



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

September 23, 2020

REPORT OF THE RODENT ISSUES SPECIAL COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Ben Ewen-Campen	Chair	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Vice Chair	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Khushbu Webber-Mayor's Office, Georgianna Silveira-Human Health Services, Doug Kress-Human Health Services, Nick Antanavica-Inspectional Services.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairperson Ewen-Campen and adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Approval of the Minutes from Tuesday, March 03, 2020

RESULT:

ACCEPTED

209799 - That the Director of Inspectional Services explain the procedures for monitoring problem properties for rodent activity, as compared to waiting until more complaints are filed.:

Chair Ewen-Campen stated the purpose of this item is to come up with proactive responses and discuss the Integrated Pest Management system which was discussed in detail in Agenda Item #3 (209802).

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

209802 - That the Director of Inspectional Services and the Director of Health and Human Services report on progress regarding planned internal rodent control meetings and regular joint departmental meetings.:

Ms. Silveira stated the main focus of this meeting will be on the plan, and on additional efforts the city is taking on rodent control. She explained the introduction of the plan and stated that it's an interdepartmental effort. The Integrated Pest Management is a strategic plan involving a variety of rodent control techniques. The plan includes every available tool to control rodents, such as baiting, trapping and education. Part of the education includes informational flyers to all properties in areas with rodent sightings, and helping residents making sure food sources are

removed and properly placed in trash barrels. Additionally, IPM is to make sure everything is well documented and working together by all staff members.

The interdepartmental coordination is to set up specific avenues along with a list of what each department's responsibility is for rodent control. Ms. Silveira stated there are different legal requirements, residential vs. commercial vs. publicly-owned land. There will be monthly big picture interdepartmental monthly and targeted weekly meetings to discuss how well things are going, new efforts and programs. She works with the ISD health inspectors to discuss what they will be doing in upcoming weeks and how to respond to specific areas of concern. Additionally, Ms. Silveira is integrating a variety of data to make sure that anything relating to rodents is included and viewed together in various departments.

Ms. Silveira presented the IPM Best Practices with three main points for a more coordinated effort. She will use data analysis in the weekly meetings to review what efforts were done last week and what needs to be done based on the data. She will be looking at trends and strategies to see if the methods are helping with rodent control.

Ms. Silveira shared examples of how the analysis would be done and how it will be used. The data strategy provided were relating to residents, commercial and city property with rodent controls strategies to handle these properties. Each section has 3 subsections education, enforcement and abatement.

Ms. Silveira stated the residential baiting program was put out to bid. The program will be revamping education involving rodent siting. Additionally, the program will help the community take a role and empower themselves, and new door hangers which are already printed out. Ms. Silveira plans to attend events where Somerville residents will be, once we are able to gather. She discussed ways to annually remind people of rodent prevention and to integrate rodent education into daily lives. Ms. Silveira stated that rodents are a community issue. She is looking into weekly meetings to direct target enforcement of reports with trash violations. Ms. Silveira wants to remind the community that the city will replace barrels for free if destroyed by rodents. Maintaining trash barrels that have been chewed through is a way for rodents to stay around. Housing and Communications departments are working together to educate the community and to educate property owners about their own roles.

Ms. Silveira stated the city plans to go out to the community to promote the abatement program by using door hangers. There will be more of a push in the spring to use this program effectively. The city is also making the abating program available for non-owner-occupied properties. There will be a two-fold process, before and after spring breeding increases. Additionally, the city will use the budget to the fullest to stay on track with the program. Residential rodent control is the biggest issue along with addressing commercial properties to provide education and resources to help businesses think about ways control rodents. Ms. Silveira discussed ways of educating the community when applying for dumpster permits. Additionally, stated that pest control is very expensive and she will help educate businesses on what to look for when hiring pest control vendors. Businesses are required to have pest control programs.

Ms. Silveira discussed rodent control on public property and how this is where the city has the most control. She will work to better integrate pest control data on city owned properties. The city has a pest control contractor who will be reviewing and improving IPM around schools, barrels, and monitoring the system to evaluate the vendor used on city properties. The abatement will be working to develop "rat ice" process which is "dry ice" and when to use it.

Ms. Silveira provided examples of data monitoring on a map of the city with residential trash tickets, commercial trash tickets which are based on the data in the past. She will integrate data from the last 6 months to try to get a sense of the longer-term trends. Ms. Silveira also stated that the trash ticket amount increases up to \$300 and remains the same each time. The data may determine that education is needed in certain areas, with heavy trash violations. There are different ways to measure rat activity such as reports of dead rats or chewed barrels indicating there is high rat activity in the area. There is a heat map on what could be causing the rat activity. A high concentration area of restaurants or city barrels in the city square, would be high activity.

Councilor Rossetti asked if the new contract for residential baiting has been settled. Ms. Silveira stated the bids are in. Councilor Rossetti asked if the person had been hired and what are the extra criteria that were in the RFP. She asked Mr. Antanavica for a memo on the new criteria which had not been received. It was stated that the main criteria are better data reporting and to share the information with the city. Ms. Silveira stated that traps are hard to maintain because you have to check it daily and that dry ice is carefully regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency. Mr. Antanavica gave an update that the city received all bids. They are closing out verification of references and will have the vendor in place once all the signatures are done. Councilor Rossetti asked how long has the city gone without residential baiting company which has been about 3 weeks. She stated that residents on the west side are inundated with rats. Mr. Antanavica stated he is making a list of the residents requesting services. The contract will be in place for one year with two one-year renewals. The previous contractor was in place for 3 years. Councilor Rossetti suggested putting out the RFP early on so that in the future the city is not left without a contractor for rat control.

