has been renting a small farmhouse on No. 6 Road and Williams in Richmond since September, 2018.
- A small shelter has been built in the basement and currently houses 50+ rabbits.
- A fenced in area under an expansive sun deck houses another 40 to 50 rabbits.
- We are planning to fence another area under the deck to house another 30 rabbits.
- We have a large backyard that is partially fenced for four potential enclosures, roughly 25 ft by 60 ft each, capable of holding at least 100 rabbits each.
- The pilot project rabbits will be housed at this location for the foreseeable future.

Current Timeline

- Enclosures need to be built over the spring and summer
- Rabbits must be trapped in the winter
- Once trapped, the rabbits are kept in a holding area, the females in one colony, the males in cages.
- They are sent to vets in Langley, Crescent Beach and Steveston two days after they are trapped.
- A minimum of one month following surgery, they are released as a colony into a escape proof and predator-proof enclosure.

Project Financial:

- The total budget for sanctuary construction, operating costs and additional rabbit care for the duration of the pilot project is roughly \$137,000; the City is being asked to contribute 1/3 of these costs matching contributions from the Society and other sources.
- Rabbitats is requesting \$45,000 from the City of Richmond in development costs to prepare the society for the intake of rabbits during the pilot project phase and to do outreach to other funding sources to cover future years.
- Rabbitats is also requesting the City of Richmond covers spay/neuter costs at \$100 per rabbit; eg: if 300 rabbits are trapped the first year, the costs will be an additional \$30,000 for a total of \$75,000.

General Financial / Fundraising

- Public donations (our 'Sick Bunny Fund) cover additional vet costs above and beyond the spays and neuters.
- We stage events like 'Bunny Meet n' Treats' to cover operating and care costs for our current rabbits.
- The city will have no obligation to the rabbits once they've been sterilized although the society will be reaching out via all available municipal grant programs.

Personnel:

- Rabbitats has no paid staff
- Trapping will be done by volunteers, at least initially

Trapping Logistics

- A colony of rabbits needs to be trapped in its entirety, a partial colony will repopulate quickly.
- Colonies close to each other may also need to be done concurrently.
- Trapping is done by various methods including penning, havahart traps and nets.

Neighbourhood Outreach/Partners

- Neighbourhood outreach must be conducted to make sure property owners are aware of the trapping program.
- Property owners will be encouraged to contribute to rabbit control and support costs for the rabbits on their properties at a suggested minimum of \$100 per rabbit.
- Businesses in the area will also be asked to contribute, as will provincial and federal governments when clearing rabbits from any crown land.

Location Choice for Pilot Program

- Preference should be given to areas where such support mechanisms exists, eg: Ikea may be interested in partnering to control the rabbits in East Cambie, YVR is being approached about control in proximity to the airport.
- The area's rabbits should have well-defined borders.
- The decision will likely not be made until the fall when our assembled resources and capacities are assessed in the fall.

Neighbourhood Outreach

- The budget includes print materials for door-to-door distribution to keep residents and businesses informed re: our plans and progress.
- We will also be in direct contact with properties with rabbits living on the premises.
- As long as the rabbits are being relocated and not culled, close to 100% compliance is expected in cases where property access is required, and in most cases the rabbits can be trapped just off the property with treat lures.
- A press and social media campaign will also be put in play.

Capacities

- Rabbits are not traditionally kept in colonies in the rescue world thus Rabbitats' direct (and extensive) experience with this method of housing must be considered.
- We take a page from their natural state, designing the enclosures for distance and vertical movement with features that mimic their natural environments.
- We allow the rabbits live in warrens with their large families

- Rabbitats releases all the rabbits into their enclosures at the same time to avoid territorial posturing, the rabbits almost immediately settle into a colony and establish a warren with just some initial supervision to pick out any bullies or bullied rabbits.

Animal Health Care

- Health supervision simply requires feeding times with communal bowls --rabbits remaining in their shelters are likely ailing; grooming sessions are conducted quarterly.
- Rabbits can usually be taken from the colony and adopted out with no ill effects; they rarely suffer the same depression seen with the loss of a mate in a bonded pair.

Risk Management

- Rabbitats seeks to minimize the risk by not overstepping our resources.
- Contingency plans include advance funding, establishing renewable funding sources, back-up properties, etc.
- We are establishing the most cost effective and low-maintenance care.
- We are fully insured and (to our knowledge) bondable.
- We don't expect a 0% mortality rate but a 97% success rate is realistic.

