



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON ORDINANCES
DATE: JULY 14, 2026
TIME: 7:05 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS SHANE BURGO, CHAIR; NAOMI CARNEY; BRIAN GOMES; SHAWN OLIVER; SCOTT PEMBERTON; JAMES ROY

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS IAN ABREU; DEREK BAPTISTE; LEO CHOQUETTE; JOSEPH LOPES; RYAN PEREIRA

Councillor Burgo called the Ordinance Committee meeting to order, took attendance and explained that the meeting was being recorded and live streamed. The Clerk read Communications into the record from Councillors Abreu, Choquette, Lopes and Pereira explaining their absences. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Pemberton.

The following matters were taken up together without objection:

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting AN ORDINANCE, amending Chapter 2, Section 2-47 establishing of the Department of Health and Human Services. (Matter ID #1041) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

AN ORDINANCE, (Matter ID #1042) (Referred – June 11, 2026)

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting AN ORDINANCE, amending Chapter 2, Administration – relative to Article IX, Human Rights Commission; Article X – Council on Aging; Article XIII – Commission for Citizens with Disabilities; Article XVI – Division of Community Services; Article XX – Department of Facilities and Fleet Management and Article XXI – Public Infrastructure Department. (Matter ID #1043) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

AN ORDINANCE, (Matter ID #1044) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting AN ORDINANCE, amending Chapter 12 Health and Sanitation, Article I – In General, by adding Section 12-11, oversight by the Department of Health and Human Services to the Board of Health. (Matter ID #1045) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

AN ORDINANCE, (Matter ID#1046) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting AN ORDINANCE, amending Chapter 15 – Licenses and Permits; Business Regulations, Article I – In General, by adding Sections 15-15 & 15-16 – Relative to the Licensing Board. (Matter ID #1047) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

AN ORDINANCE, (Matter ID #1048) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting AN ORDINANCE, amending Chapter 18, Sections 18-9 & 18-10 – Relative to Parks and Recreation. (Matter ID # 1049) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

AN ORDINANCE, (Matter ID #1050) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting AN ORDINANCE, amending Chapter 25, Sections 25-1-25-4 and 25-10 – Relative to Veterans. (Matter ID # 1051) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

AN ORDINANCE, (Matter ID # 1052) (Referred – June 11, 2026.)

The Chair recognized Stephanie Sloan, Director, Health Department, who gave an overview of the Administrations intent on combining the Human Rights Commission, Council on Aging, Commission for Citizens with Disabilities, Community Services, Licensing, Parks, Recreation and Beaches and Veterans Services into one department to be called Health and Human Services. She went on to explain that this would create efficient and strategic advantages, by providing a shared scope of duties which in turn would impact the well-being of the community as a whole. Ms. Sloan said combining these departments would create better funding accountability with a hub-like model to include process permitting and licensing between the Health and Licensing departments.

Councillor Gomes voiced his objection, opining that a previous Administration attempted to do this same thing and it did not work, which resulted in returning to the separate department model. Ms. Sloan stated that the requested model would work now because as the years have passed, there is a lot of synergy between the select departments. Councillor Gomes asked if Ms. Sloan believed the new model would work. She said she believed it would work. Councillor Gomes asked how it would be possible for someone who has never

worked in the Licensing Department to know what steps are needed to issue a license. Ms. Sloan stated the former department heads would now be a part of the new department but would be known now as Directors so the knowledge would be there.

Councillor Gomes asked how long the discussions have of combining these departments under one umbrella been underway. He was told Ms. Sloan herself was informed around the third week of April.

Councillor Carney voiced her objection as well, stating that the old school model is one that works. She asked what the City was saving by combining all of these departments. Councillor Carney was told \$1.2million dollars would be saved.

Councillor Burgo commented that the savings being purported are actually due to layoffs. Thirteen individuals were laid off. He questioned the new Health and Human Services being in a position to access grants that other departments were familiar with. Ms. Sloan stated she believed combining these departments would result in a much wider reach in applying for grants. Councillor Burgo doubted her response stating there would be many hidden expenses such as having to create all new letterheads and the like.

Councillor Gomes asked Christopher Gomes, the former Veterans Department head, now Director, what would be lost by combining his department into the proposed Department of Health and Human Services. Mr. Gomes said he is losing a Clerk that had experience on all things related to Veteran benefits.

Christine Amaral, the former Licensing Department head, now proposed Director, was recognized and stated she believed the HHS would be a good move for her former department.

Christina Connolly, Chief Operating Officer for the Administration, was recognized and stated that the consolidation and elimination of positions is a positive move. She said she is optimistic about the suggested model, having reviewed similar municipalities that have such a department.

Councillor Gomes asked if the model doesn't work, what would happen then? Would they return to the previous way of doing things. Ms. Connolly stated that it should work and there is no mechanism to return to the past way of doing things.

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Pemberton, the Committee VOTED: to receive and place on file a fact sheet, titled "An Introduction to the Health and Human Services Department – City of New Bedford", submitted by Ms. Sloan, Director, Health Department.

Councillor Roy asked whether the Administration would consider rehiring employees that were let go should it be discovered there was a gap that needed to be filled. Ms. Connolly said that they could rehire former employees if there was a gap, but the new model would not have such a gap.

Councillor Oliver asked why the Administration did not inform the Council that they were looking into a new model back in April. Ms. Connolly stated they were not sure at the time. Councillor Oliver said he was disappointed that this proposal was kept from him and his colleagues and that it was not a part of the budget development process. Councillor Oliver expressed his concern that there is not enough data to determine whether combining these departments would in fact work. He expressed his concern that the City isn't properly dealing with the reduction of fifty-one Police and Fire department employees and he is disappointed with the elimination of the Community Services Department especially how instrumental of a department it was to the City.

The general consensus from the Committee was that they should wait and see how the process unfolds before moving to combining the departments by Ordinance.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: to table these items at this time.

Councillor Pemberton made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Oliver.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.
Clerk of Committees