Mr. Antanavica was asked about chewed barrels if that is an indication of high rat activity and if someone could call 311 if they notice neighbors' barrels. Chair Ewen-Campen asked if that person with the chewed barrel gets a ticket or a warning. Mr. Antanavica stated the first step is to investigate, to observe and then a warning. If the situation persists with no action from the occupant, then ISD would issue a ticket. Ms. Silveira stated that it's DPW, not ISD who replaces the barrels and DPW needs to report the barrel's serial number to keep track of barrels. The barrels also need to be placed out on sidewalk to take away.

Councilor McLaughlin confirmed that the city will be issuing a notice if the barrels are chewed and then a ticket. Ms. Silveira stated they do a warning first because residents may not know about getting the barrels replaced by the city. Councilor McLaughlin stated he wants the city to get the replacement barrels to residents in a timely manner.

Councilor Rossetti asked about weekly meeting with ISD if there are other departments involved with weekly meetings. Ms. Silveira stated there will be a much wider variety of departments at the monthly meetings.

Councilor McLaughlin stated this is the 5th plan in the 7 years he has been trying to work on it and asked how does someone call if they have a rat problem? It was stated to contact 311 for immediate responses and report to communications system. Additionally, residents and businesses can contact Ms. Silveira and/or Mr. Antanavica with any questions. Mr. Antanavica stated he is working on increasing the number of times ISD goes out to respond to requests. Mr. Kress stated that ISD and HHS are partnering on this IPM program. Additionally, the city is happy to have Ms. Silveira's expertise in this area of study regarding rodent control. Councilor McLaughlin asked how many hours a week does Ms. Silveira spend on rodent issues. It was stated that Ms. Silveira continues to spend most of time on rodent control.

Chair Ewen-Campen stated it's important to be responsive to complaints as they come in, and to also pursue a proactive, data driven process. Chair Ewen-Campen also asked when the weekly meetings will start. It was stated that the data monitoring system has just started and weekly meetings will start soon. The chair asked for feedback on the meeting in future Rodent Issues meetings. Additionally, a question was asked about "rat ice" which is really "dry ice" and the use on city properties. The use of dry ice is highly regulated under EPA guidelines and residents can contact Ms. Silveira for guidance on its use. Additionally, there is a need to have specific label, data sheet and certain amount of feet away from buildings.

Councilor McLaughlin was asked by a resident how to avoid other animals getting into the poison and ensure only rodents get into the bait box. Ms. Silveira stated the black boxes are designed with small holes and tight turns for rats, that are very flexible. She also stated that the poison must be put in the bait boxes and requires a state license to do so.

RESULT:**KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

210113 - That the Director of Health and Human Services explain how the pandemic and related closures may be affecting rodent activity or any planned eradication strategies.:

Mr. Kress stated that COVID-19 was a stay at home order which included all staff and they had to pull back on work. Additionally, Mr. Kress stated there was an increase of rodent siting due to more people being home and seeing the rodents. There was also increase in trash from residential property due to people cooking and baking. Due to COVID, printed materials for the education process was locked up in the schools print shop. Ms. Silveira stated the measurement of activity since 2015 and 2017, have seen an increased in calls since 2017.

RESULT:**WORK COMPLETED**

210250 - That this Council's Special Committee on Rodent Issues discuss ways for renters to address rodent issues at their residences without fear of retribution from their landlords.:

Ms. Silveira stated that non-owner-occupied buildings can get baiting. The residential baiting program previously had a restriction for owner occupied properties only. The program requires legal verification is received from the property owner, before giving service to property owners in the city. This leaves out at least 50% of properties who are not eligible for this program due to being renters. The renters are very frustrated that it does not apply to them. Ms. Silveira stated the city will be extending to non-owner-occupied properties. This program involves a city staff to go on the property and will need approval. Additionally, will be requesting signatures from all the tenants to understand that toxic chemicals will be placed on the property and to make sure they are safe.

Chair Ewen-Campen stated that a number of tenants are afraid to report this for fear of the owner and asked how to protect the tenants. A question was asked if the city will inform the owner who put in the complaint. The city will be building some education on rodent protection for rentals and how to speak landlords about issues.

Mr. Kress stated to eliminate finger pointing, they are careful with their language when seeking permission to bait, such as "we are responding to increased observations of rodents in the area" as opposed to "one of your tenants complained to us." They are also looking at the language and communication with door hangers. Additionally, there is a need to treat multiple properties, not

have individuals targeted. The city will go to the landlord and will not state there has been complaints, but will state noticed activity in the area. Mr. Antanavica will not identify the person who made the complaint in order to investigate places. Communications to tenants will inform them of their legal rights and they are legally protected.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Handouts:

- Rodent IPM Plan_September 2020 FINAL (with 209799, 209802)