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Sent: Sunday, January 26, 2014 4:06 PM
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Cc: Bevilacqua, Maurizio; Rosati, Gino; Di Biase, Michael; Schulte, Deb; lafre
Rosanna; Racco, Sandra; Shefman, Alan; Clerks@vaughan.ca
Subject: Reptilia's comments regarding proposed changes to bylaw 53-2002
Attachments: Reptilia's Comments on Vaughan Bylaw 53 2002 Proposed Amendment.

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Item #	1
Report No.	4 (WS)
Council - January 28/14	

Mayor Bevilacqua, Members of Council, and Vaughan City Clerk,

It has come to our attention at Reptilia that changes have been proposed to Vaughan City's bylaw 53-2002 and would like to express our concern regarding one proposed amendment.

Our concerns and the reasons for them are laid out in the attached letter.

Sincerely,

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January 23, 2014

To the Mayor, Members of Council and Vaughan City Clerk:

As a longtime business and tourist attraction here in Vaughan (since 1996), Reptilia would like to express its concern regarding one proposed amendment to Vaughan bylaw 53-2002.

Proposed Prohibition of Constrictors (Snakes)

We preface this letter with the clarification that we are only speaking to the issues as they pertain to reptiles. With that in mind, the current Animal Care and Control bylaw (53-2002) of the City of Vaughan is well written and effective with respect to reptiles.

The additional wording included in the proposed amendment under the "Prohibited Animals" section proposing a "prohibition on the keeping of constrictors (snakes)" is unnecessary.

Apparent Motivation for the Amendment

As we understand the motivation, the reason for the inclusion of this wording is likely in reaction to the tragedy that occurred in New Brunswick in 2013 and the desire to protect the residents of Vaughan from a similar situation.

Vaughan Acted on This Safeguard Many Years Ago

Fortunately, the City of Vaughan acted in 2002 to prevent such animals from being kept by the public, so the proposed change this year is unnecessary as the New Brunswick issue was caused by a snake which has been prohibited for 12 years by your existing bylaw 53 – 2002.

Please refer to bylaw 53 – 2002 - Schedule B which, as written prohibits: All snakes which reach an adult length larger than 3 meters.

The Word 'Constrictor' is Not a Synonym of the Word 'Dangerous'

Unfortunately, the term 'constrictor' has become confused with dangerous, when, in fact, it simply refers to a method of feeding and can be applied to the vast majority of non-venomous snake species, including most of our harmless native species and such popular and safe pet species as the corn snake or even, depending on what it is eating at the time, the tiny garter snake.

A train qualifies as a vehicle and so does a Smart Car. But as everyone knows, there is a world of difference between the two that the word 'vehicle' simply does not describe or encompass, and so it is with the word 'constrictor'.

All constrictors are not dangerous. Full grown constrictors range in weight from less than a pound to over 500 lbs. Vaughan's existing bylaw already covers the 'dangerous' species of constrictor snakes.

Issues Arising From Prohibition

Prohibition of all constricting snakes will create some issues that require deliberation, including:

Owning a Snake (Even a Small Corn Snake Will Become Illegal)

First, it eliminates the legal ownership of snakes in Vaughan for both the public and in some cases, though exempted as an institution in the bylaw, the education community. This bylaw turns thousands of kids and parent who own snakes into nefarious criminals. The schools who have been teaching our curriculum enrichment programs using snakes for years and the teachers who have to care for those snakes at home during the school breaks would share the same fate.

Now the Reality

For the public, this amendment simply means that they will have to drive further to buy what they want and may even encourage the purchase of snakes now prohibited under the existing bylaw (which is viewed as being fair and balanced by most of our customers) since by having any snake – large or small – they would be in contravention of the law.

A serious risk the City runs with the proposed change is a shift from harmless species to more dangerous ones. Like the old saying goes: 'In for a penny, in for a pound'. Since a half pound corn snake is illegal anyway, why not splurge for that cool giant Burmese python that is not much more money? And if this happens, and it will, then we will have some snakes coming into the City that we **really don't want**.

