



# Memorandum

**TO:** Kevin J. Jackson, Village Manager

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**FROM:** Lisa Shelley, Deputy Village Manager/Interim Health Director  
Rida Naqvi, Public Health Environmental Services Manager

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**FOR:** Village President and Board of Trustees

**DATE:** November 19, 2024

**SUBJECT: Rodent Control Program**

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## Purpose

This is a review of the Village's rodent control measures, in particular to rats. Rats can pose significant challenges for residents, property owners, businesses, and entire neighborhoods. Rats are attracted to environments that provide essential resources, including food, water, shelter and safe pathways for movement.

## Background

Oak Park's dense environment includes restaurants in neighborhoods and residences with fruit trees, gardens, backyard chickens, bird feeders, lush landscaping and a composting program. All of these amenities can potentially contribute to rodent attraction if food sources are not confined in covered and sealed containers. Homeowners and business owners should take measures to eliminate fruits, animal feed or feces on the ground and gardens should always be in raised beds. Properties with wood piles should be off the ground and overgrown landscaping should be regularly maintained or cut-back, especially if rodents are present. Oak Park has a vibrant business community with many restaurants and multi-family buildings in which refuse containers are shared. Refuse containers need to regularly be maintained and covered. In addition, Oak Park has a vibrant economic development and home improvement environment with active construction and remodeling. These activities can disturb previously unnoticed nesting of rodents.

The Health Department's animal control officer (ACO) actively educates residents and other property owners on a regular basis regarding property maintenance in an effort

to deter rodent activity because community involvement is essential to effective control. The Health Department also responds to complaints of rats on a regular basis and frequently finds properties with one of the factors mentioned above in need of improvement.

The Village has only one (1) ACO, so it is critical that homeowners and business owners stay vigilant and educated as to how to manage their properties in order to minimize the rat population in Oak Park.

### **Program Summary**

The Village's rodent control program is primarily managed by the animal control officer in the Environmental Services Division of the Health Department. This is just one of the duties of this position. The rodent control program is for residential complaints. The Public Health Department contracts with a pest management company that will set and monitor traps. It is offered free to residential properties. Residents may call if they notice rats on their property or in the alley. The Village's ACO generally visits the site first to look for other conditions that may be causing the problem, and to educate the homeowner or business owner. Then, the ACO determines if a bait box is a viable solution. In some cases, if the property has excessive issues, the ACO may advise the homeowner to consider exploring stronger measures by contracting directly with a pest management company.

The Health Department budget for the program in FY 24 was \$32,623.41, providing for 40 bait stations. In FY 25 the Health Department proposed increasing the program to 60 stations, at a cost of an additional \$17,000. In FY 25 the Health Department will continue conversations with the pest control company and explore if there are any other successful methods used in peer communities.

The bait stations, which are the primary method used by the Village, are serviced weekly by the contracted vendor. In 2024 the Village switched to a more effective rodenticide, Final Blox. The Village's new ACO had previous experience working for a rodent control company and recommended this change. Almost immediately the Health Department noticed more complaints of dead rats from residents, which was one sign that the new bait may be more effective than the previous rodenticide. The Health Department continues to use this method and the cost is similar to the previous bait. Residents are warned that pets and children should not come into contact with any bait.

### **Other Village Rodent Control Programs**

**Commercial Rat Control** – Development Services/Permit Processing now requires applicants for commercial and multifamily demolition permits to arrange for professional rat abatement. This often results in proactive abatement if a professional identifies signs of rat activity.

**Restaurant Rodent Control** – Restaurants must maintain pest control measures, which are verified by health inspectors during routine inspections. If pests are detected, facilities are required to take immediate corrective actions.

### **Optional Village Rodent Control Programs**

There are three other methods that the Health Department is currently exploring:

1. *CO2 "Fog Method" (CopherX & BurrowRX)* – Carbon dioxide gas is sprayed directly into known rat burrows, which is safe for pets and people. However, it also kills nearby vegetation and costs approximately \$1,200 per application, making it feasible only for high-risk private treatments and not routine use. The City of Evanston uses this method in some circumstances.
2. *Contracept Liquid* – This liquid birth control limits rat reproduction; however, it requires significant daily management by staff, is costlier per unit and is unsuitable for cold weather because it may not be effective at or below freezing temperatures. The department's current staffing level would not be adequate to manage this option.
3. *Review the Current Pest Control Contract* – Staff is reviewing the current contract with the pest control management company to see if there are other applications or methods than what the Village is currently using, aside from the change in bait that was made earlier this year.

### **Experimental Rodent (Rat) Control Programs**

Staff recently met with the Chicago Animal Law Student Initiative, a consortium of students and faculty at Chicago's law schools, who is partnering with the Lincoln Park Zoo's Urban Wildlife Institute to pilot a rat contraception project in Chicago through Wisdom Good Works. The initiative plans to use contraception delivered through peanut-butter and grain pellets. The contraceptive effect is temporary and lasts about 30–60 days.

Pellets are safe for animals and contracepted rodents are 100% safe if eaten by predators. This program is also based on research that rats have evolved to survive consumption of the poison, and that the poison can still kill non-target animals, such as raptors. Also, urban rats have approximately 8-12 litters during their lifespan with litters of up to 12 pups each. Therefore, two rats can become upwards of 15,000 in one year.

Staff was excited and optimistic to learn of this fascinating alternative approach to traditional rodent control methods; however, it is a research-only project at this time led by the Chicago Animal Law Student Initiative and the Urban Wildlife Institute. Even if the research showed a reduction in Oak Park, the product would not become available anytime soon. Aside from a financial contribution, the experiment also requires a Village employee to maintain and monitor the experimental site on a daily basis. Researchers for the project are seeking funders for implementation on one (1) block in various communities. The Chicago Animal Law Student Initiative is currently piloting this research in Boston, and speaking with officials in Chicago and Evanston, as well.

### **Community Education**

As mentioned previously, there are some basic things that homeowners and business owners can do regularly to assist with rodent management.

- **Fruit Trees** – Regularly harvest ripe or fallen fruit or use netting to catch falling fruit from dropping on your property and deteriorating.
- **Gardens** – Always use raised garden beds.
- **Sanitation** – Dispose of food waste and animal feces properly. Do not keep feces in your yard if you have pets.
- **Bird Feeders, Chickens** – Keep food off the ground on your property.
- **Composting** – Use secure, non-plastic bins with tight lids.
- **Yard Maintenance** – Remove wood piles and maintain grass and vegetation to keep the area clear.
- **Refuse Containers** – Monitor your refuse container. Refuse should always be contained in the appropriate container with a tight lid.

For questions, please contact Rida Naqvi, Environmental Services Manager, via email at [rnaqvi@oak-park.us](mailto:rnaqvi@oak-park.us) or by phone at 708.358.5487.

**cc:** Ahmad Zayyad, Deputy Village Manager  
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All Department Directors