
REPORT TITLE: Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program Update

FROM: Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That the Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program end; and**
- 2. That any future rat concerns from residents and businesses be addressed by the Region of Peel in the same manner it does for other pests, as described in the report of the Commissioner of Public Works, listed on the February 23, 2023 Regional Council agenda titled “Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program Update”, be approved.**

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Community concerns over increased rat activity within neighbourhoods were raised at the September 10, 2020, Regional Council meeting. Following the delegation, Regional Council passed Resolution 2020-704 that directed Public Works staff to report back to Council with recommendations detailing a rat control program.
 - On October 8, 2020, Council passed Resolution 2020-812 approving a 12-month residential Rat Control Rebate Pilot Program and a rodent abatement program on construction sites.
 - The Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program was launched in March 2021.
 - On March 24, 2022, staff returned to Council with a recommendation to end the subsidy portion of the program due to the low uptake and to instead focus on rat prevention education. Council rejected the recommendation and approved a motion under Resolution 2022-193 approving the extension of the residential Rat Control Rebate Pilot Program until November 30, 2022.
 - Despite extending the pilot program and enhancing communication efforts, uptake in the subsidy continued to be low with 505 applicants, which is less than 50 per cent of the expected uptake for the year.
 - Based on the pilot program findings, delivery of a residential rat control subsidy is resource intensive costing \$327,800 in 2022.
 - Staff recommend that Regional Council end the Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program and instead align efforts with Public Health’s existing work on pests.
 - Peel Public Health provides education, based on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles, to homeowners to address rat sightings.
 - Proactive pest control measures have been implemented as standard practice on all Regional construction projects.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

Rats are common pests in the urban environment and while rats may carry ticks, fleas, and spread diseases, the risk of disease transmission in the community in Peel is very low. Community concerns over increased rat sightings within neighbourhoods were raised during a delegation at the September 10, 2020, Regional Council meeting. Following the delegation, Regional Council directed staff to outline a rat control program to address community concerns over increased rat activity within neighbourhoods (Resolution 2020-704). The Region on average only receives 140 rat related complaints annually. These call volumes are low.

The Pest Control Subsidy Framework and Study report was presented back to Council on October 8, 2020, which included financial feasibility, a jurisdictional scan, and information on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and subsidy options. IPM is an education-based approach recommended by an industry expert and focuses on controlling rat populations naturally, with limited chemical intervention, through elimination of sources of food, water and shelter. IPM is proven to be the most effective way to control rat populations over time. After discussion and the addition of modifications, Resolution 2020-812 was passed and the Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program leveraging IPM and rodent abatement program on construction sites began.

The Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program (pilot program) was implemented from March 22, 2021, to March 30, 2022 for rat abatement services on residential detached, semi-detached, duplex, or triplex properties. Under the pilot program, eligible residents could receive a subsidy of 50 per cent of the total cost, up to a maximum of \$200 per year, for exterior rat control services performed by a Region of Peel approved vendor. Approved vendors were selected through a competitive Request for Tender (RFT) process, and were required to follow an IPM approach, which included an inspection process, resident education, and the elimination of site-specific sources of food, water, and shelter for the rats. As a quality control measure, Region staff performed random site inspections. In addition, education and outreach materials focusing on proactive rat control measures and information about the subsidy program were given to the participating properties and surrounding homes.

In 2021, there were 330 approved subsidy applications, which was far below Council's expectation of 1,125 applications (or 29 per cent of the total). During this period, proactive pest control measures were also implemented at over 30 Regional water and wastewater construction projects. A pest control specification was developed and expanded pest control services to all Regional construction projects. This specification calls for proactive pest control measures, including preconstruction site assessments, daily site cleanup, daily waste disposal, baits and traps and weekly site inspections, on all active Regional construction projects. Region staff work with the onsite construction contractor to ensure these measures are performed.