As an example, some of the 'fringe' keepers could well opt for the more 'exciting' and potentially dangerous African Rock (the type of snake that was in New Brunswick – which can weigh up to 300 lbs), Anacondas (heaviest snake in the world – over 500 lbs in some cases), Reticulated Pythons (the longest snake in the world and a potentially aggressive predator as well) or, possibly, even venomous snakes.

It is our opinion that this amendment will simply drive underground the sane & legal keeping of a passive animal which has – to our knowledge, after being intimately involved for 18 years – never caused an issue in our City.

Education Restrictions

By prohibiting standard and safe pet species, the proposed amendment will in some cases limit educational opportunities for GTA and Vaughan students who participate in our corn snake habitarium program, as well as cause local businesses, like Reptilia, significant revenue loss with no apparent upside for the City.

Reason Is Needed Here

Harmless constricting snakes currently comprise the vast majority of pet reptile species, with the Ball Python and Corn Snake topping the list. As reptiles are the fastest growing segment of the pet industry, due to their hypoallergenic nature, ease of care, and generally docile dispositions, constricting snakes, and the materials and food required to keep and care for them, are a significant source of income for many businesses in the city.

Reptilia, for example, has spent the last 18 years building a solid clientele of retail and educational customers in the city of Vaughan, who purchase, own or are interested in pet reptiles. Reptilia and its customers, including both residents of Vaughan and those who bring their money to spend in Vaughan, would be ill served by the proposed changes.

Popular for Many Kids – Especially Those With Allergies

Across North America, Reptiles and Amphibians form the fastest growing segment of the pet industry for good reason.

As non-allergenic, low maintenance, harmless animals, most reptiles are excellent pets for active busy people. People with full-time careers are often unable to keep or properly care for more demanding traditional pets, like cats and dogs, which if left unattended for any length of time can prove far more destructive and dangerous than the vast majority of reptiles.

Many reptiles, like the docile and tractable Ball Python (a large adult weighs less than 4 lbs), are not only easily and safely handled, but are easily housed securely and humanely in even a small apartment. Reptiles have been shown to be excellent educational tools, valuable additions to school curricula and activities. Further, their hypo-allergenic nature makes them ideal given the dramatic increase in serious child allergies that we have seen in recent years.

We Educate Before We Sell

We fully believe that ownership, possession and care of reptiles, as with any animal, should only be undertaken by those who are informed and committed to the welfare of the animals in question as well as to the safety and welfare of those around them and a sweeping unfounded prohibition of all snakes does not help the situation. Rational legislation that protects the general public, the animals and the rights of the individual is what is needed.

Vaughan was Proactive with Regard to Reptiles Many Years Ago – and Quite Successful!

In summary, the proposed amendment as it pertains to reptiles (and snakes in particular) is redundant, unnecessary, and excessively restrictive, and will likely result in both increased risk to the public and needless financial duress on Vaughan businesses not to mention the almost impossible task of enforcing the bylaw on kids, parents, schools, teachers, and the retail stores handling snakes and all the support goods required.

Economic Hardship for Retailers

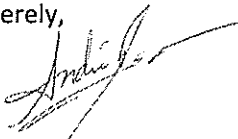
For every dollar of snake sales lost at Reptilia, we will lose at least \$85 dollars in sales for food, décor, heating, tanks, hoods, and health supplements over half the life of the average Corn Snake, for example. It is likely other retailers would share similar losses.

After 18 years in business with more than 30,000 regular customers (not to speak of the thousands of tourists that come to the Facility) and not one single insurance claim ever (as well as winning the 2010 City of Vaughan Good Corporate Citizen Award), we cannot recommend this amendment for the reasons contained above and suggest to the Mayor and Council that Vaughan has been well protected for many years by its existing bylaw wording.

Summary

Bylaw 53-2002 as currently implemented in Vaughan, with regard to reptiles, is well thought out and well written and has – for more than a decade – done a fine job of both protecting the public and the rights of residents.

Sincerely,



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