

Report from Transportation and Environmental Services, Environmental Services

Date of Report: October 25, 2017

Date of Meeting: November 8, 2017

Report Number: TES-B049-2017

File: 60.2.99

Subject: Pest Control Activities

Recommendation

That the Budget Standing Committee receive this report for information.

Summary

At its meeting of August 24, 2017, the Budget Steering Committee directed staff to report on the costs, feasibility of a Pro Active Pest Control in the amount of \$10,000 to be added to the budget.

Background

Staff have previously reported to Council regarding rats. At its meeting of September 12, 2016, Council received a report on Urban Wildlife (Rats) for information purposes (attached as Appendix 1). The report outlined the actions that City Staff and Public Health Department do with respect to rat control.

Report

Typically the City will retain pest control companies to address rats in two circumstances. First if rats are seen in City-owned buildings. Second if rats are seen entering or exiting sanitary sewers. In both of these situations pest control is done in response to a rat sighting (i.e. not pro-actively).

Rat control in City-owned buildings (e.g. works yard, fire stations, community centres etc.) is fairly straight forward. When rats are observed a pest control company is called. The actual control strategies vary depending on the individual circumstances. The cost of the pest control is charged to the appropriate building account.

Rat control in sanitary sewers is also done by pest control companies who bait the sewers with a wax-coated pesticide (i.e. rat poison). The bait is placed into manholes where the rats were observed. City staff are required to assist the pest control companies for this process (e.g. safely opening manholes, traffic control etc.). Baiting the sewers is done on a case by case basis as requested by either Public Health or City staff after they have investigated the complaint. It makes sense to bait the sewers only when it will be effective in reducing the rat population and it is only effective when the

rats are actually living in the sewers. Typically, sewers are not the rats preferred habitat. When rats are living in a ravine or other natural area baiting the sewers will not be effective.

Due to the toxic nature of the pesticide it cannot be used in areas other than the sanitary sewer (e.g. storm sewers, ravines or natural areas).

The 2017 budget amount for pest control in manholes is \$3,000. As of the end of September \$1,200 has been charged to this account. The average annual cost for the last five years is \$2,400. The amounts vary significantly from year to year with a low of \$90 (2012) to a high of \$4,400 (2016). It should be noted that these costs are charged to the wastewater budget and not the operating budget.

Staff do not feel that the budgeted amount is an impediment to baiting sewers. The amount of baiting required depends on the amount of rat sightings in the sewers. Baiting sewers where rats have not been seen is not likely to be effective.

The presence of rats on a resident's property can be a source of frustration. However, as previously reported to Council the most effective method managing this problem is for private property owners to ensure their property is free of potential food sources and habitat. Rats are part of any urban area and it is not possible to eliminate them.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

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Corporate Report

Report from Planning and Building Services, Building and Development

Date of Report: August 31, 2016

Date of Meeting: September 12, 2016

Report Number: PBS-255-2016

File: 60.2.99

Subject: Urban Wildlife (Rats)

Recommendation

That Council receive the report on Urban Wildlife (Rats) for information purposes.
FORTHWITH

Summary

At its meeting of July 11, 2016, Councillor Elliott, requested “that staff be directed to report on what residents can do to discourage rats on their property and who residents should contact at the City; and that staff report on what the City is doing about the rat issue.”

Urban wildlife are animals that live in cities and towns but are not pets or farm animals. Urban wildlife includes rodents, pigeons, raccoons, skunks, squirrels, foxes, coyotes, rabbits, bats and opossums. The geography of the Niagara Peninsula with easy access to water through its many lake, ponds, rivers and streams, abundant food sources and ample trees, bushes and other greenery used for shelter, makes it an inviting environment for urban wildlife. While Niagara may make an attractive home for these creatures, they are unwelcome by most residents.

Rats are common in urban areas such as St. Catharines. The risk of rats spreading disease is low, but they can cause damage to homes and property. While rats generally avoid contact with humans, they will enter a property to seek food, water and shelter. A coordinated effort between staff from Niagara Region Public Health (Public Health) and the City of St. Catharines, such as Citizens First, Lake Street staff, Communications and By-law enforcement staff has resulted in an improved assessment, monitoring and educational approach to dealing with this common urban pest. When residents contact the City with rat complaints or rat sightings each one is being recorded and logged. By-law officers attend the site to determine if there are any signs of rats present and enforce the by-laws for infractions on waste, long grass and weeds, maintaining buildings (no openings for rats/pests to enter), cleaning up wood piles, etc. Open composts are also not permitted.

By-law staff actively educate people on what are considered food and water sources for rats, as well as shelter areas. They will burrow within 30 meters (100 feet) of a food source such as bird feeders, gardens, composts, fallen fruit from trees and even dog

feces. Residents should avoid putting meat and dairy products in their composts and ensure that both the composts and their garbage is closed and secure. Water sources should also be removed where possible such as water fountains, bird baths or open containers that can hold water.

