

City commits \$100K to reduce Toronto's feral cat population

'Investment in humanely dealing with cats,' says feral cat advocate

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A feral cat stakes its ground in Toronto. (Tyler Flockhart/University of Guelph)

Toronto is contributing \$100,000 to help keep the feral cat population under control.

That announcement, made by Coun. Glenn De Baeremaeker on CBC's *Metro Morning* on Friday, comes on Feral Cat Awareness Day, a day the city proclaimed to raise awareness around the homeless cats of Toronto.

The Ward 38 councillor said the cash comes from developers who are required to donate money to local community groups.

"So the developers agreed to donate \$100,000 to the volunteer program to help them have traps, cages (and) operate the recovery centre, to address the cat over-population problem," De Baeremaeker told *Metro Morning*.

The money will go to a group of city-affiliated charities called the Feral Cat Coalition, who will decide how best to direct the funds.

"This is an investment in humanely dealing with cats," said Jaqueline Chan of Annex Cat Rescue, a member of the coalition.

She said the coalition will put funds toward the city-backed trap-neuter-release (TNR) program. It is a system of population control that relies on volunteers catching feral cats and bringing them to the city's recovery centre in Scarborough, according to De Baeremaeker.

"They are housed there like a health spa for the day," he said. "They go and they get their free spay or neuter operation at the City of Toronto animal hospital."

The cats are allowed to recover for a couple of days and then are brought back to the neighbourhood in which they were caught. A similar program has been successful in New York, according to Toronto Animal Services.

To residents who don't want the cats returned to their neighbourhood, De Baeremaeker says simply moving cats out of an area won't prevent more from moving in.

"If you do the neuter release program, what happens is that cat population will go down over time and they will disappear over time," he said. "Otherwise, the cats will just move back into your neighbourhood."

The average lifespan for a street cat is three years, he added.

"It's not a very romantic or nice lifestyle," he said. "Some of us think that it's wonderful that the cat's out in the back alley and having fun and impregnating other cats. For that cat he's not likely to live more than three years."

To support the TNR program, the coalition is considering another feral cat recovery centre in the city's west end.

Esther Attard, of Toronto Animal Services, said there could be anywhere from 20,000 to 100,000 homeless cats in the city.

"[Cats] can be a nuisance problem like raccoons. The bottom line is, though, they are domestic animals that should be pets," she said.

"People love to feed them but that can encourage the growth of a colony."

She said the TNR program has shown it can reduce those numbers