



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Rodent Issues Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:03 PM by Chair Clingan and adjourned at 7:09 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Wilson and Clingan), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Alicia Privett - Environmental Health Coordinator, Colin Zeigler – Environmental Health Manager, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson and Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1786](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Rodent Issues Special Committee Meeting of November 30, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

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

2. Order (ID # [24-0150](#))
By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Wilson, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Sait
That the Environmental Health Coordinator discuss alternatives to the use of bait traps containing poison to dispatch rats.

Chair Clingan invited Laura Kiesel to address the committee and asked that a copy of her presentation be provided for the record. Ms. Kiesel is an environmental advocate of Save Arlington Wildlife which focuses on restricting rodenticides. Members of Save Somerville Wildlife were also in attendance, virtually.

Ms. Kiesel gave a presentation on the effects of using Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides, (SGARs) and related incidents of predatory wildlife that died from its secondary poisoning effects. Saying that Somerville was once considered a model in combatting rats, she is now concerned that the city has returned to using these poisons. According to Ms. Kiesel, SGARs have been banned in some states and in British Columbia. During the presentation, the speaker explained why SGARs

don't work in reducing rat populations and noted that they used to be sold over the counter, posing a risk to children. She referenced a study done in California, the Raptor Pilot Study for Levee Protection, which compared two test sites, one using SGARs and the other having none. The resulting data showed that the site that had no SGARs and encouraged natural predators had a greater reductions in the number of rodents. Her belief is that more poison leads to more rats.

After about 25 minutes, Chair Clingan commented that he expected to be hearing about alternative methods of rodent control, which, to this point, hadn't been discussed. He noted that there is a 60 turnover in the city's population every two years, making it harder to sustain educational efforts in combating rats.

Councilors McLaughlin and Wilson asked to hear from the city's ISD Department representatives.

Coordinator Alicia Privett gave a presentation and addressed data on 311 calls, the number of violations seen (405), best practices, communication updates, rodenticide restrictions, and the use of different baits with less risk of secondary poisoning. She also noted that a carbon monoxide treatment was scheduled to be performed at a school tomorrow and is also being considered as an option for residential use in combatting rats. Asked about a timeline for moving away from rodenticides, Coordinator Privett said that the Mayor's Office has called for SGARs to be discontinued and that the Public Works Department is moving toward that end with advice from the Office of Sustainability and Environment. She said that rodenticides will not be going away this year and that the city's current exterminator contract would be up for renewal in 2026.

Councilor Wilson asked what the practical impacts of not using rodenticides for infestations would be and Coordinator Privett replied that education, removal of food sources, etc. are preventive methods and are advisable and will help overall, however she believes that using snap traps and glue traps would achieve the same efficacy when used for infestations but can't say so definitively.

Mary Vrinotis, from Save Somerville Wildlife, said it boils down to where the most effect can be attained. She acknowledged that there is a capacity issue and suggested that the city take the pesticide funds and put them towards sanitation efforts. She asked if ISD has data that can be shared re: ticketing for trash and 311 calls and Coordinator Privett replied that the information is available. Ms. Vrinotis also inquired about data on dumpster inspections and Mr. Ziegler explained that a dumpster audit to assess the condition of existing dumpsters (and make recommendations) has not been performed since the ordinance was enacted, due to staff shortage. New dumpsters, however, are inspected.

Chair Clingan commented that the rat problem was not like it is now when he was growing up here and that the problem needs to be address regionally, with other communities, adding that rodenticides can't be the only solution. The city has seen an explosion in the rat population and he's hoping for environmentally safe, effective solutions to deal with it.

Councilor Wilson commented that it's important to remember, when developing policy, that the level of activity that constitutes an infestation is subjective. Morgan Pinney, from Save Somerville Wildlife, suggested that Somerville look to its neighbors and learn from other communities. She closed by saying that Somerville has a rat problem because of rodenticides.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- Rodent - 2024-02-27 Presentation - Environmental Health