

**CITY OF BEVERLY
CITY COUNCIL
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

MEETING: Legal Affairs & Public Services/Committee of the Whole
DATE: June 28, 2021
LOCATION: City Council Chambers, City Hall, 191 Cabot St.
COMMITTEE: Legal Affairs
BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Scott D. Houseman (Chair), Dominic Copeland
COMMITTEE: Public Services
BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Julie R. Flowers (Chair), Stacy Ames, Todd Rotondo
BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Kathleen Feldman (Legal Affairs)
OTHERS PRESENT: Estelle Rand, Michael Cahill, Darlene Wynne, Michael Collins, Timothy Flaherty, Michael Becker, Bill Burke, Joscelyn Ruelle-Kersker
RECORDER: Sharlyne Woodbury

Order #134: Rodent Management Discussion

Houseman and Flowers jointly call their respective committees to order at 7:00pm in combination as a committee of the whole. Houseman and Flowers provide the public procedure protocols and expectations. Both chairs make opening remarks to the sensitivity of the rodent control subject noting there is not one solution. Houseman comments this is a fact-finding meeting and will require further deliberation for a multipronged- solution approach. Speakers will be held to 3 minutes with Councilor Rotondo charged as the time keeper.

Houseman views this topic as a public health issue and believes the city government should take an active role as well as balance the application of rodenticides in an effort to maintain the city's environmental green initiatives. Flowers provides opening remarks echoing similar sentiments of city collaboration with residents to find solutions for the rodent control issue. They would like to find a sustainable and enforceable rodent mitigation strategy to balance public safety, pet safety, and the health of the ecosystem. Upon initial research, Flowers would like to explore utilizing dry ice, birth control, and attracting natural predators. Ames offers opening remarks noting the volume of resident involvement and attention to the issue which is most prevalent in her precinct. Rotondo's opening remarks provide prospective as a restaurant owner discussing trash maintenance, pest removal fees, and neighbors feeding the rats. Rotondo notes the city-wide construction disrupts the rat's natural habitats forcing them to migrate elsewhere. Rand's opening remarks note the rats may be a symptom of struggling neighbors with hoarding issues. Copeland's opening remarks also bring attention to the rodent issue caused by city construction.

Houseman invites Mayor Cahill to present to the council then will open the floor to public comment. Cahill provides a brief update to city procedure on the role of the health department when building permits are applied for and approved. Cahill turns his time over to the committee in order to allow public comment. Houseman proceeds with public comment reading from a sign-up sheet.

Steven Miller, 5 Hillcrest Avenue

Miller addresses the committee. He submitted video evidence of the rodents. They are bold, persistent, and a health hazard. These rodents exhibit no fear during the day. Miller suggests the city mount a grassroots campaign going door to door with best practices for decreasing the rodent population. He discusses reducing and eliminating food sources. Miller had to convert to steel trashcans since the rats chewed through his plastic ones. Miller is looking for the city to encourage residents to be more aware of cleaner yards free of debris. Miller discusses how resilient and intelligent the rats are in working around defenses.

Heidi Roberts, 14 Putnam Street

Roberts addresses the committee. She is President of Friends of Beverly Animals, an avid animal lover, yet contends the rat issue outside her home is a problem. She does not have an issue with rats inside her residence. Roberts does not believe in animal cruelty. She researched a pest control company that performed humane treatment. Roberts discusses the city construction attributing to the rat problem when Dodge Street was opened. Roberts is open to the strategies of rat birth control and natural predators. Roberts adamantly disagrees with the use of rat poison throughout the city.

Christine DePalma, 27 Chase Street

DePalma addresses the committee. DePalma discusses the health hazards of the rats particularly the diseases they carry. She is unable to garden or enjoy her yard due to the overwhelming issue. She is dismayed by the lack of city's response and finds the city habitually places the burden back on the homeowners instead of trying to collaborate and find a solution. DePalma would like to see the city take more responsibility as an active partner interested in finding a compromised solution.

Jenna Mayer, 234 Lothrop Street

Mayer addresses the committee. Discusses the lack of city involvement. She left Boston and moved to a smaller community to gain more space and purchase her first home. Mayer and her neighbors cannot enjoy their outdoor spaces. Mayer has had many car repairs because the rats chew through the electrical wiring damaging her vehicles. Mayer does not believe it is a question if the city should get involved, but when. Houseman replies to her comments as her ward councilor. Notes her residence is juxtaposed between a water way and public park. Therefore, her situation is not due to construction or an urban setting which demonstrates the diversity of the problem.

Gerri Cahill, 12 Lenox Street

Cahill addresses the committee. Discusses the evolution of the city rodents in the last 30 years. She discusses the cost and fees associated with trying to resolve the problem. She has called pest control and the rats still persist. They are difficult to keep up with. She has purchased expensive trash cans and has purchased rat traps. Cahill has tried to get her neighbors involved. Some are simply resigned to the problem. She would like more city involvement. Also prefers humane pest control treatment. Notes the more city construction, the more rats are prevalent.

Rick Marciano, 141 McKay Street

Marciano addresses the committee. Marciano agrees with the prior speakers' comments discussing his experiences in pest control attempts. This year seems to be a particularly bad year for the rat population. Most residents conclusively point out the increased city construction and development has triggered the rat problem exponentially. The residents would like save effective methods and remedies to mitigate the issue. Notes the city can purchase these items in bulk whereas private citizens' do not have such cost-effective measures at their disposal.

