

**NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS**

**MEETING: COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**  
**DATE: MAY 19, 2022**  
**TIME: 7:00 P.M.**  
**PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214, MUNICIPAL BUILDING**

**PRESENT: COUNCILLORS WILLIAM BRAD MARKEY, CHAIRMAN; SCOTT LIMA, VICE CHAIRMAN; IAN ABREU; DEREK BAPTISTE (7:08); NAOMI CARNEY; HUGH DUNN; MARIA GIESTA; LINDA MORAD; RYAN PEREIRA**

**ABSENT: COUNCILLORS SHANE BURGO; BRIAN GOMES**

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Councillor Markey called the Finance Committee Meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read a Communication from Councillor Burgo explaining his absence from this meeting. This Communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Lima and seconded by Councillor Pereira. The Clerk informed the Committee that Councillor Gomes called and said he was unable to attend this meeting due to a prior commitment.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Morad, requesting that Department of Public Infrastructure Commissioner Jamie Ponte provide the Committee on Finance with a summary report detailing current and past due Commercial, Industrial, Municipal and Residential accounts for Water and Wastewater billings as of January 31, 2022, said report shall include comparable information for the periods of March 2021 and August 2021 (To be Referred to the Committee on Finance.) (Ref'd 02/10/2022) was received and placed on file by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Lima. (1)

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Lima, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file the spreadsheet of past due balances provided to the Committee by DPI. This motion passed on a voice vote.

Justin Chicca, Assistant DPI Director was present and gave an update as it related to the collection of past due commercial, industrial, municipal, and residential water, and wastewater billings. He explained that some progress has taken place and that within the last month the numbers are down, and outstanding bills are being paid. He accredited this to being able to issue shutoff notices to offenders. Shutoffs were stopped due to possible hardships during the height of the pandemic. Since then, they have instituted a shut-off program this past November and again in April which resulted in a lot of bills being paid or starting to be paid down. DPI plans to institute another shut-off initiative this June. It was acknowledged that while account totals are still up, water usage is down especially in residential and commercial usage.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Lima, the Committee VOTED: To table this matter for 120 days. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Pereira, requesting, that the Department of Public Infrastructure Commissioner, Jamie Ponte, appear before the City Council's Committee on Finance to discuss the department's water shut-off policies and payment procedures (Ref'd 04/28/2022) was received and placed on file by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Abreu. (2)

Justin Chicca, Assistant DPI Director, provided the Committee with an overview as it relates to the City's water shut-off policies. He explained that a shut-off notice is sent out for an account that is over \$250.00. A notice is not sent out for accounts under \$250. He also explained that DPI will work with anyone who reaches out to set up a payment plan. They will not turn away any individual or business that will work with them in getting outstanding invoices current. Mr. Chicca was asked about instituting a possible amnesty, like offering a 10% reduction on the bill if it is paid off. Mr. Chicca stated the collection numbers are currently the same as they have been in the past, so he did not feel that an amnesty program is needed. He explained that this would end up in a reduction of revenue for the city.

He was asked how the city notifies residents and businesses about the water cut-off possibilities. He explained that notifications are sent on each bill and a 45-day letter is also sent. He confirmed that they do not shut water off on Fridays. He also, confirmed that there is a water shut-off and turn-on fee applied to each bill where a shut-off occurs.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To table this matter and invite Renee Fernandes, City Treasurer/Collector to the next meeting to review credit card companies accepted by the city. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Council President Lopes, Councillors Lima, Markey and Morad, requesting that the Mitchell Administration and the Department of Public Infrastructure establish a payment plan for all past due / outstanding water and sewer bills incurred during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the payment plan shall be structured so that all past due amounts are paid in full by the end of April 2022; and further that details of the payment plan along with the verbiage being sent to the rate payers be shared with the members of the New Bedford City Council within the next 30 days (To be Referred to the Mitchell Administration and the Committee on Finance.) (Ref'd 04/08/2021) (5/17/2021 – tabled until after the Budget Hearings) (09/13/2021 – tabled 60 days) was removed from the table and received and placed on file by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Pereira. (3)

Justin Chicca, Assistant DPI Director, explained that draft policy as it related to a payment plan process for all past due water and sewer bills because of the pandemic, has been put into effect. He is not sure if it was officially adopted, but that it is the policy that DPI is following.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Lima, the Committee VOTED: To take "No Further Action" on this matter at this time. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a COMMUNICATION, Councillor Morad, submitting an email and spreadsheet from CFO Sky regarding the City's current COVID-19 Expenses as of June 5th (To be Referred to the Committee on Finance) (Ref'd 06/25/2020) (10/19/2020 – tabled; updated spreadsheet requested from CFO Sky) (10/20/2020 – updated spreadsheet sent to all Councillors via email by CFO Sky) (02/08/2021 – updated spreadsheet sent to all Councillors via email by CFO Sky) (02/10/2021 – tabled) (8/10/2021 – updated spreadsheet provided by CFO's Office, sent to all Councillors via email) (8/16/2021 – tabled) (11/24/2021 – updated spreadsheet provided by CFO's Office, distributed to all Councillors) (11/29/2021 – tabled 3 months) was removed from the table and received and placed on file by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Lima. (4)

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Abreu, the Committee VOTED: To received and place on file the master spreadsheet provided by Sharon Thomas of the CFO's Office to the Committee. This motion passed on a voice vote.

Michael Gagne, Interim CFO was present and informed the Committee that under the Covid Cares Act, the city received all but \$830.00 of the \$8,100,000 we were entitled to. He praised the work done by Sharon Thomas of his office and Brian Nobrega, Director of Emergency Management in receiving these funds, due to their due diligence in documenting all expenses and submitting it to FEMA for reimbursement. He went on to explain that the report submitted to the Committee this evening would be the final Covid Cares report as they have recovered all the funding that they are entitled to. He did state that there will be other funding received from FEMA as they move forward but nothing further related to the Covid Cares Act funding.

Brian Nobrega, Director of Emergency Management, stated that the city has moved to purchase a large amount of test kits, masks, and other pandemic related items with the remaining funds they have. After July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, funding will no longer be available to reimburse the city for purchases at 100% as they have been.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To table this matter for 90 days. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a COMMUNICATION, Councillor Morad submitting a letter dated November 30, 2021, regarding the Investment of Funds Under the American Rescue Plan Act. (Referred to the Committee on Finance.) (Ref'd 12/09/2021) (5)

On motion by Councillor Lima and seconded by Councillor Dunn, the Committee VOTED: To follow the Chair's recommendation on item number 5, to waive the reading and forward to the City Council recommending "No Further Action". This motion passed on a voice vote.

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

This meeting adjourned @ 7:42 p.m.

ATTEST:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Denis Lawrence, Jr.", written over a horizontal line.

Denis Lawrence, Jr.,  
Clerk of Committees