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**REPORT TITLE: Residential Rat Control Pilot Program Update**

**FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services  
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## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1. That the Peel Region residential rat control subsidy program end on February 29, 2024; and**
- 2. That the additional costs of \$21,000 for running the program to February 29, 2024 be funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve; and**
- 3. That Peel Health share residential rat control program information and lessons learned with the local municipalities.**

## **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Despite increased community awareness in 2023, uptake of the residential rat subsidy component has been less than anticipated over the three-year pilot program period and declined in 2023 compared to the previous year. The number of approved subsidies was 331 in 2021, 518 in 2022, and 341 as of December 31, 2023.
  - An environmental scan done in 2023 found that, while several small municipalities offer subsidies for residential rat control, no large municipalities offer subsidies in Ontario.
  - Many large municipalities, both in Canada and internationally, focus on education-based programs based on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles. IPM is an education-based approach that focuses on controlling rat populations, with limited chemical intervention, through the elimination of sources of food, water, and shelter. Scientific evidence supports that IPM is an effective way to control rat populations over time.
  - As public health inspections return to the pre-pandemic frequency and the rat abatement requirements at regional construction sites and facilities continue, the number of rat sightings and infestations are anticipated to return to pre-COVID levels.
  - Focusing on education of IPM principles will prioritize upstream efforts that prevent rat infestations from occurring. Peel Health will continue to address general inquiries related residential rat control.
  - The estimated cost for a residential rat control program from January 1, 2024, to February 29, 2024, is \$21,000 to be funded from the Tax Supported Rate Stabilization reserve.
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## **Residential Rat Control Pilot Program Update**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Background**

In 2020, Resolution 2020-812 was passed, and the Residential Rat Control Subsidy Pilot Program began. The program was based on Integrated Pest Management principles (IPM), an education-based approach that focuses on controlling rat populations, with limited chemical intervention, through the elimination of sources of food, water, and shelter. Scientific evidence supports that IPM is an effective way to control rat populations over time.

The residential rat control subsidy component of the program started on March 2021, where eligible residents received 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 Peel Region-approved vendor. At the same time, proactive pest control measures were implemented at over 30 Regional water and wastewater construction projects. A pest control specification was added to all regional construction project contracts requiring proactive pest control measures. The measures include pre-construction site assessments, daily site cleanup and waste disposal, baits and traps and weekly site inspections on all active regional construction projects.

On March 24, 2022, Council approved the continuance of the pilot program. The uptake of the subsidy component was less than anticipated and awareness may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, Council also approved additional communications tactics. On February 23, 2023, Council approved further extension, to December 31, 2023. Staff were asked to provide recommendations to Council for a program to proactively manage rat populations following the conclusion of the pilot.

#### **2. Peel Rat Control Program Metrics**

Increasing the communications budget in 2022 and employing a more diverse suite of tactics, including more traditional communication methods such as signage, contributed to an increase in community awareness of IPM measures and the available subsidy. The number of web page visits has increased over time: 10,908 (2021), and 20,655 (2022). The significant increase in website visits in 2023, 51,107 as of October 31, 2023, is partly due to a change in website analytics methods. This change prevents a direct comparison to previous years data. However, the analysis of other communications tactics implemented (e.g., Google ads) support an increase in web page visits. In addition, social media campaign metrics also indicate wide reach and high user interest, with 1.4 times the impressions and 19.2 times the clicks to the information in 2023 when compared to 2022. This same trend was observed with paid Google advertisements where impressions increased 4.6 times in 2023.

Despite the increase in program awareness, the number of subsidy applications is well below the number of 1,125 per year anticipated at the start of the program. There were 331 approved subsidy applications in 2021, 517 in 2022 and 341 in 2023 (as of December 31, 2023).

In addition, there has been a marked decrease in complaints related to residential rat sightings and program implementation over the last three years. There were 312 complaints in 2021, 242 in 2022, and 30 in 2023 (as of December 31, 2023).

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Over the three years that the program has been running, 52 per cent of the applications are from the City of Mississauga, 46 per cent from the City of Brampton and 2 per cent from the Town of Caledon.

The overall program cost for 2022 and 2023 is outlined in the table below. When taking into consideration the whole program cost, the approximate processing cost per subsidy application submitted in 2023 was \$830.

<b>Rat Program - Annual Operational Cost</b>		
	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023 (as of Dec 31<sup>st</sup>)</b>
Staffing	215,000	217,000
Communications, promotion, and educational materials	65,100	31,340
Subsidy payments	47,700	35,100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>327,800</b>	<b>283,440</b>

### 3. Findings

#### a) Jurisdictional Review

Municipal rat control programs in jurisdictions relevant to the Region were reviewed to determine what services are being offered and whether local programs are achieving control of the rat population.

