



TOWN of BROOKLINE

Massachusetts

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To: Select Board

From: Charles Carey, Town Administrator

Date: October 12, 2022

Subject: Rodent Control Action Plan Recommendation Memorandum

This memorandum explains and recommends a vote on a plan to address Brookline's rat issue. As the Select Board is well aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused seismic impacts across all areas of our lives, in both obvious and unexpected ways. One of the more unexpected and unwelcome changes is the growth of pest populations, driven in part by changes in public sanitation habits. Perhaps the most visible manifestation of this in Brookline is rats.

The explosive spread of rats requires a whole-of-government response to the emergent public health and sanitation threats they pose. Brookline's Departments of Public Works ("DPW") and Public Health & Human Services (the "Health Department") have founded a Rodent Control Task Force to address the problem. In addition to fielding a barrage of complaints, which have increased by between 300 and 400% this year, their department heads, in conjunction with numerous other departments, have developed the attached Rodent Control Action Plan (the "Action Plan") that proposes short-, mid-, and long-term solutions for the problem.

In the next six months, the Action Plan recommends:

- Immediately engaging the services of a pest control specialist who will use "smart" traps and technology to identify rodent hot spots while bringing the population down
- Concurrently engaging the services of a food safety consultant who will both identify best practices for enforcement of solid waste regulations (i.e., ensuring restaurants maintain sanitary outdoor dining setups) and help enforce those regulations
- Bringing online a dedicated one-stop public website for rodent resources and reporting by November 15, 2022
- Conducting community outreach and distributing literature such as door-hangers in hot spot areas to reinforce best residential and commercial practices
- Reviewing and revising the Town's solid waste regulations
- Purchasing 5 "Big Belly" trash compactors

In the longer term, the Action Plan recommends:

- Purchasing a small trash packer with a toter lift and hiring an operator for it
- Hiring an inspectional services and code enforcement supervisor and purchasing a dedicated vehicle for that new hire
- Seeking funds for additional Big Bellies and the repair/replacement of public dumpsters through the Town's Capital Improvement Program

The Action Plan recommends paying for its proposed short- to mid-term activities for the next six months by repurposing American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") funds currently allocated to the Health Department for the procurement of COVID-19 testing and protective equipment. I believe addressing the proliferation of rats (and the public health risk they cause) due to pandemic-related changes in behavior is an ARPA-eligible expense. Outdoor dining and increased use of parks have contributed to litter control challenges. These are changes in behavior brought out as a result of the pandemic and are likely to stay under the new normal.

The Action Plan estimates the cost of its short- to mid-term activities at \$184,000.00. I recommend authorizing the use of up to \$200,000.00 in ARPA dollars to ensure all the recommended activities can be fully funded. The Health Department believes it will still have adequate resources to address COVID-related needs in the coming winter if this money is repurposed. Unused funds can be reallocated immediately, allowing for proper planning after the dormant winter period for rats ends. The Action Plan's longer-term recommendations will need to be addressed through the FY24 budget process. I look forward to our upcoming conversations regarding your priorities for that budget.

The speed with which DPW and the Health Department developed this plan is highly commendable, and they were ably assisted by their colleagues in the Building, Information Technology, and Finance Departments, among others. In the less-than-a-month since I began serving in the Town Administrator role, DPW and the Health Department met more than five times with me to brief me on the present state of rodent control affairs and draft a comprehensive plan that moves quickly to bring the rat population down while collecting data on how to address the problem as efficiently and completely as possible. I want to thank Commissioner Gallentine of DPW and Director Reiss of the Health Department for their and their staffs' continued excellence in service of our community.

Given the above, I recommend that the vote set forth on the following page be moved at the Board's earliest convenience.

Remainder of page intentionally left blank.

