

Bear Aware

Bylaw Committees – Where Do I Start?

Objective: The objective of your committee is to review various bylaws from other communities and draft a bylaw (s) appropriate for your community. This draft bylaw is a recommendation to your city/ town council.

Who is on Your Committee?

- The Bear Aware/Bear Smart Program Delivery Specialist
- One or more City Councillors
- One or more Regional District Representatives
- A Conservation Officer (at least included on the email list and given access to the minutes)
- An RCMP officer (as above with the CO)
- City or Regional District officials or staff who might be interested in contributing – bylaw officers, city planners (others?) – at least consult with these people.
- Bear Aware volunteers.
- Anyone else?
- Make sure your volunteers are committed to turning up to every meeting. They will be contributing to Bear Aware’s image in the community. They will be a vital part of making the process work – use their skills and experience.

How to start:

- Does your community have a garbage bylaw that addresses wildlife attractants; bear proof containers; garbage accumulations; etc., (see the accompanying “synopses of community bylaws)? If so, is it adequate? Is it enforced?
- Is there a bylaw in place that could be amended to reduce the availability of bear attractants in the community?
- Has a previous program delivery specialist or committee addressed the issue previously? Check with them and their files.
- Write a letter to Council and the Regional District. In this letter you will ask to speak to them on a certain date. Outline briefly the problem: the number of bears killed; the specific problem in your community (give numbers of garbage bags out overnight before garbage collection for instance); the lack of a bylaw and how a bylaw could alleviate the situation. Cite communities that have a bylaw (see above) and emphasize that your community needs to write a bylaw that addresses the specific needs of the community. State that Bear Aware is forming a committee to review bylaws from other communities with a view to coming up with a recommended draft bylaw (s) suitable to your community. This committee will then present this draft bylaw to city council. Indicate whom you want on the committee (i.e., councillors, regional district people, Conservation Officers, bylaw officers, RCMP and bear aware members). Then ask that the city appoint a member to this committee. Do this with the Regional District as well. Before mailing the letter, complete the next step: send it to councillors who might support your initiative.

- Approach a member(s) of council and the regional district with the letter you will present to council and the regional district. Arrange a meeting to discuss the issue with this person. But even if you can only contact them by telephone or letter-give them a copy of the letter you intend to send to council and ask them to support your initiative and to volunteer for the committee. Get their comments and their support before you mail the letter to council.
- Approach everyone you want on your committee.
- Set up a time for your first meeting.

At the meeting with council:

- bring lots of supporters
- make your presentation brief, but elaborate on the themes you presented in the letter you sent.
- Be prepared for questions! Some questions will be supportive and to the point (you made sure of that by approaching councillors first). Some questions may be argumentative and way out in left field. Either way, stay calm, take time to think and don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer, but you will get back to the councillor with an answer (if appropriate). You might end up dealing with issues that are political (i.e., who is responsible, the city or the regional district; downloading by the province or some unique local issue). Do your homework and be aware of political issues. But don't let the discussion get sidetracked from the main issue: bears are being killed as safety risks due to garbage in your community – garbage is a municipal responsibility and here is a potential solution – the city can only win by supporting the committee.

After the meeting with council:

- Perhaps council will appoint a staff member to research the possibility of creating and enacting a bylaw (or amending a current bylaw). You may then not have to create a bylaw committee. Follow up with the staff member to offer assistance and to stay in touch with the progress of the bylaw.

At your first bylaw committee meeting:

- Make the objectives of the whole initiative clear (above): The objective of your committee is to review various bylaws from other communities and draft a bylaw (s) or bylaw amendment appropriate for your community. This draft bylaw is a recommendation to your city/ town council or Regional District.
- Make sure a committee member is responsible for the minutes and that the minutes are distributed to everyone before the next meeting. The minutes should be a complete record of what happens: a synopsis of what is decided, what is discussed and who agrees to do what for the next meeting. Distribution by email works well. City Council should be included in the minutes of the meeting, when appropriate (check with the city clerk). - For instance, when you draw up your schedule of deadlines and when you complete your first draft.
- Have a timeline of what you would like to accomplish. When is it appropriate to bring your recommended bylaw to council?

Working in the Community:

- Use the media to let the public know about your bylaw committee
- Some have effectively used surveys to show community support for a bear attractant bylaw
- Be innovative in your approach to getting public support for a bylaw.

Your document will be a unique product of your committee. Refer to the document submitted to the Rossland City Council by the Rossland Bylaw Committee - as an example. We documented the problem; gave the bylaw; recommended a communal garbage system be adopted; recommended City Hall educate people and we included some educational materials as an example. Your document will be different, but use as many examples as you can get to create a community specific bylaw (s).

At the beginning of each subsequent meeting know the details of what you would like to accomplish: i.e., discuss what “bear proof” means using examples from other communities; start drafting the bylaw; or draw up/ amend your schedule of what you need to accomplish by specific deadlines.

At the city council meeting when you present your draft bylaw recommendation:

- Remember they have been given pertinent meeting minutes. Hopefully they have read them. Give a brief synopsis of your objectives and the problem.
- Concentrate on selling your bylaw. They have had your package and no doubt have an opinion. Make them think. Mention that garbage is a municipal responsibility; how many bears are killed; the safety risk to people; the work of your committee. You’ve worked hard and are committed to this draft – let them know it!
- Perhaps you conducted a community survey that shows public support for your bylaw- use those results when talking to council.
- Be patient. City staff will take your document, change the words and ask your opinion.
- Then council may pass it.
- Then it goes through three readings before it is made law.
- Now your community must accept the changes – be part of the education process before the bylaw is passed and as it becomes law. Let people know that there is a human-bear issue in the community and that the bylaw is designed to alleviate the bear-human conflict.

Words of wisdom: Your experience may not reflect what is written here. This is your community and your committee. Councils and committees are different across B.C. Listen to the community and listen to your committee. Facilitate what they want. Give direction, provide information and materials and mediate meetings, but give people the freedom to make the bylaw and the initiative their own. Maybe you will be the one to write up the bylaw initially and then have the committee reconstruct the document with editing and revising – it is all part of the process. And hopefully you will sit back at some point and realize that your hard work has paid off. Even if you couldn’t have predicted just how it would all come about.