City staff will continue to monitor the issue and follow up on complaints from residents. Rats are part of any urban area and it is not possible to eliminate them. However, working with residents and other stakeholders the size of the rat population in the city can be managed. Communications staff has developed a new pamphlet (Appendix 1) that is handed out by City staff to help educate the public on how to control rats on their property. This information has also been added to the City's website.

Background

On May 16, 2016, the City received a complaint suggesting that the demolition activity at the former GM site on Ontario Street was causing the displacement of rats into the nearby neighbourhood. Staff contacted Bayshore (the developer for this property) and requested they engage the services of a pest control company to assess and take any mitigating measures that may be necessary. Bayshore were compliant with this request. Additionally, the City baited the sewers in this area as a precaution.

On May 19, 2016, an article was published by the St. Catharines Standard, drawing further attention to this specific complaint and suggesting that people need to let the City of St. Catharines and the Region of Niagara know if they see rats so that a database can be collected to map the extent of the problem. Coincidentally, on this same date, City staff had updated the City's website to provide more detailed information on how to manage rats, and also met with the Public Health staff to discuss the apparent displacement of rats from the GM site. At this meeting it was identified that there was an increase in rat complaints not only in St. Catharines but across the Region. This meeting initiated an improved coordination with Public Health to ensure we are working together on this issue. City staff have taken the necessary steps to revise its processes for receiving and addressing rat complaints, including sharing the information with Public Health.

Report

Rats are common in urban areas such as St. Catharines. A coordinated effort between staff from Public Health and the City of St. Catharines, such as Citizens First, Lake Street staff, and By-law enforcement staff has resulted in an improved assessment, monitoring and educational approach to dealing with this common urban pest. When residents contact the City with rat complaints or rat sightings each one is being recorded and logged. By-law officers attend the site to determine if there are any signs of rats present and enforce the by-laws for infractions on waste, long grass and weeds, maintaining buildings (no openings for rats/pests to enter), cleaning up wood piles, etc. Open composts are not permitted.

By-law staff actively educate people on what are considered to be food and water sources for rats, as well as shelter areas. They will burrow within 30 meters (100 feet) of a food source such as bird feeders, gardens, composts, fallen fruit from trees and even

dog feces. Residents should avoid putting meat and dairy products in their composts and ensure that both the composts and their garbage is closed and secure. Water sources should also be removed where possible such as water fountains, bird baths or open containers that can hold water.

Rats aren't just a problem for one resident but the neighbourhood. Neighbours need to work together to control rats and keep them off their properties and out of their homes. Bird feeders are permitted in St. Catharines. There is no by-law prohibiting them. Because they are a great food source for rats and other rodents, by-law staff will advise people to remove the bird feeder when they are responding to a complaint in regard to rats in the area. Fruit and vegetable gardens can also be a major food source for rats. Staff have informed many home owners about these potential food sources and some have made the decision to take out their gardens.

Public Health staff also provide public education and site visits and recommends to the neighbourhood what needs to change to discourage a rat infestation. Many different provincial health departments are overwhelmed with the amount of rat sightings throughout the province. City staff have recently met with Public Health officials and they have confirmed that rats are not a public health concern unless an infestation is inside the home. Rats are a presence in most geographical areas where watercourses and waterways are in abundance. There is no way to eliminate them completely from urban areas.

Private property owners need to be diligent in maintaining their properties to ensure that they are free of any waste and potential food sources in addition to ensuring there are no rat habitats or burrows on their property, such as under porches and sheds. Private property owners should also be making the effort through baiting of their own properties to try and eliminate any rat infestations. These steps along with being pro-active in deterring rats from residential properties is imperative to ensure pest control. Should the resident need assistance to control rats on their property, they are encouraged to call a licensed pest control expert to confirm the presence of rodents (including rats), and recommend actions to eliminate the rodents from that properties and surrounding properties.

Since mid-May of this year, City staff have been tracking the complaints received related to rats. City staff have also consulted with Public Health to determine if there is any pattern to the complaints. The data collected between the City and Region indicated that there were rat sightings throughout the City and not concentrated in one particular area. The number of complaints increased dramatically following the article in the Standard in May. The City received 66 complaints related to rats in June, 24 complaints in July, and 18 complaints in August. In each case, staff have responded and provided awareness to the neighbourhood on controlling rats in their area.

The City will continue to bait the sewers when it is appropriate to do so. The sewer baiting is being done on a case by case basis as requested by either Public Health or City staff after they have investigated the complaint. It makes sense to bait the sewers only when it will be effective in reducing the rat population. Baiting the sewers is only effective when the rats are actually living in the sewers. Typically, sewers are not the

rats preferred habitat. When rats are living in a ravine or other natural area baiting the sewers will not be effective. As well, as long as there are existing food sources in the area to attract rats they will be present (e.g. garbage, bird feeders, fruit trees etc.).

