CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS & BRIEFINGS
DATE: OCTOBER 20, 2026
TIME: 7:13 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS NAOMI CARNEY, CHAIR; IAN ABREU; DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO; LEO CHOQUETTE (7:20); SHAWN OLIVER; SCOTT PEMBERTON; JAMES ROY

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES; JOSEPH LOPES; RYAN PEREIRA

Councillor Carney called the Appointments & Briefings Committee meeting to order, took attendance, and explained that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed. The Clerk read letters into the record from Councillors Gomes and Lopes explaining their absence. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Burgo.

CITIZEN'S INPUT TIME – Not to exceed the first thirty (30) minutes of the meeting.

Catherine Synnott, 12 Ruth Street, Apt. #210, speaking on the "Excess Number of Storage Unit Facilities in the City". (Referred – July 28, 2026.) (September 15, 2026 – not present, matter moved to October 20, 2026.)

It was determined that Ms. Synnott was not present.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the matter at this time.

Brian Santerre, 173 Eugenia Street, speaking on "Illegal Parking of Commercial Vehicles with USDOT Numbers". (Referred – July 30, 2026.) (September 15, 2026 – not present, matter moved to October 20, 2026.)

It was determined that Mr. Santerre was not present.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the matter at this time.

Victor DeSousa, 169 Clara Street, speaking on “Neighborhood/Quality of Life Issues with Lighthouse Tavern, Brock Avenue/Clara Street”. (Referred – August 03, 2026.)

It was determined that Mr. DeSousa was not present.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Pemberton, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on the matter at this time.

Ernesto Silva, Jr., 49 Ellen Street, speaking on “Pothole Damage to Vehicles". (Referred – August 17, 2026.)

The Chair recognized Mr. Silva who spoke on pothole damage to vehicles in the City and how his claim for repairs was denied by the City.

The matter was concluded.

Ronald Bush, 120 Mill Street, Apt #1E, speaking on "Feasibility Studies done on Mill Buildings and Vacant Buildings". (Referred – October 05, 2026.)

The Chair recognized Mr. Bush who spoke on the need to transform empty mill buildings and vacant buildings into residences for the homeless and individuals struggling with addiction.

The matter was concluded.

Citizens’ Input Time was concluded.

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting the APPOINTMENT of ALYSSA DACUNHA, Assistant Director of the Board of Health, of Dartmouth, MA, as the Executive Director of the Commission for Citizens with Disabilities; this term will expire April 2028. (Matter ID #1449) (Referred – September 10, 2026.)

Ms. DaCunha was recognized and gave an overview of her current position as the Assistant Director of the Board of Health. She shared that she looked forward to working with the Council on Aging in this new position and instituting the Clear Paths Program, among other initiatives.

Councillor Burgo expressed concern that her appointment by the Mayor did not include a resume describing her experience and how it may be relatable to the position for which she had been nominated. He asked Ms. DaCunha how she viewed the role. Ms. DaCunha stated that she believed the role was more of a liaison to the Commission.

Councillor Baptiste also expressed concern, asking Ms. DaCunha if she had visited facilities throughout the City, stating he believed this would be an important task for the Executive Director position.

Councillor Roy asked Ms. DaCunha to provide him with highlights of what the Commission entails. Ms. DaCunha referenced the Clear Paths Program, which provides snow removal services for seniors and disabled citizens.

Councillor Burgo expressed concern that the Administration does not take the Commission for Citizens with Disabilities seriously.

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councill Abreu, the Committee VOTED: To report the matter out to the full City Council **without** a favorable or unfavorable recommendation of the APPOINTMENT of ALYSSA DACUNHA, Assistant Director of the Board of Health, of Dartmouth, MA, as the Executive Director of the Commission for Citizens with Disabilities; this term will expire April 2028.

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting the APPOINTMENT of JOANA GONCALVES, Community Relations Specialist of New Bedford, MA, as the Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission; this term will expire September 2029. (Matter ID #1450) (Referred – September 10, 2026.)

