



'Rats R Us' in Newton neighbourhood, Surrey to strengthen rat bylaw

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"What we need here is a pied piper. Does the city have any of those?" asks Dan Goy, a frustrated Surrey resident who says rats are swarming his neighbourhood. (Photo: KEVIN HILL)

NEWTON — A Surrey man says rats are plaguing his Newton neighbourhood.

"It's Rats R Us," said Dan Goy.

The longtime resident is frustrated that while he filed complaints to Fraser Health and Surrey's bylaws department in late June, the problem persists.

"What is really alarming is how visible the rats are during the daytime, on our deck, on top of the fence," Goy said.

He recalled one day when rats were running all over front lawns in the neighbourhood.

"People were rolling up in their cars and taking pictures," he said.

Goy said one of his neighbours has been feeding wildlife, "heaving food out the window," which is what is believed to have caused the problem.

"Squirrels, raccoons and blue jays - but rats, too - to the point it's ridiculous."

He has set up traps, and his dog has killed two rats, but Goy said that isn't going to solve the problem. He worries what will happen when the warm weather subsides.

"The real problem is when it starts to get cold, and they start to get into everybody's homes in the neighbourhood," he said, noting once the rodents get in, they quickly begin to multiply.

He hopes the city can do something about the problem.

"What we need here is a pied piper. Does the city have any of those?" said Goy.

David Wang, with Surrey-based AA Happy Pest Control, said it's unusual for rats to be seen during the day.

"That's abnormal," he said of spotting the rodents during daylight hours. "That means there's a lot of rats."

Wang said Goy is right in his worry about rats coming inside the home.

"That's a problem," he said. "They can chew on wires, cause fires, a lot of problems."

Wang added once rats get inside a home, they can't be poisoned, because they will die inside the home. And he noted rats typically have three to four litters per year, with usually eight to 12 babies per litter - meaning the situation can get bad, fast.

Tasleem Juma, spokesperson for Fraser Health, said that a complaint has been received about the residence thought to be the source of the problem. She said a health officer visited the home to explain the activity was bringing rodents into the area.

But she said Surrey's bylaws don't give the health authority as much as power as some other municipalities.

Burnaby has a bylaw that provides health officers with power to resolve matters like this, Juma said.

"So, if for example your neighbour is being negligent and not taking care, not taking their garbage out or whatever it may be... if they don't and there is a pest issue we can actually step in and help with bait control. But that's in Burnaby. Surrey doesn't have this bylaw, so the only thing we can actually do is to approach the homeowner and advise that this is becoming a problem... and offer some solutions. But we can't actually physically intervene in Surrey."

Juma said Surrey has been notified of the problem.

Surrey's bylaws manager Jas Rehal acknowledged the city's rat bylaw - number 1501 - is outdated and "in need of a refresh."

"We had another complaint on a different property that was, again, similar to this and in reviewing the files after it's become clear to us the current bylaw is not giving us the appropriate power to really close it off properly.

"I've asked our staff to look at amending it and to be honest, this incident now, is going to make this thing a bit more of a priority."

Rehal said the city will look at bylaws in other municipalities, such as Burnaby, in order to strengthen Surrey's.

"The way the bylaw is currently written, is it gives Fraser Health the authority to deal with them, and it seems like that's not working."

Rehal acknowledged the case in Newton is a tricky, and unique, one.

"Most of the rat issues that we have in neighbourhoods come from vacant lots," he noted. "Those ones, we have bylaws to deal with the lots, but those ones are a little different, the rats move on from there. This one seems a bit more targeted, especially with the issue of the feeding."

With that said, Rehal says the city is going to get creative in terms of how to resolve the problem in the Newton community.

"I don't want to leave the individuals waiting for the new bylaw to get out there, that will take some time, but in the meantime we'll go outside the box and we'll see what we can do."

Rehal hopes to have a revised rat bylaw to council for review this fall.

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