

## Activists support bylaw banning traps



Ryan Pfeiffer, Guelph Mercury

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**GUELPH** - December 03, 2008

Almost two years after a dog was killed in a trap intended for trespassing wildlife, the city is moving forward with a bylaw to ban body-gripping traps on public and private lands.

Exemptions will be available to farmers and licensed trappers on agricultural lands, as well as to the city and province for health and safety reasons.

Guelph will be the first city in Canada to impose such a bylaw, believes Karen Levenson of the Animal Alliance of Canada.

"To take this on as a city that is not fully urban is wonderful," she said.

In December 2006, a Jack Russell terrier died after having his head caught in a Conibear trap on an industrial property by the Hanlon Expressway.

Harper suffocated as his owner Tara Szczygiel held her dying dog in her arms, unable to free him.

"That little dog is a tragic example of what happens," Levenson said. "But we only know what happened because the owner was there."

In most cases the animal is disposed of -- like garbage, she said -- by the property owner.

Levenson was one of the stakeholders gathered to help form the bylaw with legal staff. It is slated to go before the finance, administration and corporate services committee today.

This bylaw protects all animals from these often fatal traps, though mouse traps or anything similarly not regulated under the province's Fishery and Wildlife Conservation Act are not included, explained Matthew Rae, associate solicitor and report author.

"The bylaw balances animal welfare with preventing disease outbreaks and other concerns for the city," he said.

Should the city or the Ministry of Natural Resources have to trap an animal for health and safety and no other options were viable, clear safety parameters including signage and daily inspection are mandated.

Rae said private citizens, for instance licensed trappers not on agricultural lands, can apply to council for an exemption. But council is mandated to approve only if no other option is available. An exempted individual must follow the same safety parameters as the city.

He called the traps "cruel punishment for animals" that at times may be necessary under the exemptions.

Councillor Bob Bell said he is pleased to see the bylaw would stop what happened to Harper from repeating itself.

"That's what I was looking for, the intent of the people," he said about the bylaw. His only concern is making every exemption applicant come before council. Going to an appointed staff member would undo unnecessary red tape, he said.

If passed, the next step will be a public education campaign -- a commitment to this is included in the council report.

The Guelph Humane Society, also one of the stakeholders, has already committed to contributing its resources. And Levenson said she also plans to help out.

She said it is important to show people and home builders that there are more effective ways to keep animals out of homes and properties. The need for sustainable action is increasingly important as more and more natural habitats are encroached upon by development.

"Trapping will not keep animals out of the property, it will keep one animal off property," Levenson said.