At the conclusion of the pilot program, staff returned to Council with a recommendation to end the subsidy portion of the program due to the low uptake and to instead focus on rat prevention education following IPM principles and continued rat abatement at Regional construction sites. At the March 24, 2022, Council meeting, community awareness of the subsidy was questioned and feedback focused on the possibility that COVID-19 may have posed as a distraction to resident participation, and that there was a need to leverage more traditional communication methods, such as signage in communities. Council members also provided suggestions on additional communication tactics that could better reach their constituents. Council approved a

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motion under Resolution 2022-193, to extend the pilot program to November 30, 2022, to allow for more time to enhance community awareness and better evaluate subsidy demand.

2. Program Update

a) Education

With the extension of the subsidy program in 2022, the education component of the program continued and maintained a strong focus on controlling rat populations naturally by following IPM principles. This education aligns and complements Peel Public Health and local municipal messages that discourage feeding wildlife.

Additional educational efforts were made in 2022 to better support multi-residential properties and businesses across Peel. Rat prevention guides and tenant education materials were developed with the support of rat control experts and distributed to every multi-residential property and business in Peel.

b) Communications

Based on the feedback from the March 24, 2022, Council meeting, the 2022 communications budget was doubled, and a more diverse suite of tactics were deployed. Table 1 summarizes the implemented communication tactics and their reach.

Table 1- Communications Tactics and Reach Metrics from March 30, 2022, to November 30, 2022

Media	Tactic	Reach Metric
Print	Local newspaper advertisements: Brampton Guardian and Mississauga News	291,000 newspapers
	Water bill insert	287,000 homes
	Educational flyer delivered door to door	3,883 homes
	Website (includes a translate feature on the website to allow info to be read in other languages)	20,655 page visits
Online	Connect 2 Peel e-newsletter	171,400 subscribers 154,000 total opens 10,555 total link clicks
	Social media – Twitter, Instagram, Facebook	571,354 impressions 231 engagements 1,524 link clicks
	Online advertising – social media platforms & Google Ads	2,207,494 impressions 22,892 link clicks 142,145 video thruplays
*New in 2022	*Bridge and billboard signs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 displays for 4 weeks 	Played 84,000 times
	*Roadside mobile signs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 sign per ward for 4 weeks 	Approximately 37% of travelers view signs
	*Digital screens <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional and city buildings (City halls, community centres, Celebration Square, Garden Square) 	75 locations
	*Bus backs (Brampton) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 busses for 4 weeks 	10,366,000 impressions
	*Bus sides (Mississauga) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 busses for 8 weeks 	
	*Business rat prevention guide mailout	33,474 businesses
*Multi-residential rat prevention guide mailout and e-newsletter	591 multi-residential buildings	

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The reach metrics suggest that residents interested in rat control would have heard about the program during key times of the year when rats are most active. The communication tactics delivered across the community for 2022 were significantly more extensive than would typically be developed for a Region pilot program.

c) Community Awareness and Demand for Subsidy

The pilot program was carefully monitored to assess performance, community awareness, and subsidy demand. Monitoring included recording general program feedback from the community, website views, application downloads, mapping the location of concerns and applications, and collecting participant feedback through ongoing surveys. These findings are described below and were used to inform recommendations.

Despite the extensive communication and advertising tactics deployed, participation in the pilot program remained low with 505 approved applications, which is still less than 50 per cent of Council's expectations (1,125 residents). Although participation was lower than expected, community awareness of the subsidy was high. Doubling the communications efforts to deploy a more diversified campaign that leveraged traditional and digital communications channels was successful in dramatically increasing web traffic. In 2022, 20,655 web page visits to the program page were measured, doubling 2021 results (10,908 visits).

Participant feedback survey results showed that 95 per cent of participants found it easy to find information on the website and many residents heard about the pilot program through online advertising and roadside signs. This, combined with the extensive reach of the communications tactics used, suggests that the low program uptake was not a result of residents being unaware of the program.

d) Program Monitoring and Participant Feedback

Pilot program participation and inquiries about rats were continuously monitored and mapped to identify any geographic trends. Over the course of the pilot program, this monitoring did not identify any neighbourhood hot spots for rat activity. Although no hot spots were identified, neighbourhoods with the highest program uptake in 2022 (see Appendix I for program participation by ward) were targeted with additional rat prevention education. The goal of this outreach was to shift resident behaviours that may contribute to creating rat habitats and to improve awareness about the support available through the subsidy program.

