



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Rodent Issues Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 30, 2023

6:30 PM

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Kelly at 6:31 pm and adjourned at 7:40 pm. The motion to adjourn was approved by a roll call vote of all in favor (Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Wilson, Chair Kelly), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Colin Zeigler – ISD, Nicholas Antanavica – ISD, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Charlotte Kelly, City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson and Matthew McLaughlin

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [22-1694](#)) Approval of the Rodent Issues Special Committee Minutes of September 28, 2022.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Kelly, City Councilor At Large Wilson and Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

2. Order (ID # [22-0296](#))
By Councilor Kelly, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Health and Human Services, the Director of Inspectional Services and the Environmental Health Coordinator update this Council on current rodent mitigation plans.

Taken together with item 22-0131. Environmental Health Coordinator Colin Zeigler gave a presentation on current rodent mitigation plans and data tracking. Rodent-related 311 calls are down slightly from 2020 and 2021, but ISD will continue to address issues to decrease calls further. More residences received service for rodent control in 2022 than in the last four years. ISD is also looking to expand or add staff to existing programs, including renewing the contract for the Residential Assistance Program, which expires this year. Mr. Zeigler also talked about Phase II of the SMART program and about future rodent control methods to employ, such as a carbon monoxide pump that targets burrows.

Councilor Wilson asked questions about total rat population and the potential for inter-department coordination on data tracking. There was discussion about what is entailed with the monthly cost of the SMART boxes and how the new sites for the SMART boxes at Union Square and Lincoln park were chosen. Mr. Zeigler answered that in addition to being hotspots for 311 calls, the locations feature a variety of settings and activity levels to gather data. Councilor McLaughlin expressed concern that boxes have not been placed in Ward One, where 311 calls are also high. He also asked if the ordinance that requires rodent mitigation at

construction sites is being enforced.

Chair Kelly recommended reading the presentation from the committee meeting on September 28, 2022 for context on the conversation.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [23-0131](#))

By Councilor Kelly

That the Director of Inspectional Services and the Environmental Health Coordinator update this Council on the SMART box program and other rodent control measures.

Taken together with item 22-0296.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [22-0346](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Scott and Councilor Kelly

That the Director of Inspectional Services consider a financial relief program for low income residents who are paying out of pocket for increased rodent expenses, including car and home repairs.

Chair Kelly asked whether any municipalities have set up relief funds for rodent-related car or home damage. Mr. Zeigler said that he had not heard of such a program, but would be happy to talk with other departments about how to structure such a program. He stressed that it would require an interdepartmental effort.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [23-0063](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Scott and Councilor Clingan

That the Environmental Health Coordinator and the Director of Inspectional Services discuss resident reports of cars damaged by rats over the past five years.

Mr. Zeigler explained that ISD is currently requesting a query for 311 calls relating to cars damaged by rats, and if the information is retrievable, a report will be created. Chair Kelly moved to mark the item as Work Complete and said that another item will be created to request that report in writing.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [23-0069](#))
- By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Kelly
That the Environmental Health Coordinator update this Council on any past pilots and any future plans for use of rodent hormonal birth control.
- Mr. Zeigler explained that the city piloted ContraPest birth control in 2018, but it was not effective. ISD did find that 311 calls correlate with rodent breeding seasons, however. There was a discussion over why the rats avoided the boxes and food. Councilor Wilson suggested using chewed-out trash receptacles that have been replaced instead of standard trap boxes, since the rats are already comfortable and familiar with the receptacles.
- Chair Kelly asked if legislation around rodenticide currently being considered at the state level would affect the use of carbon monoxide pumps that target rat burrows. Mr. Zeigler answered that the legislation mainly focuses on “third-generation” rodenticides, the rationale being that rats contaminated with these substances pass them onto birds of prey that eat them.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
7. Order
(ID # [23-0062](#))
- By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Gomez Mouakad
That the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development and the Environmental Health Coordinator discuss the feasibility of including neighborhood-specific rat control funding in Community Benefits Agreements.
- Mr. Zeigler said that he contacted Dir. Galligani for potential projects to pursue, and the most effective route would be to have the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals add to requirements for projects on a case-by-case basis. He said that Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) are privately negotiated between developments and organizations, and that the city can provide educational materials to help both parties make better agreements, but they do not have direct authority over CBAs.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
8. Order
(ID # [22-2037](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Kelly and Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the Director of Inspectional Services bait the sewers along Pennsylvania Avenue and adjacent streets and develop a plan to address rodent issues, in anticipation of planned water pipeline renovation.
- Dir. Antanavica explained that they have not baited the sewers for about two years for many reasons, but largely because the DEP asked the city to stop. The other main reason is that accrued costs outweighed the impact. ISD has been taking funds that would have gone towards baiting sewers and is using them for SMART boxes.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 9. Order (ID # [22-2036](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Kelly
That the Director of Inspectional Services inspect Chuckie Harris Park, the General Insulation building and 161 Broadway for signs of rodent issues and food waste.

Mr. Zeigler said that he has been trying to contact the owner or manager of the seemingly abandoned garage on Broadway, but has not heard back. He has been in contact with DPW about administering regular rodent control at Chuckie Harris Park and said he could follow up with them. Councilor McLaughlin said that he was asking about a different property than the garage, but that he will follow up via email.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 10. Order (ID # [22-0297](#))

By Councilor Kelly
That the Commissioner of Public Works update this Council on the replacement of trash bins due to rodent activity.

The Commissioner's response is attached.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

Rodent Committee - 2023-1-30 Presentation (with 22-0296)