



Residents urge Oshawa to address recent rat problems

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OSHAWA — Oshawa council has received a flood of letters from residents reporting a dramatic increase in rats in their neighborhood.

Last week, when the issue was on its agenda, Oshawa's corporate services committee received at least 16 letters from residents expressing concerns over rats.

In their letters, residents raised concerns about health issues, the safety of their pets in backyards if rats are present and concerns about damage caused by the animals.

"I am losing sleep at night thinking they may actually make their way into our house," wrote one Madawaska Avenue resident.

Several reported trapping more than a dozen rats in the past year.

The committee's chair, Coun. Amy McQuaid-England, placed the issue on the committee's agenda with a notice of motion at council in September.

"I started hearing about it in May and then started doing research about what the city could do and then I started finding a lot of road blocks, so the first thing I found out is we weren't recording the data so if people were calling in with rat issues, we weren't tracking those issues," she said.

She decided to ask residents about the issue over Facebook because she didn't think city staff and her colleagues realized there's a problem.

"I asked the question on Facebook and that's when I started getting the flood, I had enough people willing to come forward to talk about the issue," said McQuaid-England, adding the reports have come from across the city, not just one neighbourhood.

The corporate services committee passed a motion asking staff to immediately start tracking complaints about rats and to create a communication plan to let residents know they can contact Service Oshawa about the issue.

The committee also wants staff to investigate ways to assist residents with significant rat issues and if there are costs associated with such a program to include them in the 2018 budget submission.

McQuaid-England said Windsor has a rodent extermination program.

The councillor said she's spoken to pest companies about the issues and they suggested a number of reasons for the residents' recent problems with rats.

They include two relatively warm winters that allowed more of the rat population to survive the winter, a rainy year causing rats to be flooded out of their subterranean homes and the large amount of construction in Oshawa which may have destroyed some rats' homes causing them to relocate to residents' backyards.

Residents also attributed the problem to rental units being in disrepair or neighbours who don't maintain their properties — including hoarders — as potential contributors to the problem.

“Some of the neighbours in the area have bird feeders and that's a primary source of food for them, and you can't go around to every neighbour to tell them to stop feeding the birds because they don't,” said Dave Boyes, a Patricia Avenue resident who was among those writing to the city about the issue. He included a photo of a large dead rat he had trapped on his property.

Boyes said he first started noticing a problem in the spring of 2016 and since then he has trapped 15 to 20 rats.

He said traditional traps didn't work well on the larger rats.

“The only way I was able to trap that is to buy what's called the rat zapper and it was \$100.

“I believe I caught two with them,” said Boyes, adding that the trap was not meant for outdoors and broke shortly after. But he adds he's sick of spending hundreds of dollars to trap rats.

He says he's careful when handling them.

“It's disgusting and I know the disease they carry, so I'm pretty cautious about getting rid of them and catching them and stuff like that so I always wear gloves,” he said.

Boyes said his neighbour has also been catching rats and he feels like Oshawa residents are just starting to talk about the issue.

“Now people are saying 'oh my God I'm not the only one that has this issue, because I know somebody one street over has the same issues,’” he said.

The corporate services committee motion on the rat issue goes to council on Monday.