

To: Budget Standing Committee

Cc: CAO Chemnitz, Senior Leadership Team

From: Tami Kitay, Director of Planning and Building Services

Date: November 18, 2019

Subject: Residential Rat Rebate Pilot Program

Background

On March 19, 2018, General Committee passed a resolution that Council forwarded to the Budget Standing Committee directing that a Residential Rat Rebate Program with a budget allocation of \$20,000 be commenced as a pilot project.

On April 16, 2018, BSC approved the pilot Program and directed that the Program be available starting May 1, 2018. Further, that a line item for the Program be included in the 2019 Operating Budget submission and that staff be directed to prepare a report, at the time of the 2019 Operating Budget submission, on the results of the program.

In response to the above direction from BSC, the Planning and Building Services department (PBS) advised BSC through a memo dated November 20, 2018 that a line item has been included in the PBS 2019 budget submission for the Program for an amount of \$10,000. The memo reported on the success of the Program by providing statistics on the number of rebates approved and the amount paid out for the period up to the date of the memo.

On November 22, 2018, BSC approved the 2019 Program with a budget of \$20,000 and on December 17, 2018, the proposed 2019 Operating Budget was approved by Council, thereby extending the Program till the end of 2019, when it is scheduled to come to an end.

Report

The purpose of the Residential Rat Rebate Program was to assist City residents with a financial assistance of up to \$200, once per year, to cover the cost related to the hiring of a rat extermination service provider. The rebate was meant to apply to 50% of the cost of services and did not cover pest control products purchased by the property owner. Staff have estimated that the average cost of extermination services is approximately \$250 for an average residential property, based on the documents submitted with the rebate applications in 2019.

The Residential Rat Rebate Program administration was absorbed by existing PBS resources as additional resources were not supplied to support the program.

Program Administration Process

The typical process followed in the administration of the Program is as follows:

- Upon receiving inquiry/complaint of a rat problem from a property owner, staff provide guidance on the available rat rebate program, including the process, application forms, and submission process.
- Upon receiving a formal application from a property owner, a By-law Enforcement Officer visits the property for an assessment. Once they make the determination that the application is acceptable and the property meets the eligibility criteria of the program, the property owner is advised to procure rat extermination services.
- The final step is for the property owner to submit the necessary paperwork for receiving the rebate including proof of payment, which is then processed by staff.

Program Statistics and Analysis

The following table provides statistics related to the Program:

Item	2018	2019*
Number of Rebate Applications Received	268	119
Number of Rebates handed out**	175	72
Money Disbursed	\$16,300	\$12,075

* Till the end of October, 2019

**The difference between the number of applications received and the number of rebates awarded was because of the following reasons:

- In some cases, By-law Enforcement Officers determined that the applications were not valid as the properties were not being appropriately maintained, such as the presence of significant quantity of waste on the property, etc.
- All paperwork in support of the rebate application were not received. It is also assumed that in some cases, the applicants may have decided not to engage a rat extermination service provider.

As noted in the above table, 268 applications for the rebate were received in 2018, while as of October 2019, the number is 119. This represents a reduction of 44%, with two months remaining. The number of property owners applying for rat rebate in itself is

very small compared to the City's overall number of residential properties. There are currently approximately 36,000 properties in St. Catharines that are classified as low density residential (i.e., houses, semi-detached houses, townhomes, etc.). 268 applications in 2018 and 119 so far in 2019 represents just about 1% of the total low rise residential properties in the City. In addition, only one repeat application for rebate was received in 2019 when compared to 2018.

PBS has delivered the Program services utilizing its existing resources. Staff from PBS spent a substantial amount of time to administer the program including addressing inquiries, processing rebate applications, and going out for site visits. Overall, it is estimated that staff will spend approx. 750 hours from the inception of the program, i.e., May 1, 2018 till its scheduled closure, i.e., December 2019. The resources needed to run the pilot Program has created pressure on the delivery of the City's core By-law services, i.e., property standards, waste, grass and weeds, etc. as the By-law Section of PBS that is responsible for By-law services is also responsible for the administration of the Program.

Other Considerations

In addition to the above considerations, the following two items are also of importance in understanding the other rat mitigation measures currently available and independent of the status of the Program:

Building Demolition Permits

Demolition of buildings typically require a building permit under the Building Code Act. The Building Division of PBS issues demolition permits that meets the requirements of the Building Code and its applicable laws. As part of the approval process, Building Division staff also ask for a rat abatement plan from the permit applicants. This ensures that the developer undertaking demolition of buildings considers the presence of rats on the property/building and applies mitigation measures to prevent rat infestation of neighbouring properties. Staff are of the opinion that asking for such measures during demolition of buildings can assist with rat control in surrounding neighbourhoods.

Baiting of Sewers

The Municipal Works department of the City oversees a complaint based response process for baiting of public sewers through approved contractors. The typical conditions under which a complaint may be investigated by staff from Municipal Works is when:

- Rats are seen entering/exiting a sewer/catch basin/manhole
- Rats are coming up through a public toilet
- Requested by Public Health

Baiting of sewers is done on a case by case basis as determined by Municipal Works staff, to ensure that resources are optimally used.

Financial Implications

If Council decides to bring the program to its scheduled closure at the end of 2019, there will be a reduction of \$20,000 from the operational budget that can be used to offset other Council and strategic priorities. Additionally, as noted earlier, the significant amount of time being spent by the City's By-law Enforcement staff to administer the program can be best served to deliver and strengthen the City's core By-law Enforcement services, such as property standards, waste, long grass and weeds, etc.

Conclusion

While the presence of rats on a property can be a source of frustration, the most effective method of managing them is for the property owners to ensure that the property is free of potential food sources and habitat. Rats are part of any urban area and it is not possible to eliminate them. Existing measures such as rat abatement plan for buildings undergoing demolition can assist in controlling rats and protecting neighbourhoods. For 2020, PBS staff can work with Communications staff in preparing an educational program for property owners on how to prevent rat activity on their properties.