

Date: March 28, 2025

To: **Mayor and Council**

Name and title: Walter Babicz, City Manager

Subject: Review of Committee Recommendations to Improve Bear Awareness

Attachment(s): Advisory Committee on Bear Awareness Report to Council (previously considered by Council at the Regular Council meeting on November 4, 2024)

Recommendation(s):

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated March 28, 2025 from the City Manager, titled “Review of Committee Recommendations to Improve Bear Awareness”.

Purpose:

For Council information and consideration.

Background:

At its November 4, 2024 meeting, Council considered the attached report titled, “Recommendations to Council to Improve Bear Awareness” from the Advisory Committee on Bear Awareness (the “Committee”) and referred the report to Administration for review and an information report back to Council regarding the financial and operational costs to implement the Committee recommendations.

The Committee’s eight recommendations touch on proposed initiatives involving several administrative departments across the organization. Rather than reporting back to Council with individual reports from several departments, the feedback from the applicable City departments in response to each of the eight recommendations have been merged into this single consolidated report.

To ensure each recommendation from the Committee is clearly addressed, the report is structured as follows:

- Committee Recommendation
- Lead Department
- Preliminary Considerations
- Comments

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 1:

1. That Council:

- a. ESTABLISH a City staff position with a focus on sustainable waste management that includes achieving Provincial Bear Smart Status and reducing human-wildlife conflict; and*
- b. COMMITS to sustained financial support of this position for each year of the 2025 to 2030 5-Year Operational Financial Plan.*

Department Lead:

Civic Operations Department

Preliminary Consideration:

If Council does not approve this Committee recommendation, the City will lack the specific expertise required to execute Committee recommendation #2 below.

Comments:

Staff understand the intent of the proposed Sustainable Waste Coordinator position would be to research and evaluate new initiatives relating to waste reduction, waste management and recycling to help the city reach its environmental waste reduction goals. If implemented, this position would lead strategic initiatives such as:

- Develop a municipal Strategic Solid Waste Management Plan in conjunction with the Regional District of Fraser Fort George.
- Identifying targeted deliverables, producing communication plans for waste reduction, illegal dumping, education about recycling and other waste diversion strategies.
- **Lead City of Prince George and Bear Aware Technical Committee on achieving provincial Bear Smart status.**
- Undertake community based social marketing programs to establish community support for the division's initiatives.
- Pursue grants to assist with solid waste/management initiatives and/or technologies to support the division.
- Develop business cases for the implementation of a seasonal yard and garden waste collection system and review the existing collection of curbside residential recyclables (blue box) for Multi-Material BC.
- Conduct waste composition studies of municipal solid waste and recommend material bans and bylaw changes.
- Partner with Regional District staff to take an in-depth review of current transfer station operations and sites.

The annual budget for the proposed Sustainable Waste Coordinator position, including the salary cost and the non-labour expenses to support the function, is approximately \$140,000. This translates to a 2.5% increase in solid waste rates and would have an approximate impact of \$4/\$6/\$7 on small, medium and large garbage containers. 2025 expenses could be covered by the utility's current budget and reserve levels and the position could be included in the 2026 – 2030 financial plan going forward.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 2:

2. *That Council DIRECT Administration to establish a Bear Aware Technical Committee that meets regularly with membership to include at least:*
 - a. *a City staff whose operational focus is related to the Bear Smart Program and bear awareness;*
 - b. *one (1) member of each of the following stakeholders:*
 - i. *Northern Bear Awareness Society;*
 - ii. *University of Northern British Columbia;*
 - iii. *Lheidli T'enneh First Nation;*
 - iv. *British Columbia Conservation Officer Service;*
 - v. *Regional District of Fraser-Fort George;*
 - vi. *Wildlife Biologist from Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship;*
 - vii. *Other City staff members as required.*

Department Lead:

Civic Operations Department

Preliminary Considerations:

The following comments are contingent on the approval of the Committee recommendation #1 above.

