



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS & BRIEFINGS
DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 2024
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS IAN ABREU, CHAIR; DEREK BAPTISTE (7:14); SHANE BURGO; NAOMI CARNEY; LEO CHOQUETTE; MARIA GIESTA; BRIAN GOMES; JOSEPH LOPES; LINDA MORAD; SHAWN OLIVER

ABSENT: COUNCILLOR RYAN PEREIRA

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Councillor Abreu called the Appointments & Briefings Committee meeting to order, took attendance, and explained that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed. The Clerk announced that he had received four communications and read them into the record: one from Councillor Pereira explaining his absence, another from Councillor Baptiste explaining his tardiness, and two others from invitees, Dominic Galotti, Superintendent of Water, and Jamie Ponte, Commissioner, Department of Public Infrastructure explaining their absences. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Burgo, seconded by Councillor Lopes.

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PUBLIC HEARING, on an APPLICATION, Hakim Atkinson, d/b/a A1 Auto Gallery, for a SPECIAL PERMIT for Motor Vehicle Sales and/or Rentals and Light Service, at 832 Rockdale Avenue, New Bedford, MA 02740. (Application Received – August 22, 2024.) (Duly advertised in The Standard-Times on Monday, September 16, 2024 and Monday, September 23, 2024.)

The Chair opened the Hearing as it related to the Special Permit for Hakim Atkinson, d/b/a A1 Auto Gallery. Mr. Hakim Atkinson was present and recognized. Mr. Atkinson explained that he owns a used car establishment in Bridgewater and is looking to expand his business to New Bedford.

Councillor Lopes asked Mr. Atkinson what light service he would provide as he stated on the special permit application and if he would be utilizing all 18 spots on the property. Mr. Atkinson replied he planned the light service to include brakes, suspension work, and internal services on the vehicles he will be selling, no in-depth repairs; and he would utilize all spots on the lot.

Councillor Morad asked the applicant several questions. She asked how long he has owned the operation in Bridgewater, what the hours of operation would be at the New Bedford location, how many employees would be on site, and if there would be a mechanic on site as well. Mr. Atkinson replied that he has owned his current business for two years. He plans on opening his new business from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturday. Mr. Atkinson explained that he would have no employees or mechanic as he does the work himself.

The Chair recognized Mr. Danny Romanowicz, Commissioner, Department of Inspectional Services, who was asked if he had any concerns with the application before the Committee. Mr. Romanowicz responded that he had no concerns.

The Chair asked if there was anyone present who wished to speak and/or be recorded in favor of the petition. There were none.

The Chair asked if there was anyone present who wished to speak and/or be recorded in opposition to the petition. There were none.

The Chair closed the Hearing.

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPLICATION, Hakim Atkinson, d/b/a A1 Auto Gallery, for a SPECIAL PERMIT for Motor Vehicle Sales and/or Rentals and Light Service, at 832 Rockdale Avenue, New Bedford, MA 02740.

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COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting the APPOINTMENT of BRAD MARKEY, New Bedford, MA to the AIRPORT COMMISSION; Mr. Markey will be replacing Dr. Russell Olson, who resigned on January 30, 2024; this term will expire December 2025. (Referred – September 12, 2024.) (Matter ID #1436)

The Chair recognized and welcomed former Ward One Councillor, Mr. Brad Markey. Mr. Markey explained that he had been approached and asked by the Administration if he would be interested in serving on the Airport Commission. He was very active with the Airport Commission, and for a time, served as its Chair when serving as Councillor of Ward One. With that being said, he is still interested.

Councillors Gomes and Oliver spoke in favor of the appointment.

Councillor Morad thanked Mr. Markey for wanting to serve and only asked, while serving, to focus on making the Airport self-sufficient. Mr. Markey replied that he would.

Councillor Burgo thanked Mr. Markey for wanting to serve, especially since this will allow for the Airport Commission to meet their quorum requirements. He remarked that many other committees need additional members as well.

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPOINTMENT of BRAD MARKEY, New Bedford, MA, to the AIRPORT COMMISSION. Mr. Markey will be replacing Dr. Russell Olson, who resigned on January 30, 2024; this term will expire December 2025.