Baiting of sewers involves a pest management company placing pellets onto the benching of a manhole. The pellets have to remain on the benching until the rats eat them. Unlike larvicides (e.g. those used for mosquito control) the pellets cannot be put into water. Therefore, catch basins cannot be baited directly; only the main sewers can be baited.

The City is also reviewing its development approvals process to include Pest Management Plans as a condition of development where appropriate. Where construction will take place in long standing open fields or brownfield development (including demolition) there is potential to disturb a colony of rats and displace them to neighbouring properties. A Pest Management Plan will identify any issues in advance to ensure mitigating measures are taken to control the rat population rather than simply displace them.

Financial Implications

New Pamphlets were created to be handed out to residents as required. The printing cost for these pamphlets is \$11.19 per 100 pamphlets which will be charged to the By-law and Property Standards area as required.

Relationship to Strategic Plan

The information in this report support the Social Sustainability goals of:

- Striving for the highest quality of life for all citizens
- Connecting people, places and neighbourhoods

Conclusion


City staff will continue to monitor the issue and following up with complaints from residents. Rats are part of any urban area and it is not possible to eliminate them. However, working with residents and other stakeholders the size of the rat population in the city can be managed. Communications staff has developed a new pamphlet (Appendix 1) that is handed out by City staff to help educate the public on how to control rats on their property. This information has also been added to the City's website.

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Rat-proof your neighbourhood





Rats thrive in urban areas where there is easy access to food, water and shelter. So it's possible to spot rats in your neighbourhood, even if they aren't in your home.

Rats tend to stay within 30 metres (100 ft.) of their burrow or shelter. This means that rats in an urban area aren't just a problem for the one resident who sees a rat in their yard. That's why it's important for neighbours to work together.

Talk to your neighbours about changes to ensure the area is less inviting to rats.

- ☐ Remove garbage and debris kept in sheds and on properties.
- ☐ Cut tall grass and weeds.
- ☐ Raise woodpiles about 30 cm (1 ft) off the ground
- ☐ Clean up dog feces in yards, as this is a food source for rats.
- ☐ Stop feeding birds or other wild animals as this provides an easy food source for rats.
- ☐ Empty bird baths.
- ☐ Feed dogs and other pets inside.

When to call the City





-  Rats are seen entering or exiting a City sewer.
-  Rats are seen in a home's toilet.
-  Rats are seen entering a neighbour's home.
-  A neighbour's home is in disrepair or has garbage and debris on the property which could provide rats shelter.

Call the City of St. Catharines at 905.688.5600.

If you are a tenant and you suspect the unit you are renting has a rodent problem contact your landlord.

When to call a licenced pest control contractor.

A licenced pest control contractor can confirm the presence of rodents, identify what type and recommend actions to rid your home of the unwanted pests.

-  Rats are seen in your home.
-  Rodent droppings or urine are found in your home.
-  Burrows or holes are found around your home's foundation walls.
-  You have a rat infestation you cannot control on your own.



Urban
Wildlife
RATS

Urban wildlife

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The geography of the Niagara peninsula with easy access to water through its many lake, ponds, rivers and streams, abundant food sources and ample trees, bushes and other greenery used for shelter, makes it an inviting environment for urban wildlife.

While Niagara may make an attractive home for these creatures, they are unwelcome by most residents.

Rats are common in urban areas such as St. Catharines. The risk of rats spreading disease is low, but they can cause damage to homes and property. While rats generally avoid contact with humans, they will enter your home to seek food, water and shelter if given the chance.

Rats can squeeze through cracks as small as a quarter, so it's important to close up any cracks or gaps which can be used to enter your home.



Rodent proof your home

- ☐ Close up easy entry points into your home, such as cracks in walls and foundations.
- ☐ Cover dryer vents, attic vents and soffits with mesh metal screening.
- ☐ Use metal weather stripping under doors and weather strip windows.

Make your house less attractive to rats

- ☐ Remove clutter from inside and outside your house and garage.
- ☐ Cut tall grass and weeds.
- ☐ Secure garbage in containers with tight-fitting lids.
- ☐ Keep fatty or oily food waste, eggs, or milk products out of composters.

Eliminate rats from your home

Hardware stores sell traps and pesticides which can help homeowners eliminate rats. It is important to always use caution when using these devices. Always follow the manufacturers guidelines to prevent accidental contact with people and pets and use products specifically designed for rats.

Traps should be set away from children and animals. Traps should be reset in three to four weeks to catch maturing rats.



Source: Health Canada Pest Management Regulatory Agency

How to use this brochure

This pamphlet provides tips on keeping rats and other rodents out of your home, and when to contact the City or a licenced pest control expert.