

Warrant Article 3 of Special Town Meeting 2, November 2022: Petitioners' Answers to Written Questions from Members of the Advisory Committee's Human Services Subcommittee

September 29, 2022

*1. What amendments would you suggest be made to this article?*

The petitioners are not at this time offering any amendments, but we are willing to listen to any suggestions for improving WA3 (STM2).

Please note that we have heard two diametrically opposed criticisms of WA3 (STM2): (1) The article needs to do much more to address the rat problem; and (2) The Town lacks the funds for further rat control measures. It is difficult or impossible to address these comments simultaneously with an amendment. The warrant article seeks the minimum resources needed to address an urgent need without causing strain to the Town budget. In FY2024 and beyond, more funds might be available

When more information is available, it might be possible to amend the article. For example, if the Community Preservation Committee recommends using Community Preservation funds for trash receptacles in the parks, WA3 (STM2) would not need to appropriate funds for that purpose. When the Town can provide full information on updated FY2023 revenue estimates (including any fine or fee increases), we might have a better idea of what might be available for trash and rodent control. The amount appropriated for personnel costs probably should be adjusted to take into account the fact that any new position would not be filled until the middle of FY2023.

The petitioners have asked the Moderator about which amendments might be within the scope of the article. Hypothetical amendments include increasing the appropriation for trash receptacles, funding a new position in the Department of Public Health instead of or in addition to a new position in the Department of Public Works, or reducing another appropriation in the FY2023 budget in order to make funds available for trash and rat control measures. Assistant Moderator Gadsby and Deputy Town Administrator Goff have confirmed that such amendments would be within the scope. In fact, because the first two paragraphs of WA3 (STM2) are based on the language that customarily appears in the Select Board's budget adjustment articles for November Town Meetings, an even broader range of budget-related amendments could be offered under WA3 (STM2). (We anticipate that at STM2 WA1 and WA3 will be considered together, but that is for the Moderator to decide.)

*2. What evidence is there that the rat infestation is the result of garbage from public parks and public receptacles, as opposed to commercial establishments and building sites?*

There are multiple causes of the increase in reports and complaints about rat infestation. Poor trash management by restaurants, property managers, landlords, businesses, and construction sites are other contributing causes that are being addressed through other mechanisms. We favor

addressing all sources of the rat infestation, but the Town has primary responsibility for maintaining rat-resistant trash bins and preventing rat infestation in public spaces such as parks. There is much evidence that rat access to garbage in public parks is contributing to rat infestation. The four-fold increase of rat-related complaints to the Department of Public Works over the past 3+ years is evidence that the parks are part of the problem. Brookline residents report frequent rat sightings and overflowing trash at Lawton Playground. One of us has had personal experience with rat infestation at Knyvet Square being a major issue until the waste bins were changed. The fact that trash receptacles had to be removed from the Longwood Playground (Lawrence School) because rats were getting into them is further evidence of a problem in a park or playground. Neighbors report seeing rats in or near Monmouth Park. In previous discussions with Town staff, we learned that one cause of rat infestation was the lack of sufficient waste bins and that there is currently a waitlist to replace them.

- 3. Could you explain why you chose just this piece of the much larger problem for your WA?*

There are many reasons to begin by focusing on steps to improve trash receptacles in public parks. People, including children, eat and play in parks—Brookline’s public outdoor spaces. Parks and playgrounds are seeing increased use. Overflowing or rat-accessible trash bins in parks attract rats. The Town has the responsibility to take care of its public trash receptacles—to put its own house in order. Moreover, it’s hard for the Town to enforce regulations regarding waste disposal if its own trash receptacles in public parks and playgrounds are attracting rats.

The DPW identified replacement of receptacles as a key problem. The department ideally needs 80 new trash bins to meet Brookline’s overall needs, but we chose the 23 that meet the most urgent needs identified by Town staff and residents. The petitioners tried to be conscious of the budget while trying to meet the most urgent need at this point in time. Funds are limited, and we can’t do everything at once. Capital outlays for trash receptacles are one-time expenses that have a long-lasting impact and don’t create ongoing expenses for staff salaries. New “Big Belly” bins can save staff time by signaling when they are full, so they are particularly cost-effective. That said, we’d love to address every aspect of the trash and rat problem.

- 4. I’m still unclear on the location of the 80 receptacles mentioned in our first hearing. Of those 80, why were these 23 chosen?*

Please see above question and questionnaire. This warrant article was targeted to meet the most urgent needs identified by Town staff while being fiscally conservative.

- 5. Why are we distinguishing between containers on parks property and those on streets and other areas?*

There are several reasons to focus on trash receptacles in public parks.

Many members of the public, including children, use Brookline's parks and playgrounds. Use has increased since the start of the COVID pandemic. Rat-resistant trash receptacles can help reduce human exposure to rats, rat feces, and diseases borne by rats.

Parks are also places where garbage accumulates as people eat take-out food outdoors, which they are doing more often. Unless trash bins are rat-resistant, they attract rats.

Finally, the trash receptacles in parks and playgrounds could be funded with Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds if funds from the regular Town budget are not available. Other trash receptacles (e.g., on sidewalks) are not eligible for CPA funds.