



## CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

### CITY COUNCIL

CHARLOTTE KELLY

CITY COUNCILOR AT LARGE

#### **Conveying budget priorities on rodent control, in response to Item 23-0159, Mayor's Request for input on priorities for the FY 2024 Budget.**

##### **1. Project description**

Rodent control in Somerville gained momentum in 2022. This proposal provides \$365,000 including two additional employees to expand on the promising progress Somerville has made in rodent control. These funds will allow ISD to expand SMART box pilot to a city-wide program, hire two additional inspectors, start a new Neighborhood Carbon Monoxide Pump Pilot for neighborhoods with high burrow presence, and increase communication to Somerville residents. The proposal assumes that ISD's current rodent control programs including the Residential Assistance Program and April postcard will receive continued funding.

##### **2. Project justification**

The city of Somerville has been experiencing a persistent and increasing rodent problem which presents significant concerns for Somerville residents related to public health and quality of life. Rats are known disease vectors, spreading salmonella and hantavirus among others. They can cause property damage, including damage to electrical wiring which can increase the occurrence of household fires. Rodents are known to reproduce rapidly, with a single pair producing up to 2,000 offspring per year. Urban areas with a high concentration of waste and other food sources require proactive rodent management. Our investment in this area is beginning to bear fruit, so now is the time to increase our efforts to get the rat population under control.

The city completed a SMART box pilot that was quite successful and is currently in a second phase of that pilot. Neither of these SMART box phases has included Ward 1, the area of Somerville most affected by the explosion in the rat population. In order to meaningfully and permanently decrease the number of rodents in our city we need to expand the SMART box pilot citywide and work with neighboring municipalities. We also can't rely on just one

technique, which is why including funding for the carbon monoxide pump is critical. Along with these direct interventions, increased communication will help Somerville residents know that something is happening and learn more about how they can participate in these rodent mitigation strategies.

The economic impact of not expanding our rodent mitigation will result in more damage to public and personal property, increased risk of disease spread, and an unruly rodent population taking over the city. Residents have asked how they as individuals can purchase SMART boxes and spend their own money on individual rodent mitigation solutions. We know that it takes a systemized response to rodents, not an individual response, to truly address the problem. With minimal investments, Somerville can bring a multi-pronged approach to tackling the rodent problem.

### 3. Timeline and evaluation

Specifics of the timeline will be left to the Environment Health Coordinator and other members of ISD who showed decisive leadership on this project in 2022. In their quarterly reports to the Somerville City Council Special Committee for Rodent Issues, we would consider this program successful if the following milestones were accomplished:

1. Hiring process for new inspectors is complete or well underway. A comprehensive plan to expand the SMART box program citywide is complete. Carbon Monoxide Rodent Control Device has been purchased - two (2) to three (3) months.
2. Two new inspectors have been hired. At least 50% of planned SMART boxes have been installed. ISD employees have been trained on Carbon Monoxide Rodent Control Devices and used in the field at least once - two (2) to three (3) months.
3. All SMART boxes have been installed. A plan for additional mail or other media communication is in place - two (2) to three (3) months.
4. Report-back on SMART boxes and communication strategy. Carbon Monoxide Rodent Control Device has been used in at least 12 locations in neighborhoods with high burrow presence one (1) month

### 4. Estimated budget

Cost	Purpose	How calculated
\$177,000	Salaries for new inspectors	INSP2 salary (x2) with estimated COL adjustment
\$160,000	SMART Box expansion	100 new boxes at \$400 start up cost + \$1200/year service contract

\$5,200	Carbon Monoxide Rodent Control Device (x2)	Based on cost of GopherX Burrowing Rodent Control Device commercial unit
\$10,800	Printing	FY2023 ISD printing line item (60%)
\$12,000	Postage	FY2023 ISD postage line item (60%)

## 5. Conclusions

Uncontrolled urban rodent populations are a public health and safety issue. It is unacceptable for a single person in a community like Somerville to contract disease from rats or to live in a home that is unsafe due to compromised electrical wiring. Expanding our rodent control efforts is a worthwhile and cost effective way to improve our community.