Moved: To reallocate \$200,000 previously approved in the ARPA COVID Maintenance budget as follows:

Item	Original Budget	Transfer	Revised Budget
Health COVID Testing	449,520	(100,000)	349,520
Health COVID Testing Site	162,500	(100,000)	62,500
Health and DPW Rodent Control Action Plan	0	200,000	200,000
TOTAL	612,020	-	612,020

END OF MAIN DOCUMENT

Enclosure: Recommended Action Plan

cc: Melissa Goff, Deputy Town Administrator
Erin Chute Gallentine, Commissioner of the Department of Public Works
Sigalle Reiss, Director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services
Tyler Belisle-Toler, ARPA Grants Administrator



TOWN OF BROOKLINE

MASSACHUSETTS

To: Chas Carey, Town Administrator
Melissa Goff, Deputy Town Administrator

From: Erin Chute Gallentine, Commissioner of Public Works
Sigalle Reiss, Director of Public Health & Human Services

Date: October 12, 2022

Re: Recommended Action Plan to Improve Town's Rodent Control Program

The COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in behavior, patterns, and outcomes associated with initially temporary and now seemingly permanent life, work, and study habits throughout the world. Some of these changes have exacerbated rodent activity, especially in urban areas. Inspectional service calls related to sanitation, waste storage, rodent populations, and noise have increased to the Health and Human Services Department and the Department of Public Works due to changes in conditions created by human activity. During the past year, many neighborhoods and town departments felt the [impact of increasing rodent activity](#). Complaints received by both departments have increased by 300-400%.

Annual Rodent Related Complaints Received

Department	2019	2020	2021	2022 (as of Sept. 2022)
Health Dept	116	107	139	180
DPW	59	85	224	252

A multi-department Rodent Task Force meets monthly to address the increase in complaints and problem areas across Town. The Task Force has reviewed standard operating procedures, inspections, enforcement actions, problem areas, and issues of capacity. Both staff and the community are frustrated with the current situation and the lack of progress in management and communication.

To improve outcomes for both staff and residents, our Departments have developed the following recommended plan to effectively respond to rodent activity in Brookline. The recommended actions are intended to increase inspections, enforcement, education, communication, contractor responsibility, outdoor dining/commercial compliance, private hauler compliance, rodent baiting/trapping/removal, and resources for the community.

The Departments have communicated with and researched efforts of other communities including Cambridge and Somerville to discuss some of the best practices in the region.

Proposal

Short-term (now-2 months):

One of the most significant complaints fielded from both Departments is the lack of communication from the Town regarding the results of inspections, findings, and citations. In order to provide improved communication, develop data sets that will help reduce rat populations, and focus Town efforts, the Town should engage in contracts with two specialists: a Pest Control Specialist and a Sanitation/Food Safety Consultant.

The contract with the Pest Control Specialist should implement a comprehensive response, starting with detailed site evaluations of target areas to identify pest control measures to be deployed above grade or in the sewer system. Following that analysis, “smart” traps will be set in designated hotspots to reduce activity and capture catch data. The amount budgeted below is likely sufficient for 50 smart traps. Data from the traps will be used to determine hot spots, prioritize inspections, and observe reductions or changes in population over time. This approach is presently being practiced in Cambridge and Somerville.

The contract with a Sanitation/Food Safety Consultant will provide assistance with enforcement and data collection. Contracted staff will survey hotspot areas and consult with food establishments to determine actions taken to reduce rodent harborage including solid waste storage and disposal. The Consultant will also collect and report on incidents of rodent-related violations and corrective actions. The work will increase capacity to provide ongoing monitoring of hot spot areas and provide direct feedback to food establishments to help them eliminate contributing factors in high rodent activity areas.

Both Departments expressed the need for additional staff to help manage these tasks long-term, but given current financial constraints and the need to act quickly, this is the first action recommended. The contractual services can be paid for by shifting existing ARPA funding allocated to the Health and Human Services Department. After reviewing the ARPA contingency fund, the Public Health Department determined that \$184,000 of COVID testing funds could be reallocated to rodent control as test kits have continued to be provided by the state.

Action	Budget
Contract with Pest Control Specialist	\$90,000
Contract with Food Safety Consultant	\$50,000
Creation of Rodent Recourse webpage	Existing Resources
Purchase of 5 Big Bellies	\$34,000
Update Outdoor Dining Regulations to Clarify Rodent Control Requirements	Complete

The Rodent Task Force is working to release a Rodent Resource webpage by November 15, 2022 that includes information for residents on prevention and resources, how to file a rodent sighting (including using BrookOnLine), rodent activity mapping and complaint response and

status reports. Findings from the Pest Control Specialist will also be linked to this page. BrookOnLine is being modified to have a rodent sighting selection on the home screen. All inquiries will be screened and then dispatched by DPW.

