

OFFERED BY COUNCILORS SHARON DURKAN, GABRIELA COLETTA ZAPATA, RUTHZEE LOUIJEUNE, BREADON, FITZGERALD, FLYNN, MEJIA, MURPHY, SANTANA, WEBER AND WORRELL



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER FOR A HEARING TO EXPLORE SAME-DAY PUT-OUT AND PICKUP FOR NON-CONTAINERIZED RESIDENTIAL WASTE AND CONTAINERIZATION FOR COMMERCIAL TRASH

WHEREAS, The City of Boston is responsible for the collection of residential solid waste, including trash and recycling; *and*

WHEREAS, Boston faces a significant rodent problem and recently hired an urban rodentologist to develop the Boston Rodent Action Plan (BRAP) to mitigate the City's rodent population; *and*

WHEREAS, The BRAP Report, released in June 2024, identifies food refuse, particularly waste left exposed in plastic bags, as the single greatest driver of rodent activity, and recommends stronger trash management policies, including improved containment and reduced time waste remains on the street; *and*

WHEREAS, Boston's built environment is highly varied; many neighborhoods lack sufficient outdoor space to store or site trash containers for pickup; *and*

WHEREAS, Current City guidance directs residents to place trash on the curb between 5:00 PM the night before and 6:00 AM on the day of scheduled collection, either using a lidded container, a 2-ply bag, or a plastic bag with a minimum thickness of 0.9 millimeters; *and*

WHEREAS, This practice, combined with residential collection schedules that can extend into late afternoon, such as in the Back Bay, can result in trash bags sitting on the street for up to 24 hours. These bags are easily torn open, scattering litter and sustaining the City's rat population; *and*

WHEREAS, While State sanitary law prohibits non-containerized waste on the street, the City does not enforce this ban, meaning bins are not effectively required throughout Boston. In several downtown neighborhoods, the prevailing practice is to place trash in bags rather than lidded containers; *and*

WHEREAS, Commercial properties, such as restaurants, retail stores, and office buildings, generate significant volumes of food and packaging waste, particularly in high-density neighborhoods where rat activity is most severe; *and*

WHEREAS, Businesses are responsible for arranging private waste collection, yet the City does not require that commercial waste be containerized. As a result, many businesses leave trash bags on the street overnight, exacerbating rodent activity; *and*

WHEREAS, The BRAP highlights that commercial food waste is a particularly potent attractant for rodents and calls for stronger regulatory controls on commercial waste practices; *and*

WHEREAS, The BRAP notes that rodents are most active between 11 PM and 2 AM, and designates Ward 3 (Downtown, Chinatown, North End, South End, and Haymarket), Back Bay, and Beacon Hill, areas with high concentration of businesses and/or reliance on plastic bags, as priority action zones; *and*

WHEREAS, The Public Works Department and the Mayor's Office of New Mechanics are exploring adaptive containerization models for residential neighborhoods. While these efforts are essential, they require tradeoffs and time, and preliminary research has focused on understanding current resident behavior; *and*

WHEREAS, Non-containerized waste left on streets poses environmental, sanitary, and public health risks, diminishes residents' quality of life, and burdens City workers. These impacts are especially acute during the summer months, underscoring the need for immediate, interim solutions; *and*

WHEREAS, The City has jurisdiction over when residents and how businesses may place trash outside and could significantly reduce overnight exposure by coordinating same-day put-out and pickup for non-containerized residential waste and mandating containerization for commercial trash. This offers a practical, actionable strategy to curb the rat population and improve City cleanliness; *and*

WHEREAS, Addressing this issue will require coordination among City departments, trash management companies, businesses, and residents. The process should be transparent and provide opportunities for public feedback to ensure any changes are practical and well-communicated; ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to explore coordinating same-day put-out and pickup for non-containerized residential waste and mandating containerization for commercial trash in the City of Boston, and that representatives from the Public Works Department, the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Inspectional Services Department, the Office of Small Businesses, other relevant departments, and the public be invited to testify.

Filed on: August 4, 2025