To gather feedback and monitor resident satisfaction, program participants were provided an online survey asking about overall program satisfaction, vendor performance, rat prevention knowledge, and communications. Survey feedback indicated that the low participation was not reflective of the quality of the service provided. In 2022, 196 surveys were completed, with 80 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction with the overall program. In addition, 89 per cent of respondents found it helpful to have an approved vendor and found the average cost of service (\$173) to be reasonable. The survey also asked residents about their knowledge of rat prevention. Only 52 per cent of respondents indicated that they had knowledge of how to prevent rat infestations on their property before participating in the subsidy program. This number increased to 80 per cent after pilot program participation. This transfer of

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knowledge demonstrates the value of education in proactively deterring rats. These survey results validate that the program met residents' expectations and the program design was not a deterrent to participation.

e) Program Cost

Table 2 - Program Annual Operational Costs 2022

Program Annual Operational Costs 2022	
Staffing (2.0 FTE)	\$215,000
Communications, promotion, and education materials	\$65,100
Subsidy Payments	\$47,700
Total Operational Cost*	\$ 327,800

*Funded from Internal Reserves

Based on these findings, delivery of an education and subsidy program is resource intensive.

3. Proposed Direction

Based on the low risk of disease transmission, uptake on the subsidy program and low rat related complaints, staff recommend ending the subsidy component of the program and instead align efforts with Public Health's existing work on pests. Public Health will continue to support the community and investigate reports of rats and provide education. In responding to rat complaints on private property, a public health inspector will continue to discuss the issue with the resident, assess the level of risk, and may conduct a site visit during which both the property of concern and surrounding properties are examined and provided with education and advice. The education is focused on preventing rats, including removing food sources and shelter. If necessary, the inspector will refer the property to local municipal property standards/bylaw enforcement personnel. However, Public Health cannot provide pest control services.

Public Health also inspects and enforces the pest control provisions of the Ontario Food Premises Regulation (O. Reg 493/17). This requires food premises to ensure that their properties are sanitary and have pest control. This helps manage rat levels in surrounding residential areas. By leveraging existing resources within Public Health, it eliminates the need for incremental investment to support the low volume of reported rat activity.

The Region has also developed extensive online and print resources that align with IPM best practices and focus on providing residents, multi-residential properties, and businesses with the knowledge to prevent rats in their community. These resources will continue to be available to the community in the absence of the subsidy. Rat abatement at Regional construction sites and facilities will also continue as standard practice.

Transitioning the Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program to align with current Public Health pest programs including inspections and regular monitoring of rat complaints, ongoing rat abatement at construction sites and leveraging local municipal property standards and animal control is expected to address community needs. It should also be noted that no subsidy program exists for controlling other pests or wildlife in the Region. The subsidy pilot was funded

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through a reserve withdraw, therefore ending the program will not impact the net Operating budget.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

The overall reputational risk to the Region from ending the Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program is low given the demonstrated low community demand and minimal program uptake. This risk will be mitigated by continuing to provide education on rat prevention through existing programs and ongoing assessment of community needs. If the impact of rats in the community is later demonstrated to be larger than the current data demonstrates, staff will re-evaluate the need for a subsidy program.

CONCLUSION

The Region implemented the Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program from March 22, 2021 to November 30, 2022. This program included a subsidy, education, outreach, enhanced communication efforts, monitoring of complaints and inquiries, and implementation of construction abatement across Regional construction sites. The pilot program findings conclude that despite extending the pilot program and enhancing communication efforts, uptake for the subsidy remained low. Based on these findings, staff recommend that Regional Council end the Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program and align education efforts with existing pest prevention programming.

APPENDICES

Appendix I – Applications Processed by Ward (2021-2022)



Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

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