The Chair recognized Ms. Goncalves, who gave an overview of her current position with the City as a Community Relations Specialist.

Councillor Burgo expressed concern that Ms. Goncalves' nomination did not contain a resume. He asked if Ms. Goncalves has worked with the Human Rights Commission in the past year; he was told that she had.

Councillors Baptiste and Pemberton both spoke in favor of Ms. Goncalves' nomination.

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPOINTMENT of JOANA GONCALVES, Community Relations Specialist of New Bedford, MA, as the Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission; this term will expire September 2029.

The following items were taken up together, without objection:

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Oliver, Lopes, Choquette and Carney, requesting, that a representative from the New Bedford Board of Health or the New Bedford Health Department appear before the Committee on Appointments & Briefings to discuss the Board's recent vote to adopt a new Cigar Minimum Pricing Regulation, effective January 1, 2025, which restricts the sale of tobacco and nicotine delivery products; and further, that the Committee on Appointments & Briefings also hear from local business owners in the City of New Bedford who retail cigars to discuss the potential economic impacts this may have on their industry. (To be Referred to the Committee on Appointments & Briefings, the New Bedford Health Department, the Administration, a representative of the New England Convenience Store & Energy Marketers Association, and local New Bedford-based convenience, liquor, cigar and retail business community.) (Matter ID #0114) (Referred – January 23, 2025.) (February 18, 2025 – tabled) (February 17, 2026 – tabled

NEW BEDFORD TOBACCO REGULATIONS, (Matter ID #0115) (Referred – January 23, 2025.) (February 18, 2025 – tabled) (February 17, 2026 – tabled)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Morad, Abreu, Giesta, Oliver, Gomes, Choquette, Lopes, Carney and Baptiste, requesting, that the City of New Bedford Board of Health immediately rescind the recently approved Cigar Minimum Pricing Regulation that was implemented on January 1, 2025 for an eighteen (18) month period; and further, that the New Bedford Board of Health seek additional grant funding to allow the Health Department Sanitarians to continue their efforts in education of the City's youth regarding the dangers of tobacco and nicotine product use and to increase the Health Department's ability to police City's retail establishments that are legally selling tobacco and nicotine products; and further, that representatives of the New Bedford Board of Health appear before the Committee on Appointments & Briefings in six (6) months, twelve (12) months and eighteen (18) months to update the Committee regarding their efforts of education and policing. (To be Referred to the Committee on Appointments & Briefings and the Board of Health.) (Matter ID #0230) (Referred – February 27, 2025.) (February 17, 2026 – tabled)

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To remove the matters from the table.

Councillor Abreu asked if there was any information that could be shared by the Board of Health. Alyssa DaCunha, Assistant Director for the Board of Health, was recognized. She stated she did not have any information to relay and that it was her understanding that Health Director Stephanie Sloan was contacted by Councillor Lopes, who informed her that she did not have to attend, as the item would remain tabled.

Councillor Abreu expressed his displeasure at hearing this, stating he was the primary sponsor of the motion and Director Sloan should have appeared before the Committee this evening.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To table the matters at this time.

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Carney, Choquette and Pereira, requesting that HR Director, Jose Gouveia, appear before the Committee on Appointments & Briefings to discuss the City's current voluntary benefit package, benefits that are paid for solely by the employee. (Matter ID #1500) (Referred – September 11, 2025.) (November 18, 2025 – tabled)

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To remove the matter from the table.

Jose Gouveia, Human Resources Director, was recognized and gave an overview of the City's current voluntary benefit packages. He shared that there have been no additions to voluntary benefits yet. Regarding basic life insurance, the City pays 75% and employees pay 25%. Voluntary selections are available, such as increasing life insurance limits as well as adding benefits from spouse and dependents. Trustmark Life Insurance, which deals with long-term disability choices, has been made available; employees can pick up additional and/or set limits for this plan.

Mr. Gouveia stated that the City is still looking into the applicability of the AFLAC program. Nationwide and Smart Plan are in place for additional savings toward retirement.

