



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 26, 2012

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
William A. White Jr.	Chair	Present	
William M. Roche	Vice Chair	Present	
Rebekah Gewirtz	Ward Six Alderman	Absent	
Maryann M. Heuston	Ward Two Alderman	Present	
Thomas F. Taylor	Ward Three Alderman	Absent	
Tony Lafuente	Ward Four Alderman	Present	
Sean T. O'Donovan	Ward Five Alderman	Present	
Robert C. Trane	Ward Seven Alderman	Absent	
John M Connolly	Alderman At Large	Present	
Bruce M. Desmond	Alderman At Large	Present	
Dennis M. Sullivan	Alderman At Large	Present	
Eddie Nuzzo	Supt., ISD	Present	
Dave Shapiro	Asst. City Solicitor	Present	
Paulette Renault-Caragianes	Director of Health	Present	
Michael Glavin	Exec. Director, OSPCD	Present	
Ellen Schneider Collins	ISD	Present	

Ms. Collins and Mr. Nuzzo made a presentation on the subject and said that inspection requests from January to June are up 52% from the same period last year and that warmer temperatures, decreased snowfall, increased trash issues and problem properties are all contributors to the increase in rodent activity in the city. Data indicates that controlling rodents is a statewide problem and that other large cities, e.g. Chicago, are experiencing similar issues. Somerville is mapping areas of rodent activity, based on calls to 311, and using that data to bait streets and sewers. Data will be collected to determine if the bait is being consumed or ignored, indicating that another food source might be available.

Extermination of rodents is mandatory on all new construction projects. City inspectors will investigate every complaint received at both private and commercial properties and will perform regular inspections of city parks. Property owners are being cited for vegetative overgrowth and trash violations. The owners of any properties where rodents are found will be ordered to have extermination performed by a licensed exterminator, and those property owners not complying will be fined. Dumpsters at food establishments need to be inspected on a regular basis to verify compliance and a walk through of the rail lines in the city will be undertaken to locate and deal with any rodent activity found. City officials will meet with other communities to share data and strategies. Educational materials are available through the Board of Health.

The following recommendations have been put forth:

- Elimination of food and water sources on properties,
- Keeping food off the ground,
- Additional education regarding composting,
- Maintenance of properties by homeowners,
- Legal remedies for city personnel to enter upon properties and
- Vigilance in checking for rodent activity.

Mr. Nuzzo acknowledged that the city has a rodent problem but stated that the city is not being overrun with rodents. An inspection of Ward Two yielded four absentee landlord properties that were attracting rodents. Three of the owners are cooperating with the city to address the problem and the fourth owner will have legal action brought against him by the city to ensure that the problem is handled. Mr. Nuzzo reported that Boston, Cambridge and Everett have 24 hour staffing for ticketing violations. The committee agreed that the Inspectional Services Department is lacking adequate manpower to effectively deal with the problem and that the city needs to be more aggressive with inspections and legal actions. Chairman White suggested that threatened criminal action by the Board of Health might be more effective in getting property owners to comply. Mr. Shapiro stated that it would be easier to effectuate a search warrant rather than a criminal complaint, which may be sought by ISD, and noted that there is also a civil injunction that may be sought. Presently, Police and Fire personnel may enter upon property when life or limb is in danger, but inspectors may not enter property unless invited to do so by the owner.

Mr. Shapiro will be meeting with the City of Malden's legal staff to find out how the legal aspects of the problem are handled there and Chairman White requested that the city's Law Department provide the committee with an action plan, by the August meeting of the committee, on what remedy Somerville should pursue after conferring with Malden officials. Chairman White also expressed his dismay that the questions raised in a memorandum to the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development had not been answered in writing and asked that a written report be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

The committee requested:

- information on the number of citations issued for violations of the trash ordinance,
- that the Board of Health hold a public hearing to declare mapped areas as rodent infested in an effort to help the city deal with problem properties and absentee landlords,
- that the Law Department challenge the law prohibiting inspectors from entering onto property without an invitation,
- that copies of case law regarding this issue be provided to the committee,
- an explanation of why the city has not obtained a criminal complaint against the owner of 3-5 Walter Terrace.

190058 - That the Director of SPCD Provide This Board with the Latest Revision to the City's Rodent Control Policies before the Next Meeting of the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety, and appear with Appropriate Designees at Said Meeting.:

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

190956 - That the Director of SPCD and the Director of Health update this Board on the public awareness campaign to address rodent control, and describe specific problem areas and plans to address rodent control in those areas.:

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

193202 - That the Director of Health and the 3-member Board of Health Commission report back to this Board regarding their plan/policy to control the rodent problem.:

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

193310 - That the Director of SPCD (ISD) and the Director of Health determine the sources of a greatly increased rodent infestation in the areas of Lincoln Park and Central and Madison Streets, and develop an action plan to address this problem.:

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE