



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

**MEETING: COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND
NEIGHBORHOODS**

DATE: FEBRUARY 11, 2025

TIME: 7:00 P.M.

PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

**PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIR; IAN ABREU;
SHANE BURGO (7:12); NAOMI CARNEY; LEO
CHOQUETTE; MARIA GUESTA; JOSEPH LOPES; LINDA
MORAD; SHAWN OLIVER; RYAN PERERIA**

ABSENT: DEREK BAPTISTE

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Councillor Gomes called the Committee meeting to order, took attendance, and explained that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed. The Clerk read Communications into the record from Councillor Baptiste explaining his absence and Councillor Burgo explaining his tardiness to this meeting. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Lopes.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Gomes, Pereira, Abreu and Council President Carney, requesting, that the Traffic Commission and the Department of Public Infrastructure take immediate action to make Cove Road west a single lane, from Margin Street at the Veterans Monument west to Crapo Street and Cove Road, where traffic changes into two lanes west; and further, that the Department of Public Infrastructure install reflective cones or traffic sticks from the Veterans Monument west, making it a single lane; and further, that the residential parking spaces from County Street to Crapo Street be repainted with the double lanes, and that the single stripes on the road be covered with black asphalt; and further, that the Traffic Commission install single lane merging signage at the Veterans Monument, west of County Street and Cove Road. (To be Referred to the Department of Public Infrastructure, the Traffic Commission, the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods and that Rule 40 be Waived.) (Matter ID #1865) (Referred – November 14, 2024.) (December 03, 2024 – RETURNED UNSIGNED by the Mayor.)

The Chair recognized Councillor Pereira who explained that since construction has been completed in the area, it has been found that the lines painted in the street and the signage in place do not match and can be confusing to motorists.

Jamie Ponte, Commissioner, Department of Public Infrastructure confirmed this was true. Since the time the Council had contacted his department, barrels have been placed in the area to address the traffic pattern. The barrels will remain in place until DPI is able to correctly re-paint the traffic lines. Commissioner Ponte said that DPI is currently conducting a traffic study in the area which may affect how the lines will finally be painted. DPI hopes to have the lines correctly painted this spring.

Councillor Pereira stated the signs, and the lines need to correspond. The lanes currently merge into one lane which differs from the signage. He said this did not make sense to him. Commissioner Ponte said that they would make the necessary corrections to address any traffic pattern confusion. Commissioner Ponte explained that when the area was repaved, the contractor incorrectly marked the lanes, which resulted in the City having to paint the lanes with black paint. Unfortunately, the black paint is now wearing thin, and the lines have begun to reappear, which is contributing to the traffic pattern confusion.

The Councillor suggested the merging lines should turn to County Street with a break/space in front of Grota's Motors then continue again. Mr. Ponte said he understood. The Councillor asked if DPI would need to secure authority to paint the lines from the Traffic Commission. The Commissioner replied he did not believe he needed to review the matter with the Traffic Commission unless the signage was to change.

Councillor Abreu asked Ms. Laurie Alfonso, Executive Secretary/Parking Clerk, Traffic Commission, if she knew what the crash rate was for the intersection in question. She stated she did not, but that she would provide the Committee with a list. She went on to say that the Traffic Commission does not need to approve the line painting that is to take place. Ms. Alfonso said her department would replace the old signs with newer, brighter signs. She believed this would help to address the traffic pattern issues as well. Councillor Gomes agreed that new signage would be helpful, and Councillor Pereira reiterated that the current issue is that the signage does not match the traffic lines currently in place. It was agreed that new signage with traffic lines painted to match them would solve the problem.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Gomes, Pereira, Abreu and Council President Carney, requesting, that the Traffic Commission and the Department of Public Infrastructure take immediate action to make Cove Road west a single lane, from Margin Street at the Veterans Monument west to Crapo Street and Cove Road, where traffic changes into two lanes west; and further, that the Department of Public Infrastructure install reflective cones or traffic sticks from the Veterans Monument west, making it a single lane; and further, that the residential parking spaces from County Street to Crapo Street be repainted with the double lanes, and that the single stripes on the road be covered with black asphalt; and further, that the Traffic Commission install single lane merging signage at the Veterans Monument, west of County Street and Cove Road.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Choquette, Abreu, Gomes, Baptiste and Council President Carney, requesting, that the Board of Health, the Department of Inspectional Services, Paul Oliveira, Chief of Police, Scott Kruger, Chief of the New Bedford Fire Department and Mr. Robert Hughes (owner, House of Hope) appear before the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods to discuss the present living conditions of the House of Hope, 848 Mt. Pleasant Street, New Bedford, MA 02745. (Matter ID #1767) (Referred – October 24, 2024.)

