



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON CITY PROPERTY
DATE: FEBRUARY 12, 2025
TIME: 7:00 P.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, WITH EXTENSIONS SIGNED ON MARCH 29, 2022 AND MARCH 29, 2023 AND THE CITY COUNCIL'S VOTE TO WAIVE RULE 21A ON APRIL 13, 2023

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS MARIA GIESTA, CHAIRPERSON (REMOTELY); IAN ABREU (REMOTELY); NAOMI CARNEY (REMOTELY); LEO CHOQUETTE (REMOTELY); BRIAN GOMES (REMOTELY); LINDA MORAD (REMOTELY); SHAWN OLIVER (REMOTELY); RYAN PEREIRA (REMOTELY)

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO; JOSEPH LOPES

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Councillor Giesta called the City Property Committee meeting to order, read the Remote Meeting Statement into the record and explained that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed. She recognized the guests present and took attendance. The Clerk read two Communications into the record: one from Councillor Burgo and the other from Councillor Lopes, explaining their absences. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Pereira. This motion passed on a roll call vote of Yeas 8, Nays 0, with Councillors Abreu – yes; Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. The Clerk stated that he had received a communication from Councillor Baptiste explaining that he would be tardy in attending this meeting.

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COMMUNICATION, Councillor Gomes, submitting a copy of a letter from the Pimentel Family regarding a donation of a vacant lot to the City of New Bedford. (Matter ID #1869) (Referred – November 14, 2024.)

The Chair recognized Councillor Gomes, who stated that he had been approached by the Pimentel family regarding a donation to the City of a vacant lot on East Rodney French Boulevard, located south of the Cisco Brewers Kitchen & Bar. The only stipulation the Pimentel Family has is that a plaque honoring their father, Carl Pimentel, be placed on the property. Councillor Gomes provided some history on Mr. Pimentel, his business operations, and his commitment to the City of New Bedford. Mr. Pimentel was the former owner of Me & Ed's Family Restaurant, Billy Woods Wharf and the Smugglers Den.

Ms. Christina Connelly, Chief of Staff for the Mayor's Office, was recognized and stated that the Administration appreciated the Pimentel Family's offer, and that the City would gladly accept the proposed land donation.

Mr. Kurt Pimentel, representing the Pimentel Family, was recognized and stated that they were pleased to make the donation and only asked that, at the family's expense, a plaque be placed on the property in memory and tribute to their father.

Atty. Eric Jaikes, City Solicitor, was recognized and stated that the City Council is in a position to accept the property donation within the Committee and once the donation is accepted, the City Council can turn the property over to the City.

Atty. David Gerwatowski, Legal Counsel, was recognized and explained that as the Committee knows the location, plot and lot numbers, they are in a position to make the recommendation for the land transfer. The Committee would request that the City accept the land and deed, as well as allowing the Pimentel Family to erect a memorial in Carl Pimentel's honor.

Councillor Gomes expressed his wish to move forward with the acceptance at this meeting. Atty. Gerwatowski was asked to draft the Motion to accept the property. Atty. Gerwatowski suggested the item be tabled until he was able to complete the draft; and the Committee could return to the item once the language was complete.

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To remove this item from the table. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council approve the acceptance of a gift of real property, specifically the parcel identified as Map 10 Lot 108, from the current owner (Pimentel family), with the condition that the City allow for the placement of an agreed upon type of memorial be placed in perpetuity, at no cost to the City, recognizing Carl Pimentel; and further, that upon approval by the City Council and Mayor, a deed be delivered to the City by the current owner that effectuates the legal transfer of the property as approved. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

On a RELATED MOTION by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: That the City Council request that the Committee on Memorials and Dedications meet to discuss the establishment of a monument to memorialize Carl Pimentel on the property, specifically the parcel identified as Map 10 Lot 108, that is to be approved for acceptance as a gift to the City from the Pimentel family. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

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COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting two REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS (DRAFTS), for the disposition and development of the former Horatio A. Kempton School, located at 135 Shawmut Avenue, and the former William H. Taylor School, located at 620 Brock Avenue. (Matter ID #2077) (Referred – December 12, 2024.)

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS, (DRAFT), for the disposition and development of the former Horatio A. Kempton School, located at 135 Shawmut Avenue. (Matter ID #2078) (Referred – December 12, 2024.)

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS, (DRAFT), for the disposition and development of the former William H. Taylor School, located at 620 Brock Avenue. (Matter ID #2079) (Referred – December 12, 2024.)

The Chair recognized Joshua Amaral, Director of the Office of Housing and Community Development, who explained that the goal in requesting authority to issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs) on these properties is to promote the reuse of City-owned property. The City has identified these two buildings as prime candidates to be developed into housing. The School Committee declared the two former school buildings as surplus; and the City Council has referred the RFPs for these two buildings to the City Property Committee. Mr. Amaral claimed that the key objective is to encourage economic development and the full use of each site by a single developer.

