



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Board of Health – Rodent Control Hearing – August 16, 2012

Minutes

Ellen Collins, Inspectional Services Operations' Manager gave a presentation/overview of the City of Somerville's Rodent Control Pilot Program.

What is Rodent Control? The term rodent includes mice, rats, squirrels, and other small mammals of the order Rodentia. Rodent control is methods of managing a rodent population. This can be preventive management, such as eliminating potential sources of food and shelter. It can also include extermination of animals. In a city, everyone is responsible for rodent control. At this hearing, we will educate you on basic rat facts and tips to discourage their presence and create healthy neighborhoods.

What is a rat? The Norway rat is common to all cities; their features are listed as such:

- . Body about 6-9 inches long at maturity
- . Tail is equal to body length
- . Fur is brown or dark grey
- . Nocturnal (active at night)
- . Good diggers and swimmers; poor climbers
- . Live in groups underground in burrows or sewers
- . Omnivores (eat plant and animal products); food waste trash is an easy source of food when left outside
- . Like all rodents, gnaws on objects as teeth are constantly growing.

Why are rats a public health concern? Rats can be vectors for disease. While rat populations can never be eliminated in urban areas, it is important to make their impact as minimal as possible. The state sanitary code and local ordinances prescribe minimum sanitation standards for housing, trash disposal and vegetation. Understand and complying with these regulations is critical in order to control rat populations and minimize health risks for our community.

It is important for businesses and homeowners to put out trash correctly, maintain your property correctly and keep housing especially for tenants up to code. This will minimize the rodents. Check for rodent activity for example: burrows, droppings, gnaw marks. If you have a rodent problem on your property it is the law that you have to exterminate. There are more tips for businesses and homeowners at the City of Somerville's website. The tips can be found at: <http://www.somervillema.gov/rodentcontrol>.

The area of concern that the city chose to initiate the first pilot program is bounded by Skilton Avenue, the MBTA commuter rail "Lowell" line, Aldrich Street, Gilman Street and Jasper Street, including parts of Pearl and Walnut Streets. The inspectors will be going to every single property in this area to search for rodent activity. This area was chosen for tonight's hearing due to the following factors:

- . high volume of 311 calls
- . observed problem rodent populations
- . centrally located
- . variety of land uses types – parks/ opens space; rail line; Commercial; and Residential.

The proposal for the pilot program presented tonight will be the following:

- a.) Exterior (yard inspections would be planned for all properties in the area from August 27, 2012 thru September 14, 2012.
- b.) Inspectors will ask for permission to enter private property from the resident (owner or renter). If permission is not granted, a warrant may be sought.
- c.) Inspectors will visit each public and private property, looking for evidence of rodent activity and code violations that contribute to rodent infestation.
- d.) Data from the area-wide inspection will be analyzed to help understand rodent behavior in this area.
- e.) Information from the inspection is planned to be used to improve the City's Rodent Control program. The area will be monitored to see if health conditions improve for the neighborhood.

Edward Nuzzo, Inspectional Services Director, said that there are at least 12 – 14 properties in the affected area that have rodent infestation. If we can clean up these properties, we will get rid of the rodents in the entire neighborhood. Mr. Nuzzo would like everyone's' cooperation. We have to work together to get the problem under control.

Ward 2 Aldermen William Roche wanted to know how the MBTA will comply in cleaning up around the rail lines. He also wanted to know if one single extermination company could be used by the entire neighborhood at a reduced cost. Dave Shapiro from the Law Office will check into the legality of his request. Mr. Roche also mentioned that he will be speaking to the Mayor to see if there would be funds available to help the low-income, elderly, and disabled and anyone else who might qualify for a hardship in helping them pay for extermination fees.

Comments from the Public – After the presentation, the floor was opened for public comments.

Approximately 24 residents as well as Ald. W. Roche, ISD Supt E. Nuzzo, Asst. City Solicitor D. Shapiro, and ISD Operations Mgr E. Collins attended the hearing.

Residents from Gilman Street brought in pictures of rodents killed on their property and stating the rats were over a foot long. They have brought in an exterminating company and have been paying monthly extermination services for over a year @ \$75 a month. They did however state this has become fruitless because the entire neighborhood has to come together and bait their properties to be successful. Many of the residents said that they can't even enjoy sitting out in their backyards. These residents see the rats even during day light hours. It has become an epidemic. One resident from Cross Street told how her children and the neighbors' children could not use the sandbox in their backyard because it was infested with rodents. She also stated that when children are involved and witness this, it is unacceptable. Also in her neighborhood there is a language barrier. She approached her neighbor and through translation from a 6 year old child was told that this child's mom says the rodents come up through the floor boards from the cellar. It was also noted that residents would try to leave out barrels that had holes in them (and therefore did not meet code standards) to dispose of them but Russell Disposal never takes them. Overall everyone at the hearing agreed that the whole neighborhoods must come together and work together to rid their neighborhoods of rats. Alderman Roche also stated that he would like the Law Office to look into whether the city has any recourses to take legal action and have the courts give the city

permission to go on private property when the landlord does not cooperate with them and look for signs of rodent activity, bait if necessary and billed the homeowner for the cost of the service. Asst. City Solicitor Shapiro will research this issue.

Dr. Green made a motion to take a vote to adopt the City of Somerville's Pilot Project Proposal and to extend the inspection period beyond September 14, 2012 if necessary, so that the Inspectors can get to all the houses. A vote was taken all were in favor. Yes – 3 No – 0 **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

Conclusion: After the inspections, follow up letters will go to the residents in the pilot program area. The city will hold a neighborhood meeting to get feedback and comments from the residents and to provide them with this data.