

Report to Council



Date: October 7, 2015
Rim No. 1840-05
To: City Manager
From: Blair Stewart, Urban Forestry Supervisor
Subject: Pest Management - Rats

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the Report from the Urban Forestry Supervisor dated the October 7, 2015 regarding the status of the rat population in Kelowna;

AND THAT Council raise this issue with the Regional District of Central Okanagan's Board for consideration.

Purpose:

To provide an update on rat management options for Kelowna.

Background:

Rats such as the black rat (roof rat) or the brown rat (Norway rat) are invasive species which have spread world-wide and are common everywhere that humans live, with a few exceptions (e.g. the Province of Alberta and Antarctica). The Okanagan region was traditionally rat-free but in recent years rats appear to have been accidentally introduced and have spread rapidly. Pest control operators have reported that rat populations are growing in south and central Okanagan communities.

In Kelowna, staff have monitored a steady increase in the rat population and service requests relating to rats over the past two years, particularly in the Glenmore area, Downtown, the Pandosy/Lakeshore area and parts of Rutland.

Most rat sightings in Kelowna have been identified as black/roof rats. Roof rats typically live in families in abandoned buildings, sheds and debris piles. Roof rats are generally easier to capture and live a cleaner life than the Norway rat. The Norway rat is known to live in areas near garbage and sewers. Staff have not received confirmation that the Norway rat is in Kelowna or the Okanagan.

City staff recently met with staff from other local governments in the south and central Okanagan and pest management experts to brainstorm best management practices and potential recommendations for the public and commercial businesses throughout the region. Some of the key findings from this meeting included:

- Rats are here to stay; rat eradication is extremely difficult once populations are established.
- Public education should be a primary focus to help residents and businesses learn how to minimize rat problems. The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) is taking the lead with public education in South Okanagan communities and has developed a brochure that they have made available for use by other communities.
- Proper management of attractants (fruit and nut trees, compost piles, bird feeders) is particularly important.
- Rats rely on humans for survival, particularly in the winter time when food is scarce and rats seek shelter in buildings. Therefore winter is also an optimum time for trapping and rat control.
- Pest control experts recommend using high numbers of snap-traps for control, and discourage the use of poisons due to the risk of poisoning pets or predatory birds/wildlife.
- Rats should never be re-located as this just spreads the problem.
- Although there are possible health risks associated with rats, Interior Health has communicated to staff that these risks are very low (Attachment 1).
- The RDOS currently has a pilot project in Naramata to help private property owners trap and share costs, in an area with a relatively isolated infestation. Staff will monitor this initiative and any lessons learned.

Management Strategy

The City has launched an educational web page on kelowna.ca that outlines general information about rats and how to prevent infestations¹. Staff will also continue to collaborate with regional partners to monitor populations and share information. Since rats do not respect municipal boundaries, staff suggest that Council may wish to consider raising the issue at the RDCO board to determine whether RDCO can take a lead role similar to what has been done in the south Okanagan.

City staff are also planning to educate Kelowna business owners. Many commercial businesses have large garbage and recycling storage on site. Food waste can be a magnet for rodents especially rats. Staff are working with bylaw services to include a rat control bulletin with the annual business license renewal letter that is sent to all 10,000 Kelowna businesses license holders in December.

Parks and Building Services staff have hired pest control contractors to help trap rats where there are known infestations on City properties or City buildings. These costs are increasing therefore staff will likely be submitting a budget request for Council consideration during the 2016 budget process. Staff recommend that private properties continue to be responsible for management of rat infestations on their own properties.

¹ <http://www.kelowna.ca/CM/Page4827.aspx>

Lastly, Parks staff are working with the City Bylaw Department to determine whether updated language in the Unsightly Premises bylaw may help to enforce cleanup of properties that have an accumulation of garbage, food waste or other conditions that could harbor rats.

Internal Circulation:

Maria Lee, Communications Advisor

Greg Wise, Bylaw Services Manager

Martin Johansen, Building Services Manager

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

Existing Policy:

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

Personnel Implications:

External Agency/Public Comments:

Communications Comments:

Alternate Recommendation:

Submitted by:

B. Stewart, Urban Forestry Supervisor

Approved for inclusion:



Joe Creron, Director, Civic Operations

cc: Ian Wilson, Park Services Manager