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COMMUNICATION, Amelia Moore, 241 Purchase Street, New Bedford, MA, presentation given at an Appointments and Briefings Committee meeting during Citizen's Input Time regarding her proposed "Grandfather Tax Law". (Presented – February 15, 2024.)

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To Receive and Place on File the hardcopy of the presentation (Senior Tax Law Proposal) submitted by Amelia Moore. This motion was passed by a voice vote.

Ms. Amelia Moore was present and recognized. Ms. Moore gave an overview of her proposal with a power point presentation. She explained that her proposal included giving seniors, who have owned their homes for over thirty years, a fixed tax rate for the rest of their lives and provided additional information as to how the City could allow for this. The proposal also included a revenue generating plan, related to tourism, by establishing walking tours in each of the City's wards. She feels that the City finds it easy and justified in giving tax breaks to businesses, but not to the City's seniors, resulting in increasing the land value while devaluing the quality of life for residents in our City. She believes this adds insult to injury in relation to our seniors.

Councillor Burgo thanked Ms. Moore for her presentation and proposal. He agreed that the City should explore ways to help as many residents as possible stay in their homes. He expressed his concerns as to how a senior would qualify for this program and, that by offering fixed tax rates for seniors, the offset would shift the burden onto other taxpayers.

Further, Councillor Burgo pointed out that while Ms. Moore referenced Tax Increment Financing agreements (TIF) that were issued to support local businesses, it should be noted that those agreements eventually end. He asked Ms. Moore if she had reached out to the State Delegation. Ms. Moore responded that she reached out to both the State and Federal Delegation.

Councillor Morad stated that she believes more work is needed to clarify how the actual program would work. The Administration would need to be on board with such a proposal; and collaboration between all involved would be essential. Councillor Morad also questioned the tourism revenue plan in the presentation, as she did not foresee 20 tours a day at a charge of \$30.00 per person as feasible.

Echoing the sentiments of Councillor Burgo, Councillor Morad stated that the TIF and TIE program agreements issued in the City are based on new improvements and not on existing, unimproved properties. Businesses receiving TIF's are required to pay property taxes on the original parcels but not on the betterments for an agreed amount of time. She questioned what steps or requirements would be used to identify if a senior had been in their home for thirty years or more. The Councillor suggested this matter should be placed on the table as there is a lot more work that needs to be done; and she suggested that Ms. Moore meet with the Tourism department.

On motion by Councillor Morad and Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To TABLE the matter at this time.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Choquette, requesting that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with a Representative of the Department of Public Infrastructure-Water Division, a Representative of the Treasurer's Office, and Ward One Resident Christine Levasseur of 902 May Street, to discuss the process of water bill payments through LockBox in Boston, MA, and the implementation of a possible alternative for City residents in the payment procedures. (Referred – September 12, 2024.) (Matter ID #1444)

Councillor Choquette explained that the resident, Ms. Christine Levasseur, has taken issue with the way water bills are processed through LockBox, Boston, MA. She has been assessed late fees when paying through the LockBox, Boston, MA option that are consistently incorrect.

Ms. Christine Levasseur was present and recognized. Ms. Levasseur stated that she has incorrectly received late fees on her monthly bills. She explained that she pays all of her bills through her local bank's Bill Pay program, but with the Water department, she always has problems. The system is continuously down when she tries to pay the bill online. She has spoken with the Water department, but they have not been helpful in resolving her issue.

Mr. John Taxiarchos, City Treasurer, was recognized. Mr. Taxiarchos stated he reached out to the resident to get a better understanding on what was happening when he saw the matter on the Committee agenda. He turned to Ms. Debra Machado, Assistant Tax Collector, who researched the payments on this account. Ms. Machado saw no delays in posting the resident's payments. She confirmed that there was one late fee assessed in July as a result of a late payment. Mr. Taxiarchos acknowledged that one of the limitations of paying online is that you cannot pay more than what is owed. He further agreed to schedule a call between the resident, the Tax Collector's office, and the Water department.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Gomes, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Choquette, requesting that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with a Representative of the Department of Public Infrastructure-Water Division, a Representative of the Treasurer’s Office, and Ward One Resident Christine Levasseur of 902 May Street, to discuss the process of water bill payments through LockBox in Boston, MA, and the implementation of a possible alternative for City residents in the payment procedures.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Pereira and Choquette, requesting that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with Michele Paul, Director of Environmental Stewardship, to discuss New Bedford’s Floodplain Management and explore the possibility of joining FEMA’s Community Rating System. (Referred – July 18, 2024.) (Matter ID #1217)

