

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING & HOMELESS AFFAIRS

DATE: OCTOBER 11, 2022

TIME: 7:00 P.M.

PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214, MUNICIPAL BUILDING

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS SHANE BURGO, CHAIRMAN; DEREK BAPTISTE, VICE CHAIRMAN (7:02); MARIA GIESTA; SCOTT LIMA; RYAN PEREIRA

ABSENT: NO ONE

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Councillor Burgo called the Affordable Housing & Homeless Affairs Committee Meeting to order and took attendance; everyone was present. Councillor Burgo announced the attendance of Council President Ian Abreu in attendance though he is not a member of this Committee.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Burgo, requesting that United Interfaith Action (UIA) meet with the Special Committee on Affordable Housing and Homeless Affairs to discuss their goals for the City's prioritization in addressing affordable housing and homelessness, particularly through an increase in funding such as CPA and CDBG funds in specific areas of housing (Ref'd 08/18/2022) was received and placed on file by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Giesta. (1)

On motion by Councillor Lima and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file a copy of the presentation given by UIA this evening. This motion passed on a voice vote.

Andrea Sheppard-Lomba, Executive Director United Interfaith Action of Southeastern Massachusetts was present along with members Mr. Joaquim "Jack" Livramento, Ms. Maria Jose Morales, Mr. Jesse Newman, Ms. Rene Ledbetter, Sister MaryAnn Sylvester, and Mr. Geovanny Sequeira.

Mr. Livramento thanked the Committee for allowing UIA to present their concerns as it relates to homelessness and the lack of much needed low to moderate income housing in New Bedford.

Mr. Newman spoke to the context of the housing crisis in the city; that in the past schoolyear 10% of New Bedford Public Schools experienced homelessness in one way or another.

Ms. Ledbetter provided stories that included examples of how fixed income populations are being priced out of housing in the city due to the rising costs of rent. She also explained how first-time homeownership was nearly impossible for low to moderate income individuals to purchase their own home.

Ms. Sheppard-Lomba gave an overview of UIA's suggestion that the City Council pass an inclusionary Zoning Ordinance which would assure that a certain percentage of all new housing developments would be made available to low and moderate-income families. They were asking for at the very least a figure of 10%, and as high as 12-13%. She provided data of other cities in Massachusetts and what their percentages were; for example, the City of Cambridge's inclusionary Zoning Ordinance allowed for 20% as will Boston by years end.

Ms. Ledbetter and Mr. Newman gave an overview of funding proposals. UIA would like to see that the city's CPA and CDBG funds be used to increase toward the use of Community Housing. Currently only 10% is allocated and they would like to see this figure increased. They suggested that the city create an Emergency Housing Fund of rental subsidies allocating \$1.5 million to execute this program.

They called for the creation of a substantial renovation of more affordable housing programs to provide seed money to community organizations to help create more affordable housing. They also recommended increasing the funding to \$1,000,000 applying it to a Home Ownership opportunity for low-to-moderate income families in the way of first-time homeowner buyers' grants. The UIA further recommended that the city look to invest \$2.5 million, increasing the current funding for supportive housing to address homelessness in the city.

The Committee echoed UIA's concerns as it related to homelessness and affordable housing opportunities in the city. They discussed how the CPA funds were applied now and that more contractors should be applying for the CPA funds currently available, but the reality is that the submissions by contractors are low.

Councillor Pereira agreed that more housing is needed, but that in his opinion the current administration does not have the appetite for low-to-moderate income housing properties.

The Committee thanked UIA for their presentation. The Chair explained that copies of their presentation had been distributed to all Councillors.

On motion by Councillor Giesta and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council to take "No Further Action" on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Burgo, requesting that United Interfaith Action (UIA) meet with the Special Committee on Affordable Housing and Homeless Affairs to discuss their goals for the City's prioritization in addressing affordable housing and homelessness, particularly through an increase in funding such as CPA and CDBG funds in specific areas of housing. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Burgo, requesting that the staff from Steppingstones, Inc. come before the Special Committee on Affordable Housing and Homeless Affairs to discuss the work that they are doing with the homeless (Ref'd 08/18/2022) was received and placed on file by Councillor Giesta and seconded by Councillor Baptiste. (2)

Mr. Robert Cabral, Member of Steppingstone, spoke passionately about the homelessness issue in the city and how there is need for more housing, shelters, and actual services to help not only the homeless but those dealing with PTSD and addiction. He believes the city needs a 24-hour shelter that provides guidance as to the programs that are available to assist those utilizing the shelters in getting a step up.

Ms. Danielle Isom, Director of Steppingstone, spoke to the need for more organization of non-profits in the city. She explained that there are many similar organizations that are providing many of the same services and are vying for the same funds. All these organizations are worthy causes, but she feels the city would do better in appointing a Homeless Crisis Coordinator that could roundtable all the non-profits to ensure they are all working towards a common goal without replicating efforts.

Mr. Joshua Cushing, an Outreach Coordinator said that the way to reach those in need is to gain their trust. He expressed his concern that based on what he has seen and heard is that currently there are more than 50 homeless persons in the city and the Sister Rose shelter only has 25 beds. The city is in dire need of a larger, 24-hour homeless shelter. He stressed the importance that it not just be a shelter but a shelter that provides services to assist their clients.

The Committee thanked Steppingstone for their presentation and shared their concern of the lack of shelters as well as not being able to get the services needed to these individuals. They believed that the time has come for the city to address this issue. They commended organizations such as Steppingstone for doing great things in the city.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council explore by Ordinance the creation of a Homeless Crisis Coordinator to organize Public and Non-Profit Organizations and avoid duplication of available programs to address homelessness and mental health issues. (To be Referred to the Ordinance Committee) This motion passed on a voice vote.

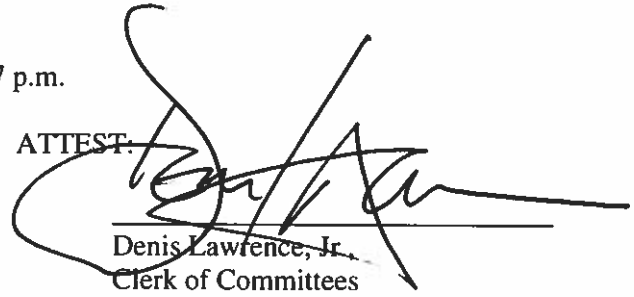
On a Related Motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: That Director of Health, Damon Chaplin and Human Services Coordinator, Marcelina Pina-Christian appear before the Committee on Affordable Housing and Homeless Affairs to discuss the homeless and mental health crisis in the City of New Bedford. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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

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

This meeting adjourned @ 8:27 p.m.

ATTEST:

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Denis Lawrence, Jr.'.

Denis Lawrence, Jr.
Clerk of Committees