Legal:

- Feral rabbits are considered wildlife and fall under the Ministry of the Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development.
- The ministry required permits to possess the rabbits in the past, but these rules have been relaxed as of 2017 and their wildlife status has been under review.
- Rescue are currently allowed to trap, sterilize and possess the rabbits in our sanctuaries and are expecting a 'fix' (any day) to the policy that technically requires a permit to relocate them from there.
- The province is adamantly against trap, neuter and release programs for rabbits.



City of Richmond

ABANDONED RABBIT CONTROL (Shelter Plan)

Introduction:

- Rabbitats is requesting cost-free warehouse or modular space from the City to set up an indoor shelter for the surrendered or abandoned pet rabbits that are beyond the capacity of the Richmond Animal Shelter (necessitated by the shelter's reduced capacity going forward in 2019).
- Abandoned or surrendered house rabbits cannot be part of the feral rabbit control program, they must be housed indoors and Rabbitats' current indoor space is very limited.
- Preventing the rabbits from being released in the wild and breeding is a huge priority.

Recommended Key Policy:

- A 'no wait', 'no fee' and 'no questions asked' (other than proof of residency) pet rabbit surrender policy should be (quietly) implemented for the foreseeable future.

Financial:

- We are looking for a rent-free space or a space where occupancy costs are covered.
- As with current shelter strays/surrenders at the City shelter, the City will be expected assume the vaccination and spay/neuter costs for the unsterilized rabbits and any rabbits born in the shelter prior to the mothers being spayed.
- Rabbitats will pursue other sources for the additional costs and reassess this position in a one year.

Volume:

- Rabbitats currently logs at least two requests per week from Richmond residents wanting to surrender their rabbits or people spotting recently abandoned rabbits.
- We need to house at least 50 rabbits, the majority in colony format, the remainder in pens.

Space:

- a warehouse, large garage or a larger modular is preferred
- the rabbits require heat, lights, running water and plumbing.
- redevelopment projects with free shorter term tenancies may also work.
- We would like to give the rabbits as much space as possible

Feral / House Pet Definitions:

- Rabbitats defines 'feral' as rabbits born outside, and 'house pets' as rabbits born inside.
- Surrendered and abandoned house pets need to be dealt with separately from feral rabbits as house-born rabbits not only are more comfortable inside, many also have genetic traits or special needs mandating indoor homes.
- The majority of house rabbits don't survive for long periods once abandoned, but they do survive long enough to reproduce.

Current Animal Shelter

- The City Shelter has a capacity of eight rabbits
- The demand for indoor space with requests made to Rabbitats alone certainly far surpasses the RAPS capacity.
- Rabbitats is approaching RAPS with a proposal that sees Rabbitats taking in feral rabbits and the abandoned/surrendered pet overflow, while RAPS works on re-homing adoptable rabbits.
- Rabbitats is going to need some assistance from Richmond Animal Control.
- Some tasks, divisions and finances still need to be addressed.

Destinations:

- Rabbitats will seek foster and adoptive homes for indoor colonies of rabbits, and assess rabbits who may be suited for indoor/outdoor options.
- We will explore options for an indoor sanctuary to house unadoptable house rabbits.

Timeline:

- Unlike feral rabbits who must be trapped in the fall, abandoned domestic pets need to be picked up as soon as they are spotted.
- As noted, Rabbitats will pursue other sources for the additional costs and reassess this position in a one year

Reasons For Abandonment:

- Reasons for abandoning rabbits include:
 - Rental housing crises
 - Life changes (moving, college, marriage, divorce, etc)
 - Allergies
 - Financial issues
 - Rabbit housing or behavioral issues
 - Physical and mental health issues
 - Unwanted and/or accidental litters
 - Breeders dumping unwanted stock

Additional Programs

- Increased efforts should also be made to keep guardians and their pet rabbits together, and Rabbitats will be addressing the above issues in addition to accepting surrenders by providing:
 - Temporary boarding or fostering
 - Pet housing construction demonstrations and assistance
 - Free supplies (when warranted)
 - Behavioral advice
 - Spay/Neuter Assistance
- Education and awareness programs addressing rabbit purchases should be continued, however, people who need or want to give up their rabbits will abandon them if they have no alternatives.