In Canada, only eight municipalities offer a residential rat rebate subsidy. These programs are generally newly started in the last three years, are all in smaller lower-tier municipalities, and mostly delivered by by-law enforcement departments. The subsidy programs identified have proactive prevention components where they educate residents on IPM and reactive components that respond to resident complaints.

One Ontario municipality, the City of St. Catharines, cancelled its subsidy program effective January 2023 after offering it for five years, citing an overall decrease in interest, high cost and high resource demands. The City added additional enforcement tools provided by the City's By-Law Division to address problematic properties that provide food, water, and shelter to rats.

Many large municipalities in Canada offer a residential rat control program that focuses on IPM principles and education but do not offer a subsidy for pest control. Most are single tier municipalities with a larger population that are administered within departments of local municipalities. Some of these municipalities include the Cities of Toronto, Hamilton, and Ottawa. Similarly, large urban municipalities across the United States and Australia have also adopted residential rat control programs that are focused on IPM and education. In contrast, large urban municipalities in the United Kingdom have adopted reactive complaint-based programs. Municipalities in the United Kingdom direct residents to the British Pest Control Association for educational material and pest control services.

#### b) Evidence Review

A search of the scientific literature was conducted to determine if there has been a rigorous and objective assessment of what effective municipal rat control programs

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include. The search found that there is little peer reviewed evidence. Two qualitative studies that assessed feedback from stakeholders directly involved in rat control programs highlighted the importance of three key issues. First, relying on complaints data as a source of information on rat infestations may not accurately reflect the true distribution and intensity of infestations. Second, all departments within a municipality involved in controlling rat populations should be involved in developing and implementing IPM strategies. Lastly, there is a need for long term strategies with robust and accurate evaluation measures.

The evidence review also noted emerging evidence regarding the environmental and human health impacts associated with the use of Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs). Some jurisdictions are reexamining their use. On January 21, 2023, British Columbia imposed new requirements for the sale and use of SGARs in response to concerns over the effects on wildlife. Their use has been restricted to essential services in the province. Alternatives to SGARs for baiting have not been fully explored, reinforcing IPM and education as the preferred upstream approach to prevent and control rat populations.

### **4. Proposed Direction**

The pilot program findings conclude that despite extending the pilot program and enhancing communication efforts, uptake for the subsidy remains low and the number of complaints has declined significantly.

It is recommended that the subsidy component of the program end on February 29, 2024. Extension to the end of February will allow time to notify general public and the approved vendors.

As part of regular programming, Peel Health will address general inquiries related residential rat control. Any inquiries involving property standards and bylaw enforcement issues will be referred to the local municipalities. The website would be updated to remove references to the rat rebate program but the information about how to prevent rat infestations would be maintained. Public Health will also work with the cities of Mississauga and Brampton and the Town of Caledon to share the residential rat control program information including the educational materials for their use in determining if they will offer a subsidy program.

Rat abatement at regional construction sites and facilities will continue as standard practice. Vendors on contract for the Region at construction sites are required to include IPM in their services as a contractual obligation.

## **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

The overall reputational risk to the Region from ending the subsidy component of the residential rat control pilot program is low. This risk will be mitigated by continuing to provide education on the prevention of rat infestations.

## **BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The passing of the *Hazel McCallion Act* (Peel Dissolution), 2023 on June 8, 2023, formalized the plan to dissolve the Region of Peel effective January 1, 2025. On December 13, 2023, the

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provincial government announced that Peel will not be dissolved, and that new legislation will be passed in 2024 to repeal (or amend) Bill 112. Until new legislation is passed, no implications can be determined.

The subsidy, IPM and education strategy and materials will be provided to the local municipalities for their use as they determine the nature and scope of the program they will offer. Each municipality will need to adapt the materials for their use. Some of the communications tactics may be less expensive for the municipalities to secure (e.g., bus shelter and bridge messaging) as they may own/operate the asset.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The estimated cost to offer the subsidy program for two months, January 1, 2024 to February 29, 2024, is \$21,000 to be funded from the Tax Supported Rate Stabilization reserve. This cost includes the estimated subsidy costs for two months and one contract position.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Region implemented the residential rat control pilot program in 2021 and awareness of the program has increased. However, uptake of the subsidy component of the program is low and the cost to deliver the subsidy is high. Staff recommend ending the subsidy component on February 29, 2024. Peel Health staff will continue to address general inquiries related residential rat control and regional construction sites and facilities will continue to require rat abatement measures as an obligation for vendors on contract to the Region. Any inquiries involving property standards and bylaw enforcement issues will be referred to the local municipalities. This is consistent with the approach taken by other similarly sized jurisdictions.



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