The Chair recognized Sophia DaCosta, Sanitarian, Health Department, who provided an overview of the conditions and possible violations at the House of Hope, 848 Mt. Pleasant Street, New Bedford, MA. Ms. DaCosta stated that her office had received an initial complaint in October of 2024. The Health Department did an inspection on October 21, 2024, where a number of violations were recognized, a total of seventeen. These violations were nothing major, things like missing tiles, which were being worked on, and plumbing issues were also being worked on at the time of their visit. There were a few issues that are going before the housing court in March, but for the most part they are being addressed by the owner of the property.

Councillor Choquette stated that he has never been overly concerned that the facility is a health concern and was pleased to hear that the owner continues to make progress in addressing the concerns brought to their attention.

Councillor Abreu stated that he knows Reverend Robert Hughes, owner of House of Hope and knows that he takes care of issues when they are brought to his attention. Councillor Abreu asked Ms. DaCosta if the Health Department does yearly inspections on the property. He was told they did not. The Board of Health is not required to do yearly inspections and only do so when they are made aware of a possible problem.

Councillor Carney suggested that perhaps the Council could require annual inspections for the property in question.

Mr. Joseph Carvalho, Environmental Health Director, was recognized. He stated that currently the facility is identified as a shelter with the City and that they have been in discussions to see if it fits the realm of a rooming house as opposed to a shelter.

Councillor Pereira stated that changing the House of Hope status to a rooming house would require a number of changes and regulations that would include fire and building code requirements and might prove cumbersome. Mr. Carvalho agreed.

Councillor Lopes asked Mr. Carvalho since the establishment is now run by the State, are inspections required similar to those required by a sober house. He was told no. Councillor Lopes asked if the property was placed in a different category such as a rooming house, would that requirement change. He was told it would, and the property would need to be inspected at least four times a year.

Danny Romanowicz, Commissioner, Department of Inspectional Services was recognized. He informed the Committee that the House of Hope had obtained the proper permits to do work as it related to repairing a deck, plumbing and electrical work for bathrooms and showers and an industrial kitchen. He went on to say that the repairs and violations are being addressed very slowly.

Matt Silva, Building Inspector, was recognized. He confirmed the owner of the property was addressing concerns but at a very slow pace. When he last visited the location, the biggest issue was clutter, which appears to be caused by the people living there as they settled in. The building has 5 points of ingress/egress, and all of the fire alarm systems are functional. They currently have an open permit for a kitchen, and bathroom spaces. Currently there are 38 to 42 people living at the property and can accommodate up to 60 people. Councillor Pereira asked what the cost would be to install a fire suppression system should the facility be required to do so. He was told approximately \$100k.

Councillor Carney stated that she was of the opinion that the property needed to concentrate on electrical upgrades and bathroom amenities. She was told when the work is completed, the location would have four toilets and three showers.

Chief Scott Kruger, of the New Bedford Fire Department, was recognized and reported the Fire Prevention Bureau would be responsible for onsite inspections. Last fall there was a complaint about clutter outside of the building which has since been addressed. He informed the Committee that the location is up to date on all fire codes and requirements, exit signs, fire extinguishers are all compliant, working and up to code. Councillor Oliver asked if clutter was a problem, would the Fire Department address the issue with the owner. Chief Kruger stated they had, and the condition had abated. He went on to say that if there were any additional issues his department would have addressed them with the owner.

