



Watertown City Council

Administration Building

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Committee on Human Services

Monday, September 14, 2023

Members Present: Councilor Tony Palomba, Chair; Councilor Caroline Bays, Vice Chair; and Councilor John Gannon, Secretary

The Committee on Human Services held a public meeting on September 14, 2023, at 7:00pm for a continued discussion on the development of a Citywide Rodent Control Program and review of an updated draft rodent control program.

1. Call to Order

Committee Chair Palomba called the meeting to order at 7:05pm and introduced the other committee members present: Caroline Bays, Vice Chair; and John Gannon, Secretary. Also present during the course of the meeting were Abby Myers, Interim Director, Watertown Health Department; Michael Albano, Director of Administration and Finance, Watertown DPW; Michael Cookson, Assistant Director of Administration and Finance, Watertown DPW; and residents Eileen Zubrowski, Carl Bazarian, Janet Erlick and Karen Russo.

Councilor Palomba stated that the rodent problem in Watertown has not disappeared and continues to be a nuisance. He announced that this meeting will address current efforts to remediate the nuisance. He allowed testimony from residents about their individual concerns on rodent issues. Carl Bazarian stated his concern that the contractors engaged in the construction of the new Watertown High School will not be placing a sufficient number of rodent traps near the construction site. He was informed that he should contact the Watertown Health Department, as that department is the main city agency to address such complaints. Eileen Zubrowski, a resident of Capital Street, noted that the rodent problem in her neighborhood was bad last year, but that the situation has improved.

Michael Cookson, DPW Assistant Director of Administration and Finance, stated that the DPW has placed a total of 77 so-called smart traps in various locations, mostly on Mount Auburn and Arsenal Streets. The smart traps use electricity to euthanize rodents and provide real-time data on the location of rodents, so that

immediate problems may be addressed, as opposed to the typical bait traps, which cannot provide such data. The data provided by the smart traps indicate that over the course of six months, 159 rodents were euthanized, for an average of 27 rodents per month. 31% of the traps had no rodent hits. The average cost per rodent killed in this early study was \$327. He recommends that the deployment of additional smart boxes should be considered as part of the overall rodent remediation strategy. Councilor Bays asked him how quickly smart traps kill rodents in comparison to typical bait traps. He replied that the smart traps attained their outcomes much quicker.

Interim Health Director Abby Myers has been taking the lead in addressing the City's rodent control issue. She stated that the United States has seen an increase in the rodent population. She has been advocating for a rodent control strategy of education, as well as enforcement. She stated that the city has been using bait and trap approaches, as well as addressing baiting of construction sites. She stated that the city has been holding pre-construction meetings with contractors to address on-site rodent control measures. The Health Department has been monitoring plans at individual construction sites and has in the past requested that developers update their plans to address newer rodent problems discovered. She stated that there are a few Watertown agencies that address rodent control issues. The Building and Health departments monitor problems across the city, including at vacant properties. The DPW handles rodent issues involving street reconstruction. The Zoning and Planning Boards impose rodent control restrictions for the construction of new projects.

She stated that the City has created a Problem Property Working Group to coordinate rodent control activities. The members of the Group include the Health Department, the Zoning Enforcement and Code Enforcement officers, the DPW, the Building Department, the Department of Public Buildings and the police and fire departments. The group will monitor rodent activity and share data on resolving problems as they occur. She stated that the City is working on finalizing a Rodent Control Plan. The working group and the plan will review the possibility of amendments to existing ordinances and regulations pertaining to trash and rodent issues. The plan will also address legal enforcement remedies to address property owners who create conditions that attract rodents and provide for methods of public education for Watertown residents, including the distribution of flyers. The Health Department will respond to all calls from residents seeking assistance in rodent remediation. She will work with the individual city departments that have jurisdiction over particular properties where such nuisances occur. The Health Department is in the process of hiring an additional employee whose responsibilities will include addressing rodent control issues.

Councilors commended the progress on the plan and encouraged strong vigilance on the part of the Working Group to address future rodent nuisance issues, particularly considering the new construction activities planned across the city.

Councilor Palomba recommended that the Committee on Human Services reconvene on occasion to monitor the progress of city efforts to address the rodent control nuisance.

Councilor Gannon made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Bays. The vote was 3-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.

Meeting minutes prepared by
John Gannon, Secretary

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Anthony Palomba,
Chair

Caroline Bays,
Vice Chair

John G. Gannon,
Secretary