Councillor Pereira stated that he was pleased to see the William H. Taylor School as part of this plan, and added that he views the building as suitable to be used for housing. He expressed concern in regard to RFPs being open for an extended period of time, and asked what the plan was if the City garners no interest in these properties. Mr. Amaral replied that they would have to reevaluate and decide how to proceed.

Councillor Oliver stated he was in favor of the possibility of splitting up the lots to perhaps attract more interest. Mr. Amaral explained that the favored goal is to offer the properties to a single developer, allowing the developer the flexibility to create more alternatives on how to restore the buildings. For example, the Taylor School property has enough land to redevelop the building and allow for ample parking. The Office of Housing and Community Development believes that selling whole parcels to a single developer reduces the chance of the properties being subdivided for the construction of single-family homes, with no space being allocated for parking.

Mr. Amaral shared that the City would like to see local developers acquire the properties, and that they would look to include benchmarks, such as meeting certain requirements in specific amounts of time, or risk breaching the terms of the RFP. He stated that taking back a property can be legally time-consuming, as the City Solicitor has mentioned before, but he believes the City should have the ability to take back a property if it is not being developed in a timely manner. This is yet another reason why the City feels it is better to deal with a single developer.

Councillor Morad stated that she is a big fan of clawback provisions; and she does not want to see a developer sitting on a property for a long period of time. She asked if any thought had been given to reaching out to local developers to see if there was any interest in the properties. Mr. Amaral replied in the affirmative and stated that his Office and the Purchasing Department have databases of local contractors, and added that they would send an email to the local contractors once the RFP is approved.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To send a Communication to all Department Heads inquiring if the aforementioned properties are needed for municipal purposes and that their responses be provided within the next seven (7) business days. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter at this time. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

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COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, requesting that 1215 Purchase Street, the former New Bedford Textile School complex, be transferred to the ownership of the New Bedford Redevelopment Authority in order to position it for housing development. (Matter ID #2080) (Referred – December 12, 2024.)

The Chair recognized Joshua Amaral, Director of the Office of Housing and Community Development, who explained the vacant building is to the north of the Quest Center. He and others have recently toured the building and though it is in need of work, it does have the potential to become a housing facility. It was decided that if a normal RFP was issued, the building would not secure an appropriate offer; he cited an example of previous properties being sold for \$100. He also referred to a discussion with the Redevelopment Authority on repairing and selling the property.

Mr. Amaral further explained that under the supervision of the Redevelopment Authority, this building could be a great candidate for securing grants and historic tax credits to clean out and stabilize the building and patch the roof; in the end, the building would be more appealing when put up for sale. This is a non-traditional approach, but they feel it would best serve the building and the City.

Paul Chasse, Chairman of the Redevelopment Authority, was recognized and shared that his Board has an interest in taking on this building, and that they would like to see the process move forward.

Councillor Pereria asked if the Redevelopment Authority had the capability of carrying this out; he was told yes, that the building would be cleaned up, secured and sold with the hopes that the Authority would recoup their initial investment. The Councillor asked if there was any objection to the Council recommending that the Authority be required to turn the parcel back over to the City if it was not sold within two years, upon completion. Mr. Amaral stated they would not be in opposition. The Councillor also stated that he would like to see the property sold to a for-profit entity.

Councillor Morad stated that she too would like to see the property sold to a for-profit entity, and added that the property should become a tax generator for the City. She agreed that if the property was not sold in a certain amount of time, it should be returned to the City. She asked if there was a support mechanism in place to move the RFP process forward. Mr. Amaral said there was and that they would work in conjunction, if they are able to, with Purchasing and DPI. However, when asked if the Authority could issue an RFP without City involvement, Mr. Amaral said yes, they could.

Mr. Chasse stated they have worked hard to resurrect the Redevelopment Authority, and they are pleased to be in a position to take on this type of project.

On motion by Councillor Pereria and seconded by Councillor Morad, the Committee VOTED: To send a Communication to all Department Heads inquiring if the property at 1215 Purchase Street is needed for municipal purposes, and that their responses be provided within the next seven (7) business days. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter at this time. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

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COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, requesting that the Committee on City Property begin the proceedings to seek proposals for the disposition of a long-term leasehold interest in property owned by the City, located at 26 Union Street, formerly known as the National Club. (Matter ID #1012) (Referred – June 08, 2023.) (July 25, 2023 – Remain in Committee) (October 12, 2023 – Remain in Committee)

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (DRAFT), (Matter ID #1013) (Referred – June 08, 2023.) (July 25, 2023 – VOTE: send a communication to all department heads inquiring if the property is needed for municipal purposes; Remain in Committee.) (July 31, 2023 – Communication sent to all department heads inquiring if there was a need for the property; no response received indicating a need.) (October 12, 2023 – VOTE: To amend the ‘Lease Term’ paragraph of Section 1 of the lease; VOTE: To determine that the property is not currently needed for municipal purposes; VOTE: That the City offer the property for lease; VOTE: That the Purchasing Department proceed with issuing the RFP; Remain in Committee.)

