

Madalyn Letellier

From: Crystal Huff [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, November 14, 2023 1:38 AM
To: City Hall Community Meetings; ashwini jambhekar; Colin Zeigler; Mayor; City Clerk Contact; All City Council
Subject: Rat mitigation in my neighborhood (Spring Hill)

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Hi, Colin and many other folks from the city of Somerville! This is an email to follow up on the community meeting the other day, and what's happened since the chat between my neighbors and Colin and I on July 13th.

About 10 or maybe 15 folks in my neighborhood did a tour this summer with Colin to talk about where the rats were living (some burrows on a few properties, and a big dumpster behind an apartment building on Adelaide Rd), how they moved around between our yards under the fences, what we could do to address it, etc. Colin made several recommendations, but he said that we would basically be responsible for the expense of any efforts we undertook, because our neighborhood isn't slated for the SMART traps and Colin and his teammate already have more traditional rat traps than they can realistically handle, even if all they did was go out and empty traps. Colin told us that it's very likely professionals would be needed to really help, and if using pest professionals, that they would likely use bait, endangering the rat predators further up the food chain. That disappointed me, but didn't surprise me. We had periodic visits from Best Pest for years; we know how that goes. We were just hoping for different options.

Alongside my household, my neighbor Ashwini (cc'd) kindly agreed to do the rat exclusion work that Colin suggested -- digging a 2' deep trench, installing 3' high hardware cloth in order to block the rats out from digging under the hardware cloth, and then filling the trench with pea stone gravel on top of the hardware cloth (bent into an L shape at the bottom of the trench). However, Ashwini received estimates from contractors in excess of \$10k in order to do the work Colin recommended to prevent the rats from going under the lengths of fence in her backyard. I even checked the estimate's reasonableness with a friend of mine who's a contractor, and he said he didn't think he could get the labor down below \$9k for the project, even as a favor. \$10k is not feasible for any of us, so Ashwini wasn't able to do that work in her backyard (where Colin said most of the rat activity was located, going in runs between everyone's houses and the dumpster at Adelaide Rd). She did do a smaller project of the same method to exclude the rats from under her front porch, for a much more reasonable cost, but that is not where Colin said most of the rats were running around.

I have been doing a lot of the rat-exclusion work myself and with friends for our (much, much shorter) length of fence at the top of our yard. I spent over \$500 on materials (hardware cloth and gravel), and dozens of hard labor hours digging and filling that trench as Colin recommended. When my wrists began to give out (and my doctor started to recommend surgery to repair them), I hired a friend to help. It is almost done, at this point, but it was quite a lot of work and it cost me at least \$1k between materials and the assistance I got from my friend (20 hours x \$25/hr).

This is obviously not a sustainable solution -- one or two households can't address the rat problem for the whole neighborhood, and particularly not if the cost is so high. In addition, we can't do anything about the dumpster behind the Adelaide Rd apartment complex, which attracts approximately two bajillion rats every winter.

We would really appreciate a more sustainable solution. This is why I asked, in the zoom community meeting, if there would be a fund to address neighborhood rat mitigation costs. This work would be more effective and more people would sign on for having it done if it didn't cost them so much and if it could be done in a coordinated fashion for whole neighborhoods at once.

I also still really think we'd do well to have curbside compost pickup. I really want to get compostable food waste materials out of the trash bins and dumpsters -- I know this has reduced the rat activity in my own trash bins. Again, though, it would only be effective if there were a concerted effort to do it neighborhood-wide, for everyone, all at the same time.

Colin and Mayor Ballantyne both asked me to follow up in email with details. I hope this note is helpful in finding a better solution. 😊

Best,

Crystal Huff

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-- I use they/them pronouns. --