

Please have the following information added to the CPSC agenda. This is provided to assist the committee in determining its recommendation to city Council for a request by Reptilia Zoo for an exemption to the animal control bylaw.

Purpose of This Request

To request CPSC to endorse an exemption to the animal control bylaw.

Background

Reptilia operates the largest year-round indoor reptile zoological garden in Canada. It features a broad range of *reptiles*, as well as some *amphibians* and *arachnids*. *The founding principles of the company are based on education and conservation.* It was established in Vaughan 27 years ago and in 2018 opened a second facility in Whitby.

Existing Reptilia locations attract approximately **350-400,000** visitors annually with the London location expected to surpass the aforementioned because of its 'flagship' size (approx. **30,000 ft.²**) and its proximity to the 401. It is also situated in one of the fastest growing and largest regional catchment areas in Ontario.

London/Reptilia History

Approximately six years ago, both Tourism London and the LEDC vigorously promoted London as the preferred location for Reptilia's next zoological garden. Subsequent objections from animal rights activists; differing administration/landlord bylaw interpretations and Covid related supply and labour challenges have significantly impeded Reptilia's opening plans.

Notwithstanding, construction is almost complete and Reptilia London will open for business in January 2023 subject to the city's assent to the exemption request.

Provincial Welfare Services (PAWS)

Reptilia is *provincially licensed* and is regularly inspected by PAWS. This agency has been mandated by provincial decree to police the welfare of **all Ontario Animals (native and non native)** It also has authority to shut down and impose fines of up to **\$500,000** on all private sector/municipal operators that are negligent in the proper treatment of animals.

PAWS recently inspected Reptilia London and has advised that it is in compliance with provincial regulation.

LICENSING

A CPSC public participation meeting this past April denied Reptilia the showing of non indigenous animals because its provincial license does not provide for their exhibition and therefore the City determined it did not comply with the city's bylaw that forbids the exhibition of non indigenous species. However, the city's bylaw does permit the residence of non indigenous species (section 3.6) with exceptions. It states:

This bylaw does not apply to animals maintained in a public park, zoo, fair, exhibition, or circus, operated or licensed by a municipal or other government body

Subsequent to the CAPS decision, Councillor Van MeerBergen introduced a motion at a full meeting of Council to request that staff be directed to prepare a report outlining potential amendment options to the animal control bylaw so as to accommodate Reptilia. The motion was defeated.

Additionally, City staff filed an information report advising Council that Reptilia intends to operate under a provincial license. They advised that once they are opened and operating, enforcement of the terms and conditions of the license would be the responsibility of the province. However, if there are matters outside of their license, they may be subject to the cities animal control by law.

It is Westmount Mall's and Reptilia's position that because the legislation under which the PAWS Act covers the well-being of animals of all types and of all origins, Reptilia complies with the applicable legislation. Therefore Westmount/Reptilia are of the opinion that the London facility does not require an exemption as it falls within the current exemption provisions of the city bylaw.

If it is determined that Council does not grant an exemption then Westmount/Reptilia will seek a judicial interpretation that could incur considerable cost to all parties and further delay the opening.

Notwithstanding, Reptilia wants to be welcomed and to become part of the fabric of the city of London as they have in other locations. They would greatly appreciate the recognition that being exempted by city Council would bring.

Current City Approvals in Ontario

Vaughan, Whitby, Burlington, and Barrie have all enthusiastically granted exemptions to Reptilia and it is hoped that London will as well.

Tourism and Economic Development

Provincially, encouraging new product development is a strategic priority and London has the opportunity to embrace a signature attraction that will appeal to everyone in all stages of life. This investment will serve to help support the economic and social recovery of the tourism industry, as well as provide a welcomed economic stimulus to a revitalizing Westmount Mall. Reptilia will exponentially serve the public interest by educating present and future generations on the importance of preserving our ecosystems so as to ensure **at risk** animal preservation.

A Quick Synopsis of the Facts

1. A substantial financial investment has been made in state-of-the-art renovations to approximately **30,000 ft.²** of Westmount Mall.
2. Reptilia since its founding in 1996 does not **PURCHASE /SELL** wild caught reptiles. Only **domestically born animals** or **rescues** are exhibited. Most such animals are fully acclimatized to human contact right from birth, and are housed in spacious temperature controlled facilities that closely replicate their natural environments.
3. Approximately **80%** of the reptiles exhibited are either **rescued** or **abandoned** animals. Most sick animals are accepted and are rehabilitated.
4. Reptilia, promulgates and implements, robust, safety, and training protocols. After over 4 million human/reptile encounters since its founding in 1996, there is **zero** history of venomous animal bites, escapes or linked **infections**.

5. In partnership, with the Province of Ontario, Reptilia authored a provincially approved curriculum for grades K-8 as well as curriculum for secondary and post grad education which is updated in lockstep with advances in the current Ontario curriculum.

6. Reptilia provides **free** veterinary style advice for the public, and has collaborated with Guelph university veterinarians on the study of bearded dragons.

7. Reptilia has supplied animals to more than **7,000** elementary and secondary schools, universities and provincial institutions.

8. Reptilia has trained Canada's wildlife officers, Canadian Armed Forces/medical personnel, assigned to overseas deployment and a number of police personnel/forces within the province. First responders and triage units as well as animal control officers and local hospital personnel have been trained to prepare them for potential incidences they may encounter with reptiles.

9. Reptilia has reached out to the UTRCA and invited their participation on the creation of a Thames River Basin native species exhibit. Reptilia is building and designing, at its expense, a habitat appropriate exhibition space and hatchery. It will feature "at risk" species such as the **Spiny Soft Shell** and **Spotted Turtle** and the **Queen** and **Eastern Hognose** snakes.

Reptilia's community outreach programs are extensive and its foundation tries to never decline legitimate requests for support. Petitions by registered charities for passes and other items dependent on the needs of their event are never refused.

In Conclusion

- Reptilia was delighted when London approached it and asked that it join the community. Each municipality that they have considered and invested in has done the same.
- Reptilia, which has been profitable since its inception in 1996 operates without government funding. It has become an active community member in each location that it serves.
- Reptilia embraces science and supports species conservation/education. It provides a sanctuary for **at risk** animals.
- Reptilia will significantly affect the awareness of animal welfare and help ameliorate preservation efforts in the London region as it has for years in other regions throughout Ontario.
- As a regional tourism attraction, Reptilia will stimulate significant visitations and spending within the City of London.