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Morad, the Committee VOTED: To remove from the table. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

The Chair shared that this matter has remained in Committee for two years, with the RFP having been authorized, and there has been no activity. She was seeking a status update.

Atty. Eric Jaikes, City Solicitor, was recognized. He explained that there had been a miscommunication and after investigating the issue, it was discovered that the RFP that had been selected was not sent back to the City Property Committee for review. He shared that a single bid had been received. However, the applicant wanted to amend the language in the RFP to allow use of the land for a total of 20 years (as opposed to 5 years), with an option to extend.

Atty. Jaikes further explained that the property is currently owned by Lafrance Hospitality, and the lower level would become a Mexican restaurant run by Steve Silverstein of Servedwell Hospitality. He stated he had been in communication with the building owner’s attorney, and they would like to come before the Committee for further discussion. He suggested that the matter be tabled.

Councillor Morad questioned the timeline for the RFP, and the possibility of it having to be resubmitted. Geraldine Calheta, Acting Purchasing Director, was recognized. She stated she would need to go back and look at the original RFP to see if such language had been included.

Addressing Atty. Jaikes, Councillor Morad stated she wanted the lease and the corresponding reply submitted to the Committee at least five days prior to the meeting date so that Committee members have an opportunity to review it beforehand. She also asked Atty. David Gerwatowski, Legal Counsel, to review the documents beforehand as well.

Atty. Gerwatowski stated that he questions if amending the terms as suggested is allowable, and whether or not that type of amendment would require that the RFP be reissued. He gave the example that an applicant who initially decided against the RFP as originally written may now be interested with the increase in lease terms.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Choquette, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter at this time. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Carney, requesting that Board of Park Commissioners Chairman, Peter Boswell, DPI Commissioner Jamie Ponte and Director of Parks, Recreation and Beaches, Mary Rapoza meet with the Committee on City Property to discuss utilizing the park behind the Pulaski School for additional parking purposes. (Matter ID #0799) (Referred – May 09, 2019.) (July 16, 2019 – received and placed on file) (October 22, 2019 – tabled) (September 27, 2021 – tabled)

On motion by Councillor Carney and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To remove this item from the table. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

Councillor Carney was recognized and explained that the parking issue has been ongoing for over a decade. She has been informed that the Park Board is working with the School Department in addressing this issue by reconfiguring the area. She went on to say that Councillor Choquette has been very involved in the project and asked that he be recognized to provide a status update.

Councillor Choquette was recognized and shared that a few months ago, he had the opportunity to meet with the parties involved and explained that plans were in place to improve access to Pulaski School by creating an entryway from Jordan Street. He stated that access to the back of the Park area would be shut down, which would create an L-shaped road, and that this should rectify the issue. He added that he has been told the groundwork has been laid and the project should be complete by the end of this spring.

On motion by Councillor Carney and seconded by Councillor Choquette, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter at this time. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 6, Nays 1, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – no; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on City Property meet with a representative of the Fall River Diocese and a representative of the Administration to discuss an action plan by the Diocese to address the number of vacant Churches in the City New Bedford. (Matter ID #0801) (Referred – May 12, 2022.)

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To sever this item, have it Remain in Committee, and request that it be heard within 90 days. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

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On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take “**NO FURTHER ACTION**” on the following items:

RELATED MOTION, Councillor Carney, requesting that the Cemetery Board come back to the City Property Committee in six (6) months and provide the Committee with a status on the new remote management program put in place by the Cemetery Board. (Referred from Committee – July 12, 2022.)

COMMUNICATION, Carl W. Taber, Executive Vice President & Chief Lending Officer, BayCoast Bank, to the Committee on City Property, submitting a letter of support for the National Downtown Club, LLC (NDC) application for a lease agreement for outdoor/dining café services at the southwest corner of the intersection of Massachusetts Route 18 and Union Street in New Bedford. (Matter ID #2026) (Referred – December 14, 2023.)

RELATED MOTION, Councillor Pereira, that the Committee on City Property request that CFO Bob Ekstrom and the City’s Finance Team explore the feasibility of having the proceeds from the properties located at 170 Cove Street, 834 Kempton Street and 754 Brock Avenue, to pay for any building permits, Zoning and Planning Boards fees associated with these properties. (Referred from Committee – April 09, 2024.) (June 11, 2024 – Remain in Committee.)

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Councillor Pereira made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Oliver. This motion passed by a roll call vote of Yeas 7, Nays 0, with Councillors Carney – yes; Choquette – yes; Giesta – yes; Gomes – yes; Morad – yes; Oliver – yes; and Pereira – yes. (Councillor Abreu not present for vote.)

This meeting adjourned @ 8:29 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence Jr.
Clerk of Committees