Comments:

The education/training/experience required of the proposed Sustainable Waste Coordinator would provide the City of Prince George with a staff person capable of leading inter-agency groups, however representing the City on the Bear Aware Technical Committee would be a small portion of the incumbents' responsibilities. This position would play a key role providing technical direction including educating the public on waste reduction initiatives and programs while supporting operational advice and potential implementations related to the Bear Smart Program and bear awareness.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 3:

3. *That Council:*
 - a. *DIRECTS Administration to incorporate multiple automated bear-resistant solid waste garbage bins based on industry standards as a two-year pilot project to select a brand compatible with City operations and to be established in areas known to have high-bear encounters; and*
 - b. *DIRECTS Administration to return a report to Council within two months following the end of the pilot project advising on the results and budget implications for implementing bear-resistant bins city-wide, with a priority roll out on high bear conflict areas. The report should also propose incentive strategies for bear-resistant bin participation and consider allowing temporary opt-out provisions for homeowners/tenants with secure garbage storage, with the end goal of all residents having bear-resistant bins that are always secure, including on pick-up days.*

Lead Department:

Civic Operations Department

Preliminary Considerations:

The following comments are contingent on the approval of the Committee recommendations #1 and #2 above.

Comments:

The Sustainable Waste Coordinator would lead the Bear Aware Technical Committee in establishing the terms of reference for a bear resistant residential cart pilot project for the City of Prince George's automated garbage collection system. The Bear Aware Technical Committee would also be responsible for researching compatible cart models, potential program costs, education materials, scope of project and reporting. Upon completion of that work, assuming that the garbage bins would cost enough to reach the threshold of a capital project, Administration would return a report asking for approval of those capital purchases.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 4:

4. *That Council DIRECTS Administration to continue to phase in bear-resistant solid waste receptacles in public spaces, including parks and bus stops.*

Lead Department:

Civic Operations Department

Preliminary Considerations:

At the current pace, Administration does not anticipate additional resources required to move forward with recommendation #4 as a standalone item or in conjunction with other Committee recommendations.

Comments:

The Parks and Solid Waste Services Division has been phasing in bear resistant receptacles in public spaces for over a decade. In 2019, a Bear Smart audit was completed for 169 parks spaces. Each space was assigned a score specific to their degree of hazard through a bear smart lens criterion. The results of the audit are still being used to prioritize both operational and capital spending when upgrading park amenities. This commitment is ongoing and investment in Bear Smart receptacles has become the standard.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 5:

5. *That Council DIRECTS Administration to consider the following tools when addressing bear-related issues:*
 - a. *Actively participating in and supporting programs aimed at reducing bear attractants through initiatives such as bear-resistant garbage bins, fruit gleaning and harvest sharing, and public education; and*
 - b. *Combining support for these programs with the enforcement of section 11 in the City of Prince George Property Maintenance Bylaw No. 8425, 2014, would effectively mitigate human-bear*

conflicts. Additionally, this approach offers an opportunity to foster community engagement and enhance local food security.

Lead Department:

Civic Operations Department and Finance & IT Services Department

Preliminary Considerations:

As noted below, funding would be recommended through MFA debt financing which would involve an alternative approval process or referendum.

Comments:

A rough estimate for the purchase of a bear-resistant bin is \$400 - \$500. With the City having approximately 26,000 bins, it would cost approximately \$10+M to replace the City's bin inventory. The reserve does not have enough to cover these costs so MFA debt would be recommended to finance the purchase. The estimate of the annual debt servicing costs for this purchase would be approximately \$850,000, which translates to a 15% increase in solid waste rates. This would have an impact of \$26/\$34/\$41 on small, medium and large garbage containers.

The Sustainable Waste Coordinator would lead the Bear Aware Technical Committee in the creation of relevant educational materials and provide support to events fostering community engagement aimed at reducing bear-related issues.

Additional comments on section 11 of City of Prince George Property Maintenance Bylaw No. 8425, 2012, are provided as part of Committee recommendation #6.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 6:

6. *That Council ADOPTS a new bylaw specific to wildlife attractants and solid waste. The proposed bylaw should:*
 - a. *Use section 11 from "City of Prince George Property Maintenance Bylaw 8425, 2012", which addresses "Feeding Wildlife and Control of Wildlife Attractants."*
 - b. *Use Section 6 from City of Prince George Garbage Collection Regulation Bylaw 7661, 2004", which pertains to "Garbage Containers and Locations."*
 - c. *Implement a progressive increase in fines for infractions related to wildlife attractants and solid waste.*
 - d. *Establish requirements for the maintenance of fruit trees and bushes, specifically the need to manage fruit before it falls to the ground.*
 - e. *Mandate the securement and/or enclosure of wildlife attractants to prevent access by wildlife.*

Lead Department:

Administrative Services Department

Preliminary Considerations:

Council direction is needed to prepare a bylaw for Council's consideration at a future regular Council meeting as described in the comments below.

