



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS & BRIEFINGS
DATE: MARCH 28, 2023
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS NAOMI CARNEY, CHAIRPERSON; IAN ABREU; DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO (7:04); MARIA GIESTA; BRIAN GOMES; LINDA MORAD; SHAWN OLIVER; RYAN PEREIRA

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS SCOTT LIMA; WILLIAM BRAD MARKEY

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Councillor Carney called the Appointments & Briefings Committee meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read Communications from Councillors Lima and Markey into the record explaining their absences. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Giesta and seconded by Councillor Abreu. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of Reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting that the Committee on Appointments & Briefings meet with local media outlets, SouthCoast Today, WBSM, New Bedford Guide, the Portuguese Times, the Providence media market to include Channels 6, 10, 12 and the Boston media market Channels 4, 5, 7, Fox 25, NECN and Boston 10; and including the new digital news website called New Bedford Light founding Editor Barbara Roessner and Publisher Stephen Taylor, this request comes upon the declining news service and coverage in the Greater New Bedford area; and further requesting that the Committee look into any new bureaus that wish to locate in the City New Bedford (Ref'd 03/25/2021) was received and placed on file by Councillor Gomes, seconded by Councillor Giesta.

The Chair recognized Councillor Gomes, the maker of the motion. Councillor Gomes gave an overview, explaining that he invited the local media for a discussion on what he perceives to be a decline in local coverage from the area's news outlets. He expressed concern that only negative news, as opposed to positive news, is being reported by the media. It is his hope that the meeting would create a collective conversation, resulting in New Bedford receiving appropriate news coverage.

The Chair recognized Michael Rock, Director of Content for Town Square Media, 27 Sciticut Neck Road, Fairhaven, MA. He was asked by Councillor Gomes what can be done by local media outlets to bring additional news coverage to the City.

Mr. Rock explained that WBSM is unique to the City with its news and talk radio format. He stated that the station reports news on an hourly basis, which includes digital and social network media. Mr. Gomes asked if the station had the ability to cut into programs over the weekend with breaking news stories; he was told they were not.

Mr. Rock stated that the station has added additional staff to their news department and that Council meetings would be covered as needed. He explained that the agenda is reviewed and a decision is made if the meeting will be covered as it relates to specific items. He went on to say that their station did address a need for immediate coverage by adding a nightly talk show, which is the only one of its kind in the South Coast area. This show allows Councillors to call in and give updates on what happened at meetings, etc. He stated that many Councillors have taken advantage of the opportunity, and added that WBSM has the Council President on-air weekly to discuss issues important to the City. He extended an open-door policy to the Council, explaining that they may call into the VIP line anytime and suggested they reach out to the moderator prior to calling in and setting up a time.

The Chair recognized representatives from ABC 6, Joe Studley, News Director and Kelly Boan, representing Standard Media, the company that owns ABC 6 WLNE, 10 Orms Street, Suite 300, Providence, RI, 02904. Councillor Gomes thanked them for attending the meeting, reiterated the questions he had asked WBSM, and added a request for a local news bureau.

Ms. Boan thanked the Committee for the invitation. She explained that ABC 6 is committed to covering local issues in the City and that they would continue to do so. She stated that the editorial department does receive the Council agendas. These agendas are reviewed and decisions are then made on what issues warrant coverage. She liked the idea of the local news bureau but explained that she was not in a position to give a definitive answer, as this would need to be approved by management. She did, however, offer to take the request to the appropriate individuals for consideration.

Councillor Morad was recognized and thanked ABC 6 for attending the meeting as well. She asked Ms. Boan if there was anything the Committee could do to assist her with this request. She was told no, there was not, that this is something that would have to happen internally. Councillor Morad stated that she believed this would be an added benefit not only for the SouthCoast area and New Bedford, but also a way to attract local sponsor revenue for the television station.

Councillor Giesta was recognized. She stated that she felt a local bureau would be a benefit to the City and asked that they consider it. She reminisced about Channel 6's past presence in the City when it was WTEV Channel 6 and located on County Street.

Karen Rezendes, News Director of WPRI 12, 25 Catamore Boulevard, East Providence, RI 02914, was recognized. Councillor Gomes reiterated the previous questions presented to WBSM and ABC 6.

Ms. Rezendes stated that she would take back to management the request for a local news bureau in the City. She explained that staffing such a bureau would need to be considered financially. She went on to state that prior to this meeting, she looked at her station's history of news reporting as it relates to New Bedford. She believed that a good amount of coverage is given to the City and local surrounding towns. Ms. Rezendes also acknowledged that the news department did receive Council agendas and the editorial staff would review them and base their coverage decisions on what was deemed newsworthy. She encouraged the Committee to visit the digital news portal on WPRI's website and stated that they would find a number of stories that relate to New Bedford.

Councillor Morad reiterated that such a bureau in the City would more than likely increase sponsorship/commercials for the station. She stated that she understood the staffing issues, but believes a little more local coverage, more on the South Coast area, would provide an opportunity for more people to watch Channel 12.

In closing, Councillor Gomes thanked the media outlets for their attendance at this meeting. He went on to stress the importance of more coverage for the City, not just the negative news but the positive news as well. He went on to say that gone is the impact of newspapers and understands that digital media has taken its place. He believes additional local coverage for the area would be a plus and is very much needed.

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To send a letter to the ABC 6 and WPRI 12 news stations in 30-45 days seeking a status update on the Committee's request to establish a local news bureau in the City of New Bedford, and that the Committee take "NO FURTHER ACTION" on the main motion at this time. This motion passed by a voice vote.

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Councillor Giesta made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Burgo. This motion passed on a voice vote.

The meeting adjourned @ 7:35 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence Jr.
Clerk of Committees