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The city that had summer students [knocking on front doors](#) looking for outlaw dogs and cats is now considering scrapping pet licences altogether.

Toronto's municipal licensing and standards department is launching a review of the program and one option is getting rid of it altogether, said Jim Hart, the department's executive director.

Other options include a lifetime — rather than annual — licence or a registration program for dogs and cats that may or may not involve a fee, Hart said, after briefing the budget committee of council.

"We earned about \$2.4 million (from licences) last year and it costs about \$2 million to run a licensing program," Hart said. Paying even students to try to get more compliance — as Toronto did in the summer of 2008 — costs more than it earns, he added.

Annual [licences](#) range from \$60 for an unsterilized dog to \$7.50 for a senior citizen's sterilized cat. The program's surplus helps offset the costs of [animal services](#), which operates four shelters, reunites tag-bearing pets with their owners and takes in animals that are injured, in distress or pose a hazard.

Councillor Cesar Palacio (Ward 17, Davenport), chair of the licensing and standards committee, didn't want to comment on the merits of scrapping licenses until he sees an upcoming staff report, but said the idea "merits consideration."

His colleague Karen Stintz, who has in the past derided the program as a "pet tax" that pays for staff, not animal services, said many pets are microchipped, making city-issued tags unnecessary.

"I would be satisfied if we got out of that business," said Stintz (Ward 16, Eglinton-Lawrence).

Hart also told the budget committee he's expanding a program by which colonies of feral cats are trapped, brought by volunteer "colony caretakers" to city vets for sterilization, and then returned to their colony.

The city aims to sterilize 1,000 cats this year, up from 217 last year. The long-term goal, Hart said, is depopulating Toronto's feral cat population, which could number as high as 100,000.