In addition, the Town will increase its efforts to phase out open-top trash receptacles and replace them with big bellies and close-topped toters where appropriate. The Town will purchase 5 additional “Big Belly” units now for a total of \$34,000, will purchase 5 sets as part of the Cypress Playground Renovation, and will plan to purchase 5 additional sets between the Murphy and Robinson Playground renovations. The Department of Public Works will include a capital improvement plan (“CIP”) request for Big Bellies for parks, playgrounds, school grounds, and the public way for the next 5 years to replace the open-top receptacles.

The Departments urge the Town to implement the above recommendations as expeditiously as possible, with the understanding that the Massachusetts public procurement process may take time.

Mid-term (2-6 months)

The Departments are working to update the Solid Waste Regulations. The intent of the update is to provide more controls regarding waste storage, placement and security, especially for dumpsters. The intent is to also require that more information be required on private dumpsters to provide owner and hauler information so that it is easier to communicate with residents/businesses when there is a problem or concern with proper waste storage. In addition, rodent control measures have been incorporated into the outdoor dining regulations for greater accountability on the part of the restaurants in their food and waste management.

To build upon the neighborhood outreach the Town will develop and deploy door knob hangers to inform residents of hot spots and resources. Currently, advisories are issued when areas are initially investigated. The door hangers will build upon these efforts and better communicate the town actions in the area and actions private residents can take to reduce rodent harborage on their property.

Action	Budget
Revision of Solid Waste Regulations	Existing resources
Community Outreach – Door knob hangers printing/design	\$10,000

Long-term (1-2years)

The change in regulations will require additional enforcement staff with the Department of Public Works. The Department recommends the creation of an Inspection and Code Enforcement Supervisor for the FY24 budget. Possible funding sources for the position include the Outdoor Dining Fees, Waste Hauler Permits, and Municipal Solid Waste Fees.

Additional trash and litter collection is required at all public parks facilities and the commercial areas. The Department of Public Works recommends the addition of a second packer and collection schedule to reduce the frequency of overflowing barrels that provide a food source for rodents. The recommendation includes the purchase of the packer and one operator. The packer could be considered for ARPA funding by the selection committee.

Action	Budget
Small Trash Packer with Toter Lift	\$140,000
CIP Request: Big Bellies; Repair/Replace Public Dumpsters	\$145,000/Year
Staff: Trash Packer Operator	\$63,850/Year
Staff: Inspectional Services and Code Enforcement Supervisor (ISCES)	\$79,400/Year
Vehicle for ISCES	\$40,000

In Brookline, rodent control is a collaborative effort across many town departments. The Public Health Department's responsibilities include responding to rodent complaints and investigating surrounding areas to identify contributing factors such as non-compliant trash storage, areas that provide rodent shelter and other harborage, and evidence of activity such as borrows and rodent droppings. In investigating each complaint, it is standard practice for the Health Department to identify and enforce multiple contributing factors on multiple properties. The Public Health Department sends order letters to all responsible owners, which then require extensive follow-up and continued enforcement. Referrals for trash storage violations are sent to the Department of Public Works. The Department of Public Works inspects improperly stored trash and recycling for both municipal and private customers. They inspect, educate, enforce and then follow up on the areas of concern for ultimate compliance. Rodent activity identified on town own property such as parks, school grounds, parking areas, and public grounds is referred to the Public Buildings Department and the Department of Public Works for treatment and clean-up. Private construction projects of concern are referred to the Building Department.

This time-consuming process quickly overwhelms existing staff and pulls them away from other critical programs. The Environmental Health Division is diverted from important public health issues such as food and housing inspections, as well as plastics ban enforcement. Public Works staff are diverted from managing critical daily operations such as the sanitation and recycling program serving over 14,000 customers per week, permitting and reviewing private waste haulers, managing the transfer station, and household hazardous waste collection.

The Departments have evaluated their current staffing, operating procedures and identified the above-listed items and priorities to develop a more robust rodent inspection, prevention, enforcement, and communication program. The Town must evaluate how these priorities should be balanced against other competing departmental needs given the Town's overall financial state in its upcoming budget process.