

# Respect the Rat

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How a Hell's Kitchen community is battling NYC's furry foes

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Backfilling a tree pit after installation of rat deterrent system by NYC Tree Pit Services. 03/18/22 Photo © Donna Rocco

March 18 – Call it an epic battle on a local scale. This week, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine and Councilman Erik Bottcher rallied support in for a Day of Action against rats and litter in Hell's Kitchen, a community that has been overwhelmed with rat populations in recent years, further fueled by curbside dining and sanitation cut backs. But as the rat population grows, so does the number of residents committed to decisive action to take back their streets. The day commenced with a discussion of wider issues that are contributing to the problem and a call by Bottcher for community boards and neighborhood associations to take action that complements the work of the Department of Sanitation and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

“Organizing is an important part of rat management in New York City.” says Caroline Bragdon who heads up Neighborhood Interventions, Pest Control Services for the Department of Health. Bragdon emphasized that hyper local rat abatement initiatives have been successful when the community, politicians and city agencies tackle the issue collaboratively.

The event was also attended by NYC Tree Pit Services, a social enterprise that plants street trees and installs rat abatement solutions into street tree beds. “They use the tree pits to create multiple entry and exit points to their underground burrows and the street trees are conveniently close to their sources of food.” says Karen Horvat, “Qualified installation of mesh systems make the tree pits undesirable, keeping the rats out while not harming our beloved street trees.”

But tree beds are just one part of a multi-point strategy which also relies on smarter trash storage solutions and accountability for property owners. “Many of the building owner’s are absent and don’t have to live with the problems they create. We are happy that the city is going to step up efforts to impose penalties as that seems to be the only thing that gets results.” said an attendee. According to Bragdon, the city will follow up with 311 complaints, starting with an inspection and then issue an Order to Abate to the property owner, who may incur fines of up to \$2000 if remediating actions are not completed within the specified time frame.

Residents city-wide were encouraged by Sanitation to take action in their own neighborhoods, including adopting a public trash receptacle or purchasing smarter cans that make it difficult for rats to enter. Other solutions include closing cracks and holes in the sidewalks and building foundations which block paths between their nests and their food. Levine and Bottcher also pushed for public support of related initiatives including a plan to centralize the collection of commercial waste and efforts to revive the city’s composting program. Following the discussion, members of the community along with Sanitation workers enthusiastically dispersed through the neighborhood to pick up litter, fill rat burrows and post signs. The event was held at Fountain House on March 18 and was organized by the West 47/48<sup>th</sup> Block Association.

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