Councillor Oliver asked if the City was any closer to implementing dental and eye plans. Mr. Gouveia replied that the last time these two matters were discussed was in Committee, where they remained. He said there are several issues preventing his department from moving forward; there are plans that could be offered but these issues must first be rectified.

On motion by Councillor Abreu, and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter at this time.

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Choquette, and Pereira, requesting, that HR Director, Jose Gouveia, and CFO, Bob Ekstrom, appear before the Committee on Appointments & Briefings to discuss the City's current Prescription Drug Plan and possible savings options available. (Matter ID #1501) (Referred – September 11, 2025.) (November 18, 2025 – tabled)

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Choquette, the Committee VOTED: To remove the matter from the table.

Jose Gouveia, Human Resources Director, was recognized and shared that there have been some changes for the better. The current prescription plan is through Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BCBS) and is negotiated by the Union. However, the City has identified another program that can be used which is called BeniStar; effective January 2027, this program will be available to the City's retirees, resulting in a premium decrease. A new program called Health Scripts will be offered to fill prescriptions for both BCBS and BeniStar, at no cost to the City. PillarRX is another prescription plan; it has been in place since 2022, continues to be used, and results in savings to the City.

Councillor Abreu asked about insurance coverage for Ozempic or a similar prescription drug. Mr. Gouveia explained that they have been working with their consultant Lockton and have determined that using it for weight loss control would increase the cost by approximately 18%. Other than medical reasons, coverage for Ozempic is not afforded.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter at this time.

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COMMUNICATION, Valerie Kilduff, MassDOT Project Manager for Design-Build, to Council President Pereira, requesting an opportunity to present to the City Council regarding the next phase of the I-195 Project. (Matter ID #1646) (Referred – October 08, 2026.)

On motion by Councillor Roy and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file a copy of the MassDOT presentation submitted by Valerie Kilduff, MassDOT Project Manager.

The Chair recognized Valerie Kilduff, MassDOT Project Manager, who gave an overview of the I-195/Route 18 Project, noting that the project was approximately six months ahead of schedule. She reviewed the following information with the Committee:

<u>Construction Progress</u>

The following activities have occurred:

- Construction of the new I-195 WB
    - New viaduct structure
    - New Cedar Grove retaining wall
    - New Cedar Grove Ramp
- Construction of new Exit 26 Ramp and Bridge from I-195 WB to Rt. 18 South (Ramp C)
- Construction of new Rt. 18 NB on-ramp to I-195 WB (Ramp D)
- Drainage and utility work (above and below ground)

Phase 3 Work

Winter 2026/2027:

- Shift I-195 WB traffic to completed WB viaduct
- Mill and pave the I-195 median for EB crossover
- Shift I-195 EB traffic to completed WB viaduct

Phase 3 Traffic Impacts:

- I-195 WB traffic will be shifted onto the new bridge
- I-195 EB traffic stays in current location
- Construction on I-195 WB and WB Exit 26 on and off-ramps
- No long-term closures scheduled for other WB ramps

Phase 4 Work

Winter 2026/2027 to Summer 2029:

- Demolish existing I-195 EB viaduct and EB ramp
- Construct I-195 EB viaduct and EB ramp
- Construct all stormwater basins, parking lot and skate park

Phase 4 Traffic Impacts:

- Exit 26 from I-195 EB to Rt. 18 South (Ramp F) will be closed through Spring 2029
- Construction on I-195 EB, the EB Exit 26 on and off-ramp
- Closure of Rt. 18 SB to Weld Street off-ramp
- No long-term closures scheduled for other WB ramps

Route 18 to Weld Street Ramp Detour

- Drivers will continue on Rt. 18 South
- Take the Purchase Street exit
- Continue on Purchase Street
- Take a left onto Weld Street

Resources For Regional Drivers

- Real-time traffic information posted on I-195.
- To check real-time traffic conditions before your commute, visit Mass 511: https://mass511.com/.
- Coordination with mapping companies prior to traffic shifts.
- Roadside message boards to notify drivers two weeks in advance.
- To view a graphic for each detour, visit the traffic detour page on the Project website.
- Project updates and traffic advisories sent to project email subscribers and posted to the project website.
- Be aware: drivers must reduce their speed when traveling through the work zone.

