

**NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS**

**MEETING: COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**  
**DATE: MARCH 31, 2021**  
**TIME: 7:01P.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 LINDA MORAD, CHAIRPERSON (REMOTELY); JOSEPH LOPES, VICE CHAIRMAN (REMOTELY); IAN ABREU (REMOTELY); DEREK BAPTISTE (REMOTELY); NAOMI CARNEY (REMOTELY); DEBORA COELHO (REMOELY); MARIA GIESTA (REMOTELY); SCOTT LIMA (REMOTELY); WILLIAM BRAD MARKEY (REMOTELY)**

**ABSENT: COUNCILLORS HUGH DUNN; BRIAN GOMES**

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Councillor Morad called the Finance Committee Meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read a Communication from Councillor Dunn explaining his absence from this meeting and a Communication from Councillor Gomes stating he would be late in attending this meeting. These Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Abreu. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 9, Nays 0, with Councillor Abreu, yes; Baptiste, yes; Carney, yes; Coelho, yes; Giesta, yes; Lima, yes; Lopes, yes; Markey, yes; Morad, yes.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, requesting an opportunity for relevant City staff and Consultants to brief the City Council regarding proposed upcoming Wastewater and Stormwater Capital Improvement Projects identified through the City's recently completed integrated plan as well to discuss anticipated financial implications and proposed sewer rates increases associated with the Plan (Ref'd 03/12/2020) (07/13/2020 - tabled) was removed from the table and received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Abreu. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 9, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Baptiste, yes; Carney, yes; Coelho, yes; Giesta, yes; Lima, yes; Lopes, yes; Markey, yes; Morad, yes. (1)

Jaime Ponte, DPI Commissioner was present (remotely) and presented a power point presentation on the need to increase sewer user fees to follow EPA regulation. There were two options discussed: The Baseline Alternative and the Smoothed Alternative.

The Baseline Alternative would result in a 25% increase in wastewater fees and the Smoothed Alternative would result in a 15% increase but utilize the current funds in the wastewater stabilization fund.

The increases could be anywhere between \$2.00 to \$18.00 a month depending on the alternative selected. The average bill could increase anywhere between \$300 to \$500. The increases would be broken down each year from 2021 to 2026. The highest spike would take place in 2022.

Commissioner Ponte and Joseph Ridge of CDM Smith, Inc., explained that right now the Water Departments collections have been down by \$2,000,000, \$1,000,000 more than normal, due to the pandemic. They were asked to provide the Committee with a breakdown by residences and commercial establishments.

Ari Sky, CFO, explained that some funding could be used to lower the burden on the taxpayer, using the stabilization fund and the federal money coming into the City under the American Rescue Plan Act. Under this Act money can be used towards Reverse Replacement, Water and Sewer Infrastructure, Economic Development and Arts and Entertainment venues. The exact guidelines on how the money can be used have not yet been issued through the United States Treasury and he hopes to have a better idea come May first.

Attorney Richard Davis, Beveridge & Diamond PC, was asked if the EPA would file suit against the City if they did not meet their obligations, given that there was a delay put on them due to COVID-19 and we are still not out of the pandemic. He stated there is a possibility that the EPA would, but to date no move has been made.

Councillor Abreu asked Christina Connelly from the Mayor's office if the Administration had reached out to the Federal Delegation to explain our concerns. She said they had not. Councillor Abreu stated that he could not imagine the EPA would move to force New Bedford along with other communities to move forward with projects they cannot outright afford.

Councillor Markey asked if the more outstanding bills are paid, would this lower the amount of money needed to complete the needed projects and he was told yes.

Councillor Lopes expressed his concern about having to increase the fees by 25% or even 15%, that we should exhaust every resource and funding available to meet the EPA requirements with the least effect on city taxpayers.

Councillor Carney expressed her frustration at the request and stated if it were to come to a vote she would not support the request. The citizens of New Bedford are hurting financially because of the pandemic and here is the City wanting to force another increase on them. Every resource needs to be exhausted.

Councillor Lima expressed the same frustration and echoed the concerns of Councillor Lopes.

Councillor Morad expressed her displeasure with the Administration's request that the City is not made up of millionaires. That the citizens of New Bedford would have great difficulty absorbing such an increase, and that they would be forced with the decision of paying a fee increase or buying food or medication. She suggested that a cease and desist of CPA funding be put into place and that \$1,000,000 annually be applied to the wastewater issue.

It was agreed that the Committee should wait to see what the American Cares Act allowed funding to be spent on and when and what other areas of revenue can be tapped into prior to deciding.

The Committee also asked for a written decision on how the Administration was going to deal with delinquent water bills not being paid.

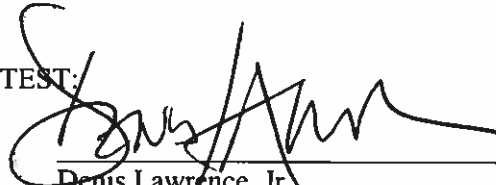
Councillor Morad asked CFO Ari Sky if a delay in deciding over the next thirty (30) days would affect the budget, she was told no. This was in response to Attorney Gerwatowski, informing the Committee that the sewer rates must be set annually and must happen fourteen (14) days before the budget is dealt with.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To table this matter at this time. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 8, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Baptiste, Yes; Carney, yes; Giesta, yes; Lima, yes; Lopes, yes; Markey, yes; Morad, yes; and Councillor Coelho not present for the vote.

Councillor Lopes made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Carney. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 8, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu, yes; Baptiste, Yes; Carney, yes; Giesta, yes; Lima, yes; Lopes, yes; Markey, yes; Morad, yes; and Councillor Coelho not present for the vote.

This meeting adjourned @ 8:40 p.m.

ATTEST:



Denis Lawrence, Jr.  
Clerk of Committees