

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & NEIGHBORHOODS
DATE: AUGUST 23, 2017
TIME: 7:09 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214, MUNICIPAL BUILDING

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS DEBORA COELHO, CHAIRPERSON; BRIAN GOMES, VICE CHAIRMAN; IAN ABREU; NAOMI CARNEY; HUGH DUNN; JOSEPH LOPES; STEVEN MARTINS

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS LINDA MORAD; JAMES OLIVEIRA; DANA REBEIRO; KERRY WINTERSON

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Councillor Coelho called the Public Safety Committee Meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read Communications from Councillors Morad, Oliveira, Rebeiro and Winterson explaining their absences. These Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Carney.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Coelho, requesting, that Fire Chief Michael Gomes be invited to a Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meeting to discuss the recent suspicious vehicle and residential fires that have occurred in the City; and further, provide Committee members with an update on the situation, is there anything information he can make public to help the community, are the fires arson related, have any arrests been made, etc. (Ref'd 8/17/17) was received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Abreu. (1)

Fire Chief Michael Gomes was present to address the Committee. Councillor Abreu asked the Chief if he had seen anything like the number of suspicious fires that have been set in the city before. The Chief explained that they are dealing with people who have a lot of physiological issues. Unfortunately, most of the evidence has been destroyed in the fire themselves. There is a lot of circumstantial evidence, but they are working with the State Fire Marshall, the Police Department and are leaving no stone unturned in their investigations; he stated he is unable to provide specifics for the investigations are ongoing. He told the Committee that signs of suspicious behavior are people who do not belong in a particular neighborhood. If residents see something out of the ordinary they should report it immediately.

Councillor Dunn asked if there are preventive steps that can be taken to prevent arson. He was told that a homeowner should move ordinary combustibles, because those with evil intent use normal backyard and shed property to start fires. Also, fire prevention can go a long way, for instance homeowners should make sure they have working fire alarms in their homes. Securing sheds is a plus as well, as most shed have flammables in the, combustible liquids.

Councillor Coelho asked, given the current events if the city should be on a high state of emergency. She was told no. The Chief was able to report that fire activity has

abated over the last few weeks. The Fire Department is still actively pursuing their investigations and there are rewards be offered if they lead to a conviction. The Chief said that even if there is a small fire and if it appears suspicious a call to 911 should take place, anything out of the ordinary should be reported.

The Chief assured the Committee that the New Bedford Fire Department is standing by ready to respond as needed.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Dunn, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council to take “No Further Action” on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Coelho, requesting, that Fire Chief Michael Gomes be invited to a Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meeting to discuss the recent suspicious vehicle and residential fires that have occurred in the City; and further, provide Committee members with an update on the situation, is there anything information he can make public to help the community, are the fires arson related, have any arrests been made, etc. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Coelho, Abreu, Martins and Carney, requesting, that Police Chief Cordeiro be invited to the next Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meeting to discuss recent gang activity (Ref’d 6/22/17) was received and placed on file by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Lopes. (2)

Police Chief Joseph Cordeiro was present to address the Committee.

Councillor Lopes thanked the Chief for the recent Gang Unit successes throughout the city and the cleaning up of neighborhoods.

The Chief went on to explain there are a number of strategies in place with the Department that are addressing gang activity throughout the city but that he is unable to discuss as work is ongoing. His department continues to work through the Problem Property Ordinance and is working with landlords on issues as they arise.

They are finding that as they address crime in one specific area of the city, the activity moves on to another portion of the city. The New Bedford Police Department is however working with State and Federal agencies to address problems as they arise. The Gang Unit has been making a lot of arrests lately and the success rate in addressing gang activity is climbing.

The New Bedford Police Department is sharing gang related activity with cities like Taunton and Brockton, this sharing of intelligence helps. Though he would like to be transparent on the activity and investigations taking place, it is not prudent to do so, as they are ongoing and it is best not to reveal what is taking place by the Department.

To curb gang involvement, they are working with the School Department and are in the schools reaching out to young people who are in the position to succumb to gang activity. They have a list of problem students and reach out to them to be proactive as opposed to reactive. They are working with organizations like Community Connections, Patchwork to reach out to single parents to help them, they work with the Foster

Grandparent Programs as well, Dennison Memorial, basically any organization that reach out to and help the youth, keeping them on the right track.

Councillor Coelho asked about foot patrols. The Chief explained that each Officer in a vehicle is required to do walk and talks, meeting with neighbors, businesses, etc, it is happening, but it is not like the Beat Cops of the past. The Bike Patrols have not been up to full force because of injuries.

The Gang Unit numbers have been beefed up as has the Organized Crime Units, Port Security and the Narcotics Unit. The Gang and Narcotics Units have been merged together to create a better team.

The Chief stated that in his thirty-one (31) years on the force he does see the city going in the right direction. Unfortunately, real crime is not handled like you see on television; it cannot be wrapped up in a neat package within sixty (60) minutes; but they are doing well in combating the gang and drug issues in the city.

Councillor Dunn asked about the transient population in the city, which the Chief believes contributes to an increase in crime. Councillor Dunn wanted to know what attracts this population, he was told that the services that are offered by the State and other Organizations attracts a population that may bring trouble to the area, that this has been a problem since around 2004.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council to take "No Further Action" on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Coelho, Abreu, Martins and Carney, requesting, that Police Chief Cordeiro be invited to the next Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meeting to discuss recent gang activity.

Councillor Abreu made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Dunn.

This meeting adjourned @ 8:15 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.,
Clerk of Committees