



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Rodent Issues Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 28, 2022

6:00 PM

Others present: Colin Ziegler - Environmental Health Coordinator, Nick Antanavica – Director of Inspectional Services, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Kelly and adjourned at 7:03 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Strezo and Kelly), none against and none absent.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Charlotte Kelly, Matthew McLaughlin and Vice Chair Kristen Strezo

1. Order
(ID # [22-1521](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Director of Inspectional Services increase measures to control the rat population from Vinal Avenue to Walnut Street and from Highland Avenue to Summer Street.

See item 22-1515.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK
COMPLETED**

2. Order
(ID # [22-1411](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Kelly and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Health and Human Services immediately increase rat control measures in the areas of Fellsway West to Temple Street and Broadway to Jaques Street.

See item 22-1515.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK
COMPLETED**

3. Order
(ID # [22-1410](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Kelly and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Health and Human Services increase rat control efforts from Wigglesworth Street to Dana Street.

See item 22-1515.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK
COMPLETED**

4. Order (ID # [22-1197](#)) By Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Kelly
That the Commissioner of Public Works, the Director of Inspectional Services, and the Environmental Health Coordinator address rodent issues and overgrowth in the public access alleyway between Mt. Vernon and Mt. Pleasant Streets and devise a long-term solution to the problem.

See item 22-1515.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order (ID # [22-1515](#)) By Councilor Kelly
That the Director of Inspectional Services and the Environmental Health Coordinator update this Council on the SMART box program and other recent rodent control measures.

Director Zeigler gave a presentation based on data from 311 calls from 2019 through 2022 and reported that wards 1 and 2 continue to show the most rodent calls, although there has been an increasing trend in wards 5 and 6. Inspectors have gone to areas where there have been a high concentration of 311 calls to conduct inspections and advise residents of ways to alleviate the problem. During spring and summer 2022, there was an average of 25 new properties being added weekly to the first time residential program. Residential program treatments are on track to surpass 2021 figures. There have been 27 community site visits with residents, businesses, property managers, community gardens and commercial locations.

Director Ziegler discussed the SMART Pilot Program and reported that as of today, there have been 923 rodent captures, with the greatest concentrations being in Davis Square, along the bike path, the GLX area from Pearl Street to Gilman Street, and Macarthur Street. More importantly, data is now available for targeting the city's approach to the problem. The city has eliminated the use of rodenticides, and that will only have a positive local environmental impact. Director Ziegler noted that there is a slight delay in receiving collected data since the city does not have direct access to the vendor's database, adding that he has spoken to the vendor to obtain access keys to look at all of the data.

Phase II of the SMART program will see inactive boxes, i.e., 3 captures or less per week, being relocated to Union Square and Lincoln Park. Director Ziegler told the members that a new rodent PSA video has been released, postcards were mailed to 23,000 properties, and 300 door hangers were distributed, all with information about trying to control the rodent population in the city. Additionally, the city's SMART program has received both national and local media coverage. Some potential additions to the integrated pest management (IPM) program include identifying and replacing trash barrels in green spaces with big belly barrels, expanding the SMART program to include other high-report areas, exploring a community composting program, and developing a community-based rodent monitoring

program. The city's residential program will become more difficult in the future as a result of the MA legislature possibly creating stronger restrictions on the use of rodenticides.

Councilor Strezo asked about the plan for absentee landlord properties. Director Ziegler stated that he has been taking a more direct approach by contacting them directly by phone/email to ask why things are happening and so far, the response has been favorable. Increasing staff in order to issue citations and levy fines on a more frequent basis might help, as well. Director Antanavica noted that there are different levels of landlords with respect to property upkeep, adding that with Director Ziegler onboard, there has been a tremendous increase of follow up that has led to some positive turn arounds. He went on to say the the city still has the option to seek an injunction to enter private property, if needed. Director Ziegler noted that his work of direct contact has been working out, but there are some cases where the response is less than satisfactory, leading to the generation of increased fines. Councilor McLaughlin asked for some clarification of city's policy about trash barrels, for which it charging \$50 each. Director Antanavica explained that this is a DPW policy and he assured the committee that ISD could work with residents who were fined while trying to obtain a new barrel.

Councilor McLaughlin noted Macarthur Street, the Mt. Vernon Street/Mt. Pleasant Street alley and the Nunnery grounds are still having problems with rodents and he asked about use of dry ice and sterillization. Director Ziegler said those methods are not being used presently, but the city is seriously looking into them, noting that the sterilization method has shown mixed results.

Chair Kelly asked why wards 2 and 5 have the least number of site visits and Director Ziegler said that site visits are initiated by request calls and direct communication and he noted that a meeting is scheduled in ward 5 tomorrow. Chair Kelly noted a jump from March to April and asked why there is a severe decrease in August. Director Ziegler explained that the increase in calls was due to the post cards the city sends out. Chair Kelly asked where the boxes being transferred to Union Square and Lincoln Park are coming from and Director Ziegler replied that they are being relocated from one side of bike path where there was low activity. Chair Kelly asked about composting and what's involved in getting it going and Director Ziegler explained that the city wants to look at New York to see what's being done there, then look at 311 calls, and finally, gauge public interest. New York is placing barrels at vaarious locations and giving participants a key card to access the compost.

Councilor Strezo inquired about the cost of the program going into Phase II and Director Ziegler said the budget is \$40k, but that the pricing is going to chang to \$57k. Director Antanavica explained that the \$40k was for the 4 month pilot program and the \$57k is for a full year.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED