

REVISED EXPLANATION FOR ARTICLE 3 (SPECIAL TOWN MEETING 2):
TRASH MANAGEMENT AND RODENT CONTROL

Summary

The petitioners of Warrant Article 3 of Special Town Meeting 2 (WA3STM2) will move a resolution regarding trash management and rodent control. This resolution is offered as a substitute for the budget amendment that was included in WA3STM2 as it was originally published in the Warrant. The resolution recognizes that Brookline has a major rat infestation, welcomes the announcement of the Town's Rodent Control Action Plan, thanks Town staff for what they are doing to address the problem, acknowledges that much more needs to be done, and urges that future budgets include the necessary funding for rodent control and trash management.

The resolution is being offered because it is clear that there will not be additional FY2023 General Fund revenues that could be appropriated for trash management and rodent control. The Town has, however, issued a Rodent Control Action Plan, and on October 18 the Select Board voted to reallocate \$200,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for short-term steps that are part of that plan.

The petitioners hope the resolution will increase awareness of Brookline's rat infestation problem and encourage further efforts to address the rat infestation while improve the town's infrastructure against future infestations.

The Original Warrant Article

WA3STM2 began as a response to concerns about the increasing rat infestation in Brookline. During the late spring and early summer of 2022, many Town Meeting members reported rat sightings or residents' complaints about rat infestation in their neighborhoods. Several Town Meeting members thought that a warrant article should be filed to address this issue.

The original explanation of WA3STM2 presents data on the scale and causes of the rat infestation problem, including long-term factors and changes associated with the COVID pandemic. Since the warrant article was submitted, many members of the public have presented detailed accounts of why they regard the rat infestation as a crisis that is ruining their quality of life and imposing high costs on them.

The original WA3STM2 proposed to appropriate FY2023 budget funds to buy more Big Belly trash bins for Brookline's parks and playgrounds. The Parks and Open Space Division of the Department of Public Works had in the spring of 2022 sought but not received funds for this purpose. The unfunded proposal was an indication of need and included budget figures that served as a basis for the appropriations requested in the warrant article.

There are many good reasons for installing rodent-resistant trash receptacles such as Big Bellies in public parks. Uncovered trash bins in parks attract rodents, particularly when people bring take-out food to parks and dispose of the containers in park trash bins. Many people, including children, use parks and playgrounds and potentially encounter rats and rat feces in these public spaces. Such encounters have become more frequent as more and more people have been using Brookline's parks and playgrounds for outdoor recreation in recent years. The Town of Brookline has responsibility for its public places, so it is particularly important that the Town "keep its own house in order" and control rodent infestation in parks and playgrounds at the same time that it is requiring private businesses and residents to manage their trash properly.

The petitioners also regarded the proposed acquisition of Big Belly trash receptacles as fiscally responsible and efficient. The one-time capital investment in buying Big Bellies would improve trash management and rodent control for years to come, without creating a major and ongoing increase in the budget for staff and salaries. Buying Big Bellies probably would save some staff time. The newer Big Bellies can send a signal when they need to be emptied, eliminating the need for staff to frequently visit trash bins or empty the bins before they are full. They are sturdier than regular bins, which rats are chewing through.

Although it focused on appropriating funds for Big Belly trash receptacles, WA3STM2 was drafted so that the scope of the article was broad enough to allow for amendments that would appropriate funds for other ways of addressing the rat infestation problem.

The petitioners submitted their proposal as a warrant article, not as an amendment to the Select Board's FY2023 budget adjustment article (Warrant Article 1 of Special Town Meeting 2), for the following reasons. First, budget amendments tend to be considered late in the Town Meeting process and to receive relatively little attention. Second, filing a warrant article would ensure that the Advisory Committee and Select Board would hold public hearings and that residents would be able to air their concerns about rat infestation. The hearings also would give

Town staff an opportunity to discuss the rodent problem and the Town's response. Third, during the lengthy process of reviewing the warrant article, there would be opportunities to identify potential funding sources for the items listed in the article, as well as other initiatives for controlling the rat infestation. Compared to previous years, potential sources of funds (e.g., American Rescue Plan Act and Community Preservation Act funds) are now more numerous and complicated. Finally, the discussion of the warrant article would promote awareness of Brookline's rodent problem and stimulate a process of education and communication.

