



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 3, 2020

REPORT OF THE RODENT ISSUES SPECIAL COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Stephanie Hirsch	Chair	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Vice Chair	Absent	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Annie Connor-Mayor's Office, Doug Kress-Human and Health Services, Georgianna Silveira-Human and Health Services, Nick Antanavica-ISD, David Shapiro-City Solicitor's Office and several residents.

The meeting was held in the Committee Room and was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairperson Hirsch and adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Approval of the November 13, 2019 Minutes.

RESULT:

ACCEPTED

207380 - That the Administration work with this Board to consider strengthening rodent eradication as part of building demolition, potentially using as an example the ordinance of Nassau County, Long Island, which requires proof of eradication before allowing demolition to proceed.:

Mr. Kress, Mr. Antanavica and Ms. Silveira have now added Ms. Silveira to the approval list to help strengthen the rodent eradication process. Mr. Kress stated that HHS's role is to educate and work with the community in problem solving and make recommendations along the way to strengthen enforcement. Ms. Silveira advises policy and procures and analyzes data. Ms. Silveira has suggested changes that do not require the ordinance to be changed. This would be changes to policy and procedures such as: paperwork for demolition, submit an invoice from an exterminator with a maximum of 30 days before demolition and minimum of seven days before demolition. There were other suggestions: find burrows, maintenance extermination, hire exterminator, check perimeter for baiting, and recommend ISD review property prior to demolition.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

207944 - That the Director of Health and Human Services provide the Special Committee on Rodent Issues with an update of the Department's rodent survey.:

There were discussions about food services, construction activity and how citations were issued. It was stated that Lake Street, around the corner from Market Basket is really bad. Ms. Silveira stated that the rodent report is getting higher every year since 2016. The committee suggested that Ms. Silveira try to attend the ResiStat meetings and there should be regular updates at the meetings. Ms. Silveira stated that over 100 traps were put out on properties.

A resident, who is also an exterminator, works in Boston. He stated that houses on Marshall Street have many rat burrows. He's called 311 and cannot get anyone to come out, they will come out because of trash issues. Rodents can be found in the street every other day. Questions were asked about health issues for residents. Rodents breed every 30 days. The issue will get worse.

Ms. Silveira talked about education and resources such as: composting, feeding birds, water bowls can all contribute to rodent activity. The city website has a wealth of information to combat rodents.

The chair heard from some residents that the bait boxes can take a while for the rats to get used to it. A resident stated that two boxes were dropped off, one box was left in the yard and their dog was getting into it.

Another resident stated that she and another resident were walking home and a large rodent sat in the yard. They threw rocks to get the rat to move and had to finally use a snow shovel to get the rat moving before it started coming after the resident. This resident also stated that baiting on MacArthur Street is not working. A resident has to go in the yard several times a day to make sure it's safe before letting her dog go out.

Another resident stated a tree has a burrow and the city put some tar over the hole. She has to stomp on the stairs before going out to get the rats away from her house. She has seen rats going in and out of dumpsters at the East Somerville Community School. She also has dead rats in her yard. She called 311 to remove rats from her yard, but was told to move the dead rat onto the sidewalk to be removed. This resident stated she cannot allow her grandkids to play outside in the yard due to the rat issues.

Another resident from MacArthur Street stated that she has been working to combat rodents for a while. There is one property that has several burrow holes. It was supposed to have gone to court and believe nothing had been done until last February. Residents have been calling City Hall for years, with no change. She stated the city staff need to inspect areas before construction. Property owners should be forced to take care of burrows and this is no different than residents having to shovel snow from sidewalks.

Another resident has owned her house for 16 years. She covers her trash barrels, but still rats are getting worse. Her neighbors have bird feeder and rats in the basement.

A resident on Prospect Hill, rents and rats come into the house. The landlord is cooperative, but more could be done.

Questions were asked by residents why after seven (7) days that the city stops the rodent baiting program. This was stated that 7 days is not long enough to see if the program is working. Mr. Antanavica will look into this matter and report back to the committee chair.

The chair asked for the city's plan to address these rat issues. It was stated that the plan in the report is not working. Mr. Kress stated that there needs to be 100% compliance from everyone in order to work.

Councilor-at-Large Rossetti *motioned and it was accepted that the Administration send out a 311 call in April to residents to remind them not to put out water or feed the birds as methods to help combat the rodent issue.* This should be sent out as a High Alert to the community.

Another resident stated the city needs to enforce the current ordinance. A house was demolished two days before they received the permit. And then it was given a pass having to exterminate the house. The resident was shown a letter stating no evidence of rodents and he saw rats leaving once the digging started.

Mr. Antanavica may have results of the new policy in 2-3 months to report back to the committee. Currently, he is down two food inspectors and the two housing inspectors go around with pest control checking bait boxes.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

209050 - That the City Solicitor and the Director of Health and Human Services provide options to increase the City's authority to address rodent issues on private property.:

Mr. Antanavica stated he ticketed owner and keeps ticketing. He stated it takes several months of writing orders and documenting the problem in order to go onto private property. Mr. Antanavica also stated that violations are sent out at \$50. Letters can be sent to property owners threatening court. ISD has attempted to bring to court one property owner in the past. ISD needs to validate the proof that the actions are taking place without any correction. They also need to look at how strong the case may be before going to court. Ms. Silveira stated it's hard to write down one cause for rodents in a neighborhood.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

209210 - That the Administration report on whether the Neighborhood Impact Team continues to operate, and, if it does not, how its goals are pursued in other ways.:

The Neighborhood Team was designed to include different departments such as: Police, Fire, and Council on Aging, and DPW multi-disciplinary departments to help with property issues. It was stated that HHS is not involved. ISD has not resumed the NIC team, but will if needed. It was stated that it's a strain on everyone in terms of time, no regular meetings, and informal group. The chair suggested that ISD and Ms. Silveira meet on regular basis and provide a high-level summary for this committee. City staff also said that internal rodent control meetings will be resuming. Councilor-at-Large Rossetti suggested that Ms. Silveira remind everyone that this is everyone's problem and need to work together so that it's not in your neighborhood.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

209243 - Director of Health and Human Services submitting the Rodent Control Report and its Executive Summary, re: rodent activity in East Somerville.:

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Handouts:

- Email - S Hirsch (with 207380, 207944, 209050, 209210, 209243)