

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: SPECIAL COVID-19 BUSINESS COMMITTEE
DATE: JUNE 23, 2020
TIME: 7:02 P.M.
PLACE: HELD REMOTELY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS' MARCH 12, 2020 ORDER SUSPENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF THE OPEN MEETING LAW G. L. C. 30A, SECTION 20 AND THE CITY COUNCIL'S VOTE TO WAIVE RULE 21A

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS HUGH DUNN, CHAIRMAN; IAN ABREU, VICE CHAIRMAN; DEREK BAPTISTE; MARIA GIESTA; SCOTT LIMA

ABSENT: NO ONE

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Councillor Dunn called the Special COVID-19 Business Committee Meeting to order and took attendance; everyone was present. Councillor Dunn announced that also in attendance were Council President Joseph Lopes and Councillor Ward One William Brad Markey. He also announced he received a Communication stating that City Planner Tabitha Harkin was unable to attend this meeting.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of an UPDATE, on City of New Bedford COVID-19 cases, demographics and neighborhoods impacted and outreach efforts; Board of Health orders business re-opening and next steps; and a COMMUNICATION, Council President Lopes, submitting a list of phases to reopening the City (Ref'd 5/14/2020) were received and placed on file by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Giesta. (1, 1a)

Damon Chapin, Director of the Board of Health, was present and gave a brief presentation to the Committee as it related to COVID-19. There are 2,123 cases and 104 deaths; most people infected are between the ages of 30 to 60 year's old. The majority of those that have expired are in long-term care facilities (Nursing Homes). The Latino population is at risk with 47% positive cases, and African Americans are at 9%.

Phase 2 will deal with restaurant openings. This is being allowed because there is a decline in the number of cases. However, Mr. Chaplin is worried about a repeat, due to allowing more contact, less distancing. The Board of Health is inspecting all restaurants with the help of Inspectional Services in allowing them to open. They have seen a tick up in cases in cluster gatherings, e.g. churches and fish houses. The city is not out of the woods yet with this issue. It is a long way from being over.

Councillor Abreu asked why the Latino population has been affected so much and he was told living in communal housing, lack of testing, culture that embraces, touching and breaking habits is not easy. There are systems in place to reach out to these communities, there is a framework in place.

The city is targeting specific neighborhoods with outreach. They have done public service announcements, met with local Latino Pastors and Park outreach.

Councillor Dunn asked about testing sites. He was told there are four, Hawthorne, SouthCoast, Community Health Center and a mobile van are doing testing. The do, however, need the State to provide the city with more tests. Currently the city has 351 free tests for the Community Health Center, not enough to do the kind of surveillance that needs to be done.

Derek Santos, Director of the Economic Development Council gave his opinion that the city is not opening too soon. He provided pre-COVID and during COVID statistics as it relates to unemployment in the city. In May of 2020 unemployment was 23.9% compared to February when it was 4.5%, a dramatic increase. Opening and closing is no an easy choice, but economically if you can open some businesses it will help with the unemployment issues.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To table these matters at this time. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Discussion on outdoor dining districts, with street closures and street seating beyond the sidewalk cafes, like permitting in Boston's North end, San Diego's Little Italy and other outdoor dining districts was received and placed on file by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Giesta. (2)

Anne Louro, from the Planning Department gave an overview on outside dining. She praised the interdepartmental organization that is in place to allow restaurants the ability to open. The ability for restaurants to do this is based on the Governor allowing establishments like this to operate as a part of Phase 2. In most cases, the City is issuing permits within twenty-four hours.

There is a move to see if the yearly opening of outside cafes could be allowed. The City is looking at this, but for the most part it would require actual licensing, which is currently being waived under the Governor's direction.

Councillor Baptiste asked how many applications have been granted to date and he was told 28. So far the City has reviewed over 30 of them and there are more being submitted.

Councillor Giesta expressed her concern about shutting down streets. She was fine with café style dining but was concerned about streets. She was told that if streets were allowed to be shut down they would have to be streets with insignificant traffic issues, and the city has reviewed over 30 of them and there are more being submitted.

Councillor Lima spoke in favor of progressive zoning stating that outside cafes could add to attracting tourists. He used the Cotali Mar as a business that has an outside café at the rear of their establishment.

Nick Nanopoulos, Licensing Director stated moving forward, post COVID, there will be outdoor seating regulations and rules that must be met to continue to operate such establishments. He told the Committee that the ones that are currently opened, are open because of the State relaxing requirements. This is not applicable to bars, you must serve food as well, a full menu and not just pretzels.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Lima, the Committee VOTED: To table this matter at this time. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a BRIEFING, on City of New Bedford Community Development Block Grant-COVID-19 funding and plans to implement a small business loan program was received and placed on file by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Giesta. (3)

Patrick Sullivan, Housing & Community Development Director, explained that the City has received \$1,800,000 in Federal Funds and \$865,000 in emergency solution grants. This money is to be used for public service activities and economic development activities. There is a Committee which has been established to deal with the impact and dispersing of funds that are applied for. They will be use towards small businesses, food security and homelessness because of COVID-19. The Mayor's Office will review the proposals put forth by the Committee. There will be a five-day comment period. He believes they will be dealing with se real housing issues, especially where the Governors moratorium of evictions is lifted in August.

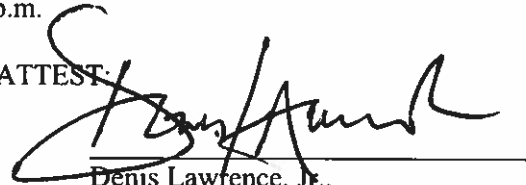
Councillor Giesta asked how you will know that you have the ability to apply and she was told that the EDC and other mechanisms were being used.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To table this matter at this time. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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

This meeting adjourned @ 8:37 p.m.

ATTEST:



Denis Lawrence, Jr.,
Clerk of Committees