Comments:

Administration has considered how this recommendation may be implemented if Council direction is received and have taken preliminary steps to draft a standalone Wildlife Attractant Bylaw. The draft bylaw incorporates the guidance shared in the Advisory Committee on Bear Awareness' report, Section 11 of Property Maintenance Bylaw 8425, 2012, Garbage Collection Regulation Bylaw 7661, 2004, and potential penalties for bylaw non-compliance.

Administration would look to Council for direction to finalize the draft bylaw for Council consideration at a future Council meeting where the bylaw would be described in more detail and include the necessary consequential amendments to other City of Prince George bylaws that may be affected by the new bylaw.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 7:

7. That Council DIRECTS Administration to amend the City of Prince George Zoning Bylaw No. 7850, 2007, and any other applicable bylaws, to permit electric fencing to secure wildlife attractants specifying requirements for voltage, installation, and maintenance.

Department Lead:

Planning and Development Department

Preliminary Considerations:

Should Council choose to pursue the provision of electric fencing in the Zoning Bylaw, Administration seeks Council direction to conduct the extensive research required for electric fencing to be a permitted fencing type in the Zoning Bylaw.

This project is not currently included in the 2025 Corporate Work Plan and, therefore, would result in adjusting the 2025 Corporate Work Plan to include these works, with the removal of other work plan item(s).

Comments:

Currently, Zoning Bylaw No. 7850, 2007 ("Zoning Bylaw") regulates the height of fences based on the zone of a property and does not regulate the type of fence (i.e. chain link, picket, panel) or finishing material (i.e. wood, composite, vinyl, metal, etc.) of the fence. The Zoning Bylaw currently restricts barbed wire fencing for certain zones.

The Zoning Bylaw is scheduled to be reviewed and updated to ensure consistency with Provincial legislation and proposed OCP Bylaw No. 9525, 2025, which is currently being considered by Council. Once OCP Bylaw No. 9525, 2025 is adopted, Administration intends to commence the review of the Zoning Bylaw.

Through the review of the Zoning Bylaw, Administration could consider the inclusion of electric fencing as a permitted type of fencing. Administration notes consideration of the inclusion of electric fencing in the Zoning Bylaw would require thorough research and analysis and would not be achieved through a "quick" text amendment to the fencing regulations of the Zoning Bylaw.

Careful consideration of risks, liability, insurance implications, safety standards, jurisdictional responsibilities, and operational impacts should be conducted to inform the provision of electric fencing for properties located within Prince George. A review of other BC municipalities' bylaws should also be conducted to determine if electric fencing is permitted. Administration also notes the need for an implementation strategy that includes public awareness, a procedure for installation and maintenance, plan for monitoring and evaluating, and potential staff enhancements for permitting, enforcement, and compliance.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 8:

8. That Council:

- a. DIRECTS Administration to include educational materials on human-bear interactions with the City's utility bills for the spring and fall billing cycles; and*
- b. DIRECTS Administration to continue incorporating bear awareness information on the garbage collection schedule, social media platforms, and website.*

Department Lead:

Finance & IT Services Department and Administrative Services Department

Preliminary Considerations:

n/a

Comments:

A utility bill cycle consists of approximately 20,000 physical bills and envelopes. As a result, the City uses an inserter that folds and stuffs the envelopes. Currently, the City of Prince George has an inserter that can only reliably do inserts of two double-sided 8 ½ x 11 pieces of paper into a standard sized envelope. We use one page for the bill itself and the other page to communicate important information. In the spring insert, we include the garbage schedule for residents for the year. The fall insert isn't used every time, but we include one if there is something important that the City wishes to communicate (election information, engagement opportunities, etc.).

If the City wanted to include an additional page on each utility bill dedicated to the information in Recommendation 8 a., the City would need to purchase a new inserter that would be able to handle additional inserts with our bills. The rough estimate for a new inserter is approximately \$25,000.

To facilitate additional inserts, we would also need to change the size of envelope used and this adds some minor additional cost as well (estimate of \$3,000 per utility cycle).

Administration will continue to incorporate bear awareness information through communication method such as the garbage collection schedule, social media platforms, and City of Prince George website.

Strategic Priorities:

This report aligns with Council's strategic pillars of Environmental Stewardship & Climate Action, Social Health and Well-Being and City Government and Infrastructure, relating to a safe environment (for both bears and humans), and improvement of processes and practices to support effective service delivery.

Summary and conclusion:

This report provides staff commentary on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Bear Awareness and provides Council with information on implementation and resource considerations.

Respectfully submitted:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2025/04/07