The original WA3STM2 did not identify a source of funds (e.g., an offsetting budget cut) for the acquisition of the Big Belly trash receptacles. At the time that the article was submitted, it was not clear whether Brookline would receive more FY2023 revenue than when the May 2022 Town Meeting had approved the budget. The petitioners hoped that state aid and other revenue would exceed projections or that other revenue estimates would increase and some of any additional revenue could be used for the appropriations in WA3STM2.

Why A Resolution

There are two primary reasons why the petitioners have decided to offer a resolution under WA3STM2 instead of a budget amendment.

First, since WA3STM2 was submitted, it has become now clear that there will not be a lot of unexpected revenues in the FY2023 budget that could be appropriated to address the rat infestation problem. Although some revenues exceed the estimates that were available when the May 2022 Town Meeting considered the FY2023 budget, those funds are needed to balance the budget, fund the schools, and to pay for potential collective bargaining agreements. Some are dedicated to specific uses, such as the opioid settlement funds, and cannot be used for trash management and rodent control.

Second, after WA3STM2 was submitted, the Town has issued its Rodent Control Action Plan. This plan, announced on October 12, is the result of the work of the Rodent Control Task Force, which includes Commissioner of Public Works Erin Chute Gallentine and Director of Public Health and Human Services Sigalle Reiss, and other Town staff. Town Administrator Chas Carey has been actively involved in the work of the task force.

The short- and mid-term elements of the Rodent Control Action Plan include contracting with a pest control specialist who will identify pest control measures

and use smart traps to capture rodents and gather data; hiring a food safety consultant to gather data and assist with enforcement; creating a Rodent Recourse webpage for reporting and responding to rodent sightings and complaints; purchasing five Big Belly trash bins, updating outdoor dining regulations (completed); revising solid waste regulations; and using door knob hangers to inform residents.

These actions will take place in the next six months and will be funded with \$200,000 in reallocated ARPA funds, as approved by the Select Board on October 18, as well as existing resources.

The long-term (1–2 years) measures in the Rodent Control Action Plan include a hiring an Inspectional Services and Code Enforcement Supervisor and a Trash Packer Operator, and purchasing more Big Belly trash bins, a small garbage truck (packer) with a toter lift, and a vehicle for the enforcement supervisor. Annual costs would be \$288,250 plus one-time costs of \$180,000.

Given the budget situation, the announcement of the Rodent Control Action Plan, and the availability of \$200,000 in short-term funding, a resolution seemed to be a better approach than the original budget amendment.

Summary of the Resolution

The “Whereas” clauses acknowledge that Brookline has a serious rodent problem and list some of the many ways that the rat infestation has negatively affected residents’ quality of life.

Those clauses also recognize that Brookline now has a Rodent Control Action Plan and that a multipronged approach is necessary for fighting the rat infestation.

The “Resolved” clauses:

- Thank staff and departments for their work to address the rat infestation, including their efforts to develop the Rodent Control Action Plan.
- Urge that the town administrator include necessary rodent control funding in the FY-2024 Financial Plan, including funds for “inspections, enforcement, rodent-resistant trash receptacles, education and communication, rodent, baiting, trapping, and removal, and any other best practices for rodent control.”

- Urge the Select Board to review fees and fines related to trash management and rodent control to raise revenue and provide stronger incentives for compliance.
- Urge the Departments of Public Works and of Public Health and Human Services to review solid waste and other regulations to make them more stringent (in progress).
- Urge Town boards, committees, and commissions to consider the need to devote funds to rodent control when they make decisions regarding Community Preservation Act (CPA) or ARPA funds.
- Urge the public and businesses to take steps to fight the rat infestation, recognizing that we all have to work together to control the rodent problem.

We hope this resolution will put Town Meeting on record as recognizing the severity of Brookline's rat infestation problem, supporting a robust and comprehensive effort to fight the rat infestation, including increased funding for Town departments, the use of other funds (e.g., ARPA), tougher regulations, and improved compliance by businesses, restaurants, and property owners/mangers.

We realize that many of the key decisions and votes related to rodent control will take place between now and the May 2023 Annual Town Meeting and at that Town Meeting.