

For consideration to the Economic and Community Development Committee,

I am writing today to express my concerns with the proposed Rat Response Plan for the City of Toronto. As a lifelong resident of Toronto, I want to shed light on the issues that could be addressed in order to discourage and reduce the presence of rats inside buildings, businesses and homes.

If you spend anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes walking around any given area in Toronto, you will find trash, unsecured garbage, recycling and compost receptacles and/or food disposed of on sidewalks and roadways, around construction sites and by residential or corporate buildings. It doesn't take long to see the issues which seem to be the cause of rats being present within our dwellings. In all my years living in Toronto, I have not personally experienced rats in my home across any type of dwelling I have resided in - from a home, to an apartment building to a basement apartment. It worries me that while some areas can be kept clean and tidy and have their infrastructure secure so that rats cannot enter, those that don't take particular care of the space - the rats are being poisoned among other inhumane methods.

In 2025, we are well aware of the public health risks associated with the use of these poisons and yes, public health includes the animals who live within our cities like coyotes, birds, raccoons, mice, rats, cats and dogs. Once ingested, these poisons travel through various species impacting entire populations of animals and pose several fatal risks. This is not about a singular impact, there are far reaching implications to these poisons and that should not be something a world-renowned city like Toronto is complicit in allowing and enabling. The cost and stress associated with tending to our companion animals like dogs at the vet if they ingest poison is avoidable and something that tends to burden those in lower socio-economic communities.

It is also worrying to see that nowhere is there mention of exclusionary practices. If there are gaps, holes and entryways into our homes and buildings, animals will try to get in and are most often successful in doing so. There are numerous ways to address the source of the issue and that is not through poisoning, a significant one is taking a thorough look at the dwelling/business/building and securing those spots so that no one can enter. This has been done countless times and is successful with no rats having to be harmed in the process.

I recently came across a bait box in Toronto's east end that was busted open and sitting exposed right next to an elementary school - the neighbourhood is filled with young children, dogs, birds, squirrels and raccoons among other species. Enforcement and oversight is always a concern when it comes to these sorts of plans as it inevitably comes down to resources readily available. Rather than investing in temporary fixes that cause more harm than good and that neglect to address the root causes, a long-term strategy should be implemented that helps support homeowners, tenants, business owners and other establishments to do an initial analysis of the property to see where the issues are (ex. garbage accessible to animals, food and other attractants around the property, entryways into the property that should be sealed up appropriately, dog waste in backyards, etc).

When we think of not only the environmental and public health concerns associated with these poisons on our communities, but additionally the ethical implications on animals who naturally reside within our communities as social norms and views on how we treat and perceive animals, how can a plan involving lethal measures even remotely be considered in 2025 when alternatives and concrete solutions do exist?

It is not our inability to do something ethically and in an environmentally sound way through a holistic lens, but rather our unwillingness to and that is not acceptable. Our inability to modify our own behaviour as citizens of the city as well as home and business owners reflect a very startling aspect of ourselves. We need to take accountability and responsibility both as individuals and the larger population of Toronto to keep our communities clean. Reconsidering the design and structure of our waste bins across the board would be a good start for example and perhaps implementing a more robust system when it comes to not only prohibiting the feeding of animals, but establishing strict implications to those who do that will hopefully deter this behaviour. We can do better and I strongly urge the city of Toronto to reconsider the incorporation of harmful poisons and lethal measures to address these concerns. I feel for those who have been impacted and these people deserve a sound approach that is proven effective and is safe for them and their families. I also feel for the rats who are merely trying to exist and are living in a world that is not actively and humanely discouraging their presence in the places we reside, but rather inadvertently creating an enticing environment for them at no fault of their own.

Sincerely,

Nicole Sapalovski
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