Police Chief Paul Oliveria was recognized and spoke highly of the House of Hope. He stated he believed there are currently thirty-eight individuals housed on the property. He personally reviewed the call for service reports as it related to the facility and did not find anything out of the ordinary, stating that most of the calls were medical calls. He informed the Committee that the House of Hope has always worked with the Police Department and has readily accepted individuals that the Police have come across that require shelter, especially on the midnight shift.

The Chair recognized Reverend Robert Hughes, founder and operator of the House of Hope. He explained that his shelter provides nursing and medical staff seven days a week, in the morning at 10:00 a.m. and in the evening from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. This is primarily for medication distribution. They also provide Home Health Aides. The Reverend took exception to the social media claims that his establishment is a nasty place.

He stated he takes in people that would otherwise be out on the street. He explained he finds it saddening that social media has tried to paint a different picture. He gave an overview of the people who come to the House of Hope. He stated that his facility is a moral and Christian organization charged with helping others and has been doing so for over eighteen years. They do not receive any Federal or State aid and is currently the largest shelter service provider in the City.

When asked how the program is funded, Reverend Hughes explained that residents pay \$400.00 a month service fee and they are required to surrender \$200.00 in food stamps and/or SNAP funds to cover food and meal costs.

Councillor Carney asked Reverend Hughes why it takes so much time to complete a project. She was told it depends on the funding they have at the time. He stated much of the funding comes out his own pocket. He is a contractor by profession. They also receive donations from companies like Home Depot. Reverend Hughes is committed to completing all of the required repairs/work by March.

Councillor Burgo asked the Reverend to clarify what payments were made by those living in the shelter. Reverend Hughes said a fee of \$400.00 a month was required for their living quarters and \$200.00 in SNAP benefits which they receive is paid into the facility for the purchasing of food. The residents are provided with three meals a day. Councillor Burgo explained that he had heard that the House of Hope would take a resident's benefits and once they had the funds, they would kick the person out of the shelter. The Reverend said this was not true. However, there are times when a person in the shelter does not adhere to their regulations and according to the rules, they can be evicted from the property. Those living on the property know that if they have paid the funds and if they are evicted, they are unable to recover what they have previously paid for living on the property.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file a packet submitted by Reverend Robert Hughes detailing the House of Hope operation.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take "NO FURTHER ACTION" on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Choquette, Abreu, Gomes, Baptiste and Council President Carney, requesting, that the Board of Health, the Department of Inspectional Services, Paul Oliveira, Chief of Police, Scott Kruger, Chief of the New Bedford Fire Department and Mr. Robert Hughes (owner, House of Hope) appear before the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods to discuss the present living conditions of the House of Hope, 848 Mt. Pleasant Street, New Bedford, MA 02745.

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On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To follow the Chair's recommendation to waive the reading and take "**NO FURTHER ACTION**" on the following items. The items are as follows:

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods, the Health Department, the Fire Department, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), investigate the fire that took place at Brittany Dyeing and Printing Company, 1357 East Rodney French Boulevard on Saturday, March 9, 2024; said fire sent thick tan colored chemical smelling smoke from its stacks throughout the entire south end, furthermore, the smoke was overwhelming and made breathing and seeing difficult; and further requesting an immediate investigation into what the chemicals were, and if there was any harm to the neighborhood and that letters be sent to all departments to begin an immediate investigation and report back with findings to the Public Safety and Neighborhoods Committee. (Matter ID #0348) (Referred – March 14, 2024.)

COMMUNICATION, Councillor Gomes, submitting a response to a request in a Written Motion made at the City Council Meeting on March 14, 2024 regarding the fire at Brittany Global Technologies. (Matter ID #0594) (Referred – April 25, 2024.)

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

This meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.,
Clerk of Committees