Kim Smith, 19 West Dane Street

Smith addresses the committee. Smith inquires if the plans for new construction are available to the public. The committee answers affirmatively. Smith discusses the recently constructed 5 West Dane Street residential building. Smith has been in Beverly for 6 years with minimal rat sightings. Smith points out the overdevelopment of Beverly is a contributing factor to the increased rat population since their natural habitats are disturbed and demolished. Smith questions how well the construction plans are being followed since residents are seeing an increase in rats.

Rachel Tolan, 14 Chase Street

Tolan addresses the committee. Tolan's experiences are the same as Smith's. The city construction and development destroyed the rats' habitats and now they are a problem. Her backyard is adjacent to the alleyway for the new Rantoul condo buildings and restaurants. These back-alley dumpsters should be tended to more frequently in order to eradicate the rats' food sources. Tolan has also tried pest control bait boxes unsuccessfully.

Joan Matton, 26 Chase Street

Matton addresses the committee. She is a life-long resident and has not seen the rodent population this bad until the city construction in her area with the new Rantoul condo buildings. Discusses absentee landlords not properly caring for rentals in her neighborhood. Discusses a neighboring apartment building with a new owner who performed yard clean up. The prior building owner did little or no yard clean up. Matton agrees with prior residents that the overflowing dumpsters are significantly contributing to the problem. Thanks Councilor Ames for assisting with her complaint. Matton would like larger dumpsters in those back-alleys better maintained for trash pick-up. She expresses concerns with absentee landlords ("slumlords").

Flowers would like the public to note that no one needs to apologize about their attempts to try and resolve the rodent issue as it is a work in progress. Beverly citizens are conscientious with trial and error rodent control techniques.

Danielle Spang, 16 Mulberry Street

Spang addresses the committee. Spang has the same issues with construction, neighborhood trash, pest control fees and expenses. Would like the city to restore city trash receptacles when the construction is over.

Mayor Cahill addresses the committee. He emphasizes the connection the city would like to have with residents in mitigating the rodent issue. He is happy to further discuss with Smith the

building and demolition plans available to the public for the recent construction on West Dane Street.

Michael Becker, Waltham Pest Services, addresses the committee. Provides a public presentation and updates on pest mitigation strategies. Agrees with the public there is no one size fits all solution and that rodents are part of the city. While they cannot be fully eradicated, their population be limited and controlled in a safe effective way. Discusses environmental causes, the rodent species, their biology, rodenticides, their mating and propagating factors. Becker takes questions from the public during the presentation. Most comments center on the ineffectiveness/effectiveness of natural remedies, other community strategies, and trash maintenance. The public inquires how far rodents travel when their food sources and habitats are destroyed. Rats are creatures of habit and do not travel too far from the areas they are comfortable with.

Councilors pose questions to Becker. Ames inquires if Becker can work with the city to find effective remedies for those impacted by the extreme nature of the situation. Rotondo inquires if in general, composting is a contributing factor. Becker does not feel that composting is an overwhelming variable. Houseman discusses composting and whether if the ingredients, meat vs. vegetables, make a difference to the rats. Becker does not believe the compost ingredients matter either way. Copeland inquires about the new construction correlation between the increased rat population and whether or not there are better plans to put in place. Becker suggests submitting a rodent control plan along with the building permits.

Mayor Cahill addresses the public and committee. The mayor discusses how the city has tried to work with the public and identify those areas most affected. The mayor also discusses causation and mitigation strategies, their implementation, successes and failures. Cahill discusses city budget abilities and resources dedicated to the issue. The mayor briefly discusses the composition of the city health department and staff. The mayor discusses city trash efforts, proper recycling efforts and trash composting. Balancing these variables is key in reducing the available food resource for rodents. The mayor concludes his presentation to the committee encouraging residents to reach out with concerns.

Ames would like more direct collaboration between the city and the residents, even offering some residents to be on a committee and lend their first-hand experiences for consideration.

Houseman also addresses the mayor. Discusses his efforts to create a city ordinance with the city solicitor for pest control.

Tolan offers comments for thought replying to the mayor's concerns for clean recycling. She suggests using stickers on the bins to outline proper procedures.

Rand would like to know what is the best protocol for getting help with individuals struggling with hoarding.

Cahill recommends the online reporting tool, QSCEND, as the first line of communication.

Bill Burke, Public Health Director, addresses the committee with hoarding protocols and procedures.

Flowers notes the time and allows for one more public comment before closing the meeting.

Greg Dolan, 5 Prospect Street

Dolan addresses the committee. Dolan finds the overall experience of tonight's meeting educational and impactful. He is concerned about the attention to what the neighborhood and neighbors are doing. Equal attention should be on the city too. He would like the city to be a good neighbor itself. He notes the support of the mayor, the city engineer, and board of health are equal co-contributors to addressing the issue. Dolan discusses the building code as required by state noting the city is doing the minimum but not anything additional. He notes the city has an obligation to hold the developer and building owner to the minimum state code requirements. Dolan also believes the city needs to go beyond the state minimum requirements. If the minimum code requirements are not working, then as a community local code needs to do more. Dolan discusses data collection. Dolan discusses the city restoring the city trash bins to open spaces and public parks. Dolan comments on the increased city litter without the public trash receptacles.

Houseman and Flowers conclude the public section of tonight's meeting and will now begin formal motions for the subcommittees to adjourn. Councilors note the issue is not closed and a continuation of the discussion will resume at a later date.

Adjournment

Copeland moves to adjourn the subcommittee of Legal Affairs. Houseman seconds. The motion carries 2-0.

Ames moves to adjourn the subcommittee of Public Services. Rotondo seconds. The motion carries 3-0.

Rand moves to adjourn the committee as a whole. Ames seconds. The motion carries 7-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:21 p.m.