Ms. Michele Paul was present and recognized. Ms. Paul provided information as it related to the request before the Committee. She confirmed that the City is in the beginning stages of considering the feasibility of joining the Community Rating System (CRS) offered through FEMA. Part of that process is determining if the CRS program would be a good fit fiscally. One of the main factors influencing the determination is that a large number of people that could be helped by this program would not qualify because the City’s hurricane barrier provides protection for those homes. She explained that CRS allows residents who have flood insurance to receive a certain amount of relief in the form of a 5% to 45% discount on their insurance. The City is currently a member of the National Flood Insurance Program; and the Floodplain Manager in New Bedford is Mr. Danny Romanowicz, Commissioner, Department of Inspectional Services.

Councillor Oliver asked if Ms. Paul knew how many residents would be eligible for a discount if this benefit was in place. Ms. Paul did not have a figure, but said it would basically include those residing along East and West Rodney French Boulevard, on the point, in front of the barrier, and include some of those residing behind the hurricane barrier. The majority of the residents behind the barrier would not be included because they are not considered to be in a flood zone due to the protection from the hurricane barrier.

Councillor Lopes stated, that as a former Ward Six Councillor, he can confirm that only a handful of families fall within the flood zone. He suggested that the Department of Infrastructure be included in the discussion as Ms. Paul moves forward with her research. Having worked with them in the past, he feels that they are in a position to provide a good deal of information as it relates to current flood maps and the areas that may be covered.

On a RELATED MOTION by Councillor Choquette and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council request that the Administration take immediate action to participate in FEMA’s Flood Insurance Community Rating System due to the amount of money collected from New Bedford Properties that are insured under the FEMA Flood Plan.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter for 90 days at this time.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Gomes and Lopes, requesting that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with Director of Tourism & Marketing Ashley Payne and Marketing Manager Amy Desrosiers for the purpose of discussing a light pole and banner sponsorship program in the City, primarily in business districts and along Route 18, which will not

only serve to beautify the City, but will also generate revenue and promote local businesses. (Referred – May 23, 2024.) (Matter ID #0856)

Councillor Gomes asked, Ms. Ashley Payne, Tourism and Marketing Manager, if it would be possible to create a program where sponsors would be secured to allow the placement of banners advertising events on light poles throughout the City and along Route 18. Ms. Payne stated that the banner program is currently under review; and along with the Administration, they are looking to develop an acceptable standard operating procedure. Ms. Payne explained that it was brought to the City's attention that advertisements were being put in place in areas that were not allowed by the State. A decision was made to review the guidelines that were in place and make sure the correct procedures were followed. Councillor Gomes asked when Ms. Payne believed the banner project would be operational. She replied that it was hoped by the spring of 2025.

Acknowledging the MASS 250 program, Councillor Lopes asked if there was anything within the guidelines that the State was using to promote the 250th anniversary that would allow for the City to follow in erecting banners. He was aware that there were special rules in Plymouth, MA for the Plymouth 400 Celebration. He noted that there were countless banners throughout Plymouth. Ms. Payne stated she has not seen the State language yet but does know that when the City is in the position to put sponsorships on the banners, they would occupy the bottom of the banner. Ms. Payne confirmed that they have every intention in bringing the banner program back within the City. They just want to make sure they have all the appropriate guidelines in place to do so.

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Gomes and Lopes, requesting that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with Director of Tourism & Marketing Ashley Payne and Marketing Manager Amy Desrosiers for the purpose of discussing a light pole and banner sponsorship program in the City, primarily in business districts and along Route 18, which will not only serve to beautify the City, but will also generate revenue and promote local businesses.

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Councillor Burgo made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councillor Carney.

This meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence Jr.
Clerk of the Committees