How to Connect

- Email the project team with feedback and questions: i195route18newbedford@dot.state.ma.us
- Visit the project website for more information: https://www.mass.gov/route-i-195-to-route-18-interchange-rehabilitation-in-new-bedford
- Call the project hotline at 508-441-4532

Councillor Oliver asked if the communication between the City and MassDOT has been good; he was told that it has. He asked if the City and MassDOT are taking steps to notify the area residents of closures; he was told that they were. He was also told that for Phase 3, the closures would remain as they are now. Ms. Kilduff said that they do community outreach and send dated reports every two weeks, and that those reports are multilingual.

Councillor Roy asked what the next major changes are that the public should be informed about. He was told the next major change will be during Phase 4 when the other side of the bridge-scape will be demolished, and the traffic pattern will shift entirely.

Councillor Oliver asked City Engineer Shawn Syde if the City is continually reviewing traffic patterns and signal patterns for residents regarding this construction. He was told the City has and will continue to do so.

Councillor Baptiste expressed his concern about traffic flow in the Maxfield Street area as well as Franklin and Pearl Streets. He believes that traffic will increase in these neighborhoods with drivers trying to avoid the recommended detours during construction.

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the matter at this time.

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On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the following matters:

CITIZEN'S INPUT TIME – Not to exceed the first thirty (30) minutes of the meeting.

Kyle Fahey, 59 Shawmut Avenue, speaking on "Excessive Car and Motor Bike Noises". (Referred – July 13, 2026.) (September 15, 2026 – tabled)

Carmen Norman, 941 Oakley Street, speaking on "Safety Concerns & Traffic Accidents near 5 Nauset Street". (Referred – July 22, 2026.) (September 15, 2026 – tabled)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with the owner and operator of Nice N' Clean Car Wash located at Bolton Street and Bliss Street, this property has an ongoing problem with trash and maintenance affecting the entire neighborhood and businesses surrounding the property, it also affects the Veterans monument located just across the street south of said business; and further, that the Health Department and the Department of Inspectional Services take a look at this location and issue notices for trash and maintenance violations and that the owner be notified of any violations. (Matter ID #2065) (Referred – December 14, 2017.) (January 03, 2018 – RETURNED UNSIGNED by the Mayor.) (July 31, 2018 – Remain in Committee) (February 10, 2020 – Remain in Committee) (March 16, 2021 – tabled; secure address for owner to invite to meeting) (April 20, 2021 – tabled) (May 17, 2022 – Remain in Committee) (June 14, 2022 – tabled)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Carney, Gomes, Abreu, Oliver, Council President Morad and Councillors Giesta and Markey, requesting that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with Wendy Morrill from the South Coast Neighbors United organization and Stephanie Sloan, Director of the Health Department, to speak on the South Coast Renewables, LLC (formerly known as "Parallel Products of New England") project being proposed for the City of New Bedford. (Matter ID #1191) (Referred – June 22, 2023.) (July 18, 2023 – tabled) (June 17, 2025 – tabled) (September 15, 2026 – tabled)

RELATED MOTION, Councillor Pereira, requesting that the City Solicitor be invited to the next Appointments & Briefings Committee meeting to discuss the Host Community Agreement made with South Coast Renewables, LLC (formerly known as "Parallel Products of New England") and that the New Bedford Fire Chief also be invited to discuss fire concerns at the proposed location. (Referred from Committee – July 18, 2023.)

COMMUNICATION, Amelia Moore, 241 Purchase Street, New Bedford, MA, presentation given at an Appointments and Briefings Committee meeting during Citizen's Input Time regarding her proposed "Grandfather Tax Law". (Presented – February 15, 2024.) (September 30, 2024 – tabled)

Councillor Roy made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councillor Pemberton.

The meeting adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

ATTEST:

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Denis Lawrence Jr.
Clerk of Committees