RPO Changes:

Helping people help other people, and their animals.

Good morning City Council,

My name is Jessica Miller, and I am the CEO of the Winnipeg Humane Society. Thank you for allowing me to write to you regarding the proposed amendments to the Responsible Pet Ownership by-law.

I would like to thank both **Mayor Scott Gillingham and Councillor Evan Duncan** for taking time to tour the Winnipeg Humane Society recently and listen to me talk all things animals which is one of my favorite things to do!

I would also like to thank **Councillor Sherri Rollins** for all of her support over the years.

As Manitoba's **oldest** animal welfare organization, running for **129** years, the WHS has **continuously** undertaken means to **innovate, adapt, and evolve** to meet the needs of Winnipeg's animal population and the community that cares for them.

We are a community services organization who supports people and animals in every way we can - that is why we

support the proposed amendments that are before Council today.

As you may be aware, shelters and rescues across the city, province, and all across Canada, even into the United States are struggling to support the influx of animals coming into care. Our operating budget of **over 12M annually** is being **squeezed** like never before. The simple procedure of a spay or neuter is a powerful tool available to help reduce the overpopulation of animals, and in turn, reduce the number of dogs and cats entering shelters, as well as feral populations that live amongst communities. Believe it or not, there are North American wide feral cat colonies living amongst us, and Winnipeg is no exception, **although I wish it was.**

In 2023, we performed **6,100 spay/neuters in-house,** and over **1000** external of our shelter walls, though third parties. We also held 39 remote clinics through our One Health Program that helps provide access and reach to veterinary care **both geographically and financially.** While these numbers are commendable, it still is a drop in the bucket for the overwhelming need for these surgeries.

The addition of a veterinary clinic at animal services would help to alleviate some pressure placed on rescues and our private clinic partners who support this critical work.

It would also help to **reduce barriers to accessing care.** That's something I say often, as it's the key to the castle. The **inability to afford vet care is the primary reason animals are surrendered to our shelter**. In 2023, 77% of dogs surrendered to us by their owners was because they couldn't pay for their pet's medical bills.

Additionally, we have heard from the community that travelling to our clinic to access our low-cost spay and neuter program, as well as other vet care **can be a challenge due to our location**. It was recently told of people bringing animals to a downtown location we operate some third parties services out of , that people were bringing their animals by kids wagons and shopping carts to access low income spay and neuter services. Now that is willingness and determination… but also savy as these appointments are only so many, as we can only financially support so much.

Offering a **centralized and secondary location** for the community to access low-cost vet care means more

animals remain healthy and, in their homes, where they belong. **Animals do not belong in a shelter, it should be the last resort.**

We also support amendments to the RPO Bylaw **No. 92/2013** which addresses community cat management.

The Winnipeg Humane Society's mission is to ensure the well-being of all animals. **For some adult cats, that means living their life outside, not in a shelter, or even a home.** If a cat is thriving in its community, then it's in their best interest to stay there. Community cats, or feral cats that are not socialized, prefer to live in their communities and are difficult to socialize after the fact, making many of them unlikely adoption candidates.

Removing them from the area and bringing the cat to a shelter takes them from a **familiar environment** to the unknown, often stressful, space.

Bringing a **healthy unsocialized cat** to an animal shelter also uses shelter resources that can be better used for animals in need of **immediate, life-saving attention and care**.

That being said, we will not turn away a sick or injured cat, and in extreme conditions, like those we can face in

Winnipeg's winter, we use good judgment when accepting or not accepting a feral cat into care.

The ability for the community and rescues to utilize a Trap, Neuter and Release (TNR) model freely without barriers or penalties aims to increase the health of the cats **in their preferred community**.

The benefits of spaying/neutering go beyond population control. It's proven to **reduce aggression, roaming, and prevent disease.** When a cat comes to WHS for TNR they are also provided with vaccinations to reduce the spread of illness in their community.

We must collectively work together to protect the well-being of both the cats and the communities they live in. By this we are solutioning the people and the animals within these communities.

We see "harbouring" as a safe haven. Allowing the community to care for these cats without fear of penalty provides them with a quality of life in their preferred place without compromising the safety of the public.

We understand the concerns of people who do not want cats in their gardens or hurting birds on their property. From our experience, these are often **owned cats** who are free roaming the neighbourhood – which goes

against City by-laws – versus the feral cats we're discussing, these cats are less likely to interact closely with people.

We have full confidence in our friends at Animal Services and their ability to ensure properties helping community cats **meet the requirements for public health and safety**, as well as the health and safety of these animals.

Lastly, we support the proposed amendment to the Dangerous Dog Designation which would not focus on a **singular incident** but would consider previous behaviours.

At the WHS, our behaviour team takes an animal's **full history,** when available, into account before putting them up for public adoption. Only looking at **one piece of the puzzle** does a disservice to the well-being of both the dog and the adopter and is not indicative of future behaviour.

Thank you for your consideration of the amendments.