



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS
Chair

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District Manager

January 14, 2022

Dr. Dave A. Chokshi
Commissioner
Department of Health & Mental Hygiene
42-09 28th St.
Long Island City NY, 11101

Re: Rat Control in Manhattan Community District 4

Dear Commissioner Chokshi,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) thanks Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Director of Neighborhood Interventions Caroline Bragdon for presenting on the topic of rat control at the Board's Arts, Culture & Street Life (ACES) committee meeting on December 13, 2021. These comments were approved at the January 5, 2022 Full Board meeting with 43 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining and 0 present but not eligible to vote.

Background

The Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOH) is responsible for the City's efforts to monitor and control the rat population. In recent months, the rat population has appeared to increase significantly in our neighborhood, caused by a number of factors including cutbacks in trash collection, the proliferation of outdoor dining stalls and construction sites that can be conducive to rats.

DOH reassigned staff from rat control to COVID-management responsibilities in 2020, though they have been moved back to rat control as of mid-November 2021. DOH also conducts regular neighborhood rat indexing, in which inspectors evaluate every property in the neighborhood to identify those with rat activity. The data from these inspections are publicly available through the rat information portal at nyc.gov/rats. Residents can report rat problems to DOH through 311, with the expectation of a 14-day response time.

MCB4 also held a public hearing on rat conditions in our district at its January 5, 2020 Full Board meeting. At this hearing, members of the neighborhood expressed their significant concerns about the increase in rats and cited trash on the sidewalks from

residences and businesses as a primary cause of the issue. Residents asserted that building owners and tenants alone are unable to solve the problem- the City needs to also take an active role in addressing the issue and its underlying causes.

Board Comments

Board members expressed concern about the recent apparent increase in the neighborhood's rat population and applaud the return of DOH inspectors to help address this issue. The record number of leptospirosis cases in 2021, caused by rat urine, is just one indication of the increasing problem and its implication for public health.¹

DOH needs to be resourced appropriately to accommodate the pressing need for rat control given its importance for both neighborhood health and quality of life. Moreover, rat control needs to be at the forefront of cross-agency efforts related to its root causes- including as a part of Department of Transportation (DOT) inspections of outdoor dining stalls. If DOT remains unable to effectively monitor rat conditions associated with outdoor dining stalls, DOH needs to be granted additional resourcing to take over the inspection of these stalls for rats- with oversight of rat inspections thus consolidated under one agency.

In addition, we reiterate our support for several priorities championed by MCB4 that can provide additional support for the rat control effort:

- **Support for trash containerization²:** MCB4 reiterates its support for trash containerization to make it harder for rats to access food in trash bags on the sidewalk. We request that DOH partner with DOT to quantify the impact of containerization on rat populations, push for containerization tests in areas flagged for rat problems, and work to identify an optimal on-street trash container design that prevents rat issues. MCB4 is happy to help identify locations in our district for these on-street trash containers.
- **Streetside organics collection³:** MCB4 reiterates its support for streetside organics collection, which helps to remove organic food for rats from residential trash bags. Restoring funding for the citywide program rather than making it opt-in would help to improve utilization of the program.

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2021/10/22/leptospirosis-outbreak-in-nyc-spread-by-rat-urine-13-hospitalized-one-dead/amp/>

² CB4 letter expressing support for CHEKPEDS trash containerization proposal (August 2019): <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/02/40-ACES-Letter-to-ChekPeds-re-CHEKPEDS-TOSS-Proposal.pdf>

³ CB4 included organics collection in its FY23 Statement of District Needs, and expressed prior support for composting (June 2020): <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/06/07-Letter-to-Mayor-re-Composting-Programs.pdf>

- **Garbage management plans for new buildings:** MCB4 reiterates the importance of well thought-out garbage management plans for all new buildings, including consideration of trash storage space inside buildings and the inclusion of trash compactors where possible.

We thank DOH for presenting to us about rats in our neighborhood and look forward to continuing to work together on addressing the root causes of this important health issue.

Sincerely,



Lowell D. Kern
Chair
Community Board 4



Allen Oster
Co-Chair
ACES Committee



Kit Tollerson
Co-Chair
ACES Committee

cc: Edward Pincar, Manhattan Borough Commissioner, NYC DOT
Edward Grayson, Commissioner, NYC DSNY
Fred Kreizman, Commissioner, Mayor's Community Affairs Unit