

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 & BUSINESS
DATE: MARCH 08, 2021
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 (REMOTELY); IAN ABREU, VICE CHAIRMAN (REMOTELY); MARIA GIESTA (REMOTELY); SCOTT LIMA (REMOTELY)

ABSENT: COUNCILLOR DEREK BAPTISTE

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Councillor Dunn called the COVID-19 & Business Committee Meeting to order and took attendance; everyone was present except for Councillor Baptiste.

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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 (06/23/2020) (06/23/2020 – tabled) was removed from the table and received and placed on file by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Giesta. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 4, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Dunn, yes; Giesta, yes and Lima, yes. (1)

Damon Chaplin, Board of Health Director was present and provided the Committee with an update on COVID in the City of New Bedford. To date, there have been 329 deaths; 12,726 positive cases. The City is currently in the red zone with 23.6%. The positivity rate is 4.2. However, the City is in the process of moving towards becoming a yellow zone.

The City is receiving approximately 400 vaccines per week and they are issuing 300 of them to at-risk seniors in the City and those seniors living in public housing. Once seniors are vaccinated they will make the shots available to other City residents. Currently the City/State is in Phase 3, Step 2. He expects the Governor to enact Phase 4 by March 22. The City is waiting on the requirements to be introduced for the Phase. He does anticipate less restrictive enforcement as more and more people are being vaccinated. Mr. Chaplin expressed his frustration that the City must work twice as hard to get support from the State to get half the response as it relates to securing vaccines.

Councillor Giesta expressed her disappointment with the States response to New Bedford's request for additional vaccines.

Councillor Dunn asked if there was still a spike in the City demographically, he was told yes. There are still disparities within the Latino and Black populations. The state will expand their "Stop the Spread" initiative which provides outreach to these demographics.

Councillor Abreu asked about festivals and summer events would they take place. Mr. Chaplin explained that the City may be able to allow events held differently late summer, early fall. The City will need to wait on State guidelines and establish local requirements. They will still include wearing masks and social distancing, but it may be possible. This would apply to smaller events. The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament is a different beast, too many people in such a congested place would prevent an event that size. If reconfigured it may be possible, but it would not be the feast that is most recognized.

On motion by Councillor Giesta and seconded by Councillor Abreu, the Committee VOTED: To table this matter at this time. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 4, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Dunn, yes; Giesta yes and Lima, yes.

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Councillor Giesta made a motion to take up items two (2) and three (3) together, without objection. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 4, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Dunn, yes; Giesta, yes and Lima, yes.

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. (06/23/2020) (06/23/2020 – tabled) (2)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Lima, Council President Lopes, Councillors Giesta, Markey, Carney and Baptiste, requesting, that our Federal Delegation offer financial stimulus solutions and economic recovery pathways for New Bedford and Massachusetts-based businesses who opened after September 01, 2019, under the current terms of the "City of New Bedford COVID-19 Small Business Grant & Loan Program," is a Federally funded U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program and its terms of eligibility are very specific, so the City of New Bedford has no authority to financially assist this particular business population through this mechanism. (To be Referred to Congressman William Keating, Senator Edward Markey, and Senator Elizabeth Warren). (Ref'd 01/14/2021) (3)

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To take item two (2) from the table and receive and place on file items two (2) and three (3). This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 4, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Dunn, yes; Giesta, yes and Lima, yes.

Patrick Sullivan, Director, Office of Housing & Community Development was present and gave an overview of the funding received from the Cares Act Funding. This past summer they received \$1.6 million for CDBG and \$800,000 from ESG. They also received and additional \$951,000 for CDBG and \$1.5 million from ESG.

Mr. Sullivan explained the funding was offered out by the RFP process, in which they were able to fund twelve (12) Not for Profit Public Service Agencies. This funding was used to help with rental and utility assistance, job redistribution programs, homeless shelters, street outreach which resulted in direct placement of homeless at the Dartmouth Hotel. It will also be used to provide internet access in public parks.

Councillor Dunn asked what the next round of funding would be, and he was told that it would be substantial.

Councillor Lima asked what formular is used in awarding funding and he was told that there are three (3) qualifications that take place, which includes, population size, affordable housing, and economic decline.

Derek Santos, Executive Director of the NBEDC was present and gave an overview of the funding received through the Cares Act that is being used to offer loans to businesses that need some form of economic relief to continue their business in the City as a result of the COVID. To date, there are sixty (60) grants available. The NBEDC has been able to increase the grants beyond the initial \$10,000. They have also looked at programs across the County and State and have had a Grant-Loan Program to their attention, which they are looking into instituting in the City as well.

Councillor Lima asked if the funds available are just related to restaurant survival and he was told no, that it is open to several businesses; it is just that the restaurant industry is at the forefront because it has been physically affected by either complete shut down or decrease in the number of customers. Other industries for example, the auto repair industry could still do work but had to change the way repairs were done.

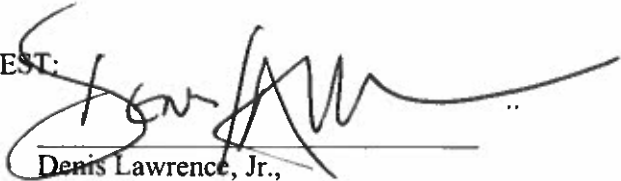
Ramon Silva of the NBEDC gave an overview of the loans issued and informed the Committee that there are still loans available.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To take "No Further Action" and refer out to the full City Council items two (2) and three (3). This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 4, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Dunn, yes; Giesta, yes and Lima, yes.

Councillor Abreu made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Giesta. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 4, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Dunn, yes; Giesta, yes and Lima, yes.

This meeting adjourned @ 8:22 p.m.

ATTEST:



Denis Lawrence, Jr.,
Clerk of Committees