



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE AIRPORT
DATE: FEBRUARY 26, 2025
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS LEO CHOQUETTE (7:02), CHAIR; IAN ABREU; BRIAN GOMES; SHAWN OLIVER

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS JOSEPH LOPES

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Councillor Choquette called the Airport Committee meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read a communication into the record from Councillor Lopes explaining his absence from the meeting. The communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Abreu.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Choquette, requesting, that Airport Manager Scot Servis appear before the Special Committee on the Airport, to discuss the status of continuing upgrades to the New Bedford Municipal Airport in FY 2024-2025. (Referred – February 13, 2025.)

Mr. Scot Servis, Airport Director, was recognized. Mr. Servis outlined the financial implications for the City as a result of the privatization and closure of an airport. He distributed an information sheet he had prepared on the subject.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Abreu, the Committee VOTED: To Receive and Place on File an informational sheet provided by Mr. Servis.

Mr. Servis explained that, according to his research, the City could potentially incur costs of approximately \$150 million. This figure is purely hypothetical, as the airport is not scheduled to close. His intention was to inform the Committee about the financial implications involved. The land where the airport currently operates was deeded to the City of New Bedford by the Federal government in the 1940s during its development. Should a decision be made to shut down the airport, the City would be obligated to purchase the property from the government and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Additionally, the City would need to settle any existing leases and acquire the properties that comprise the airport.

Mr. Servis elaborated that future plans include upgrading the roadways adjacent to the airport, constructing a new terminal, flight tower, and maintenance buildings that will also accommodate emergency equipment. The planned improvements could be implemented with a projected estimate of a \$3.2 million investment; and any additional funding required will be reimbursed by the FAA, the Federal government, and the State.

Mr. Servis emphasized that the goal is to expand the airport while supporting the local community, all without imposing any financial burden on taxpayers. The majority of the airport's budget is supported by revenue generated from users of the property. He believes that, although there is currently a funding shortfall, rehabilitating the existing airport will attract new businesses and create additional revenue streams.

Mr. Servis also mentioned that one of their tenants plans to initiate twice daily flights from New Bedford to Boston (Logan Airport). This service would be advantageous for international travelers, as it would help them avoid traffic, high parking costs, and the hassle of TSA clearance in Boston, since a TSA checkpoint will be reinstated at the City's airport. An added benefit is that luggage will be transferred directly to the final destination, bypassing security. This new service is projected to begin in the summer of 2025.

Mr. Servis provided the Committee with a timeline for the upcoming work at the airport, which includes the following:

- Designer selection Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) - March 2025
- ATCT design Contract - April 2025
- ATCT Bid documents - February 2026
- ATCT Program completion - December 2027
- Designer selection for the terminal and ARFF - Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighter – April 2025
- SRE- Snow Removal Equipment housing (ARFFISRE) - April 2025.
- Design contract- May 2025
- Bid Documents - To be determined (dependent of funding)
- Terminal and ARFFISRE Complete - December 2028

Mr. Servis indicated that the next steps involve collaborating with the Governor and the Secretary of Transportation to incorporate the entire project into the next Transportation Bond Bill. This would enable the Airport to secure 95% funding for the project from both the State and the FAA, requiring only a \$3.8 million match from the City as part of a total investment of \$72 million.

Councillor Oliver noted that it would be more costly for the City to close the airport than to invest in its upgrade, making the latter a favorable option. The Councillor inquired about the potential for developing housing near the airport. Mr. Servis responded that this is unlikely due to the presence of wetlands and protected species in the area. Mr. Crane, Asst. Airport Manager, added that, when managing an airport, it is essential to minimize heavy traffic impacts on residential areas, making development along Aviation Way challenging from both an aviation and community perspective. An essential goal is to preserve quiet neighborhoods and be good neighbors. Mr. Servis mentioned that there are some parcels of land that could be considered for development, though they are not currently under consideration.

Councillor Gomes expressed his satisfaction regarding the upcoming changes at the airport, noting his longstanding support for the facility and welcomed the return of TSA services, as well as the introduction of commercial flights from New Bedford to Boston. He inquired about the condition of the road surrounding the airport, which requires repairs. Mr. Servis explained that the road is not an accepted city street, placing the costs of maintenance on the Airport, though the Department of Public Infrastructure assists with pothole filling and snow removal. The new airport design includes plans for road improvements.

Councillor Gomes inquired about the potential to attract additional airlines and whether the new terminal would feature retail and dining options. Mr. Servis replied that New Bedford Airport has a longer runway than Hyannis, which accommodates Jet Blue flights; and he expressed hope that the new terminal and other developments will help attract similar airlines. He mentioned that plans for a restaurant are still being developed, as he is currently negotiating a three-year lease so that the contract between them could be extended into the new building.

Councillor Abreu asked Mr. Servis whether he believed the development of a new golf course in an industrial area and the upcoming rail service could help the airport generate additional revenue. Mr. Servis said that he believes it would, particularly in attracting corporate flights for CFOs visiting their facilities. He referred to when Harvey Industries acquired ABC Disposal; the CFO who visited was impressed by the proximity of Harvey's operations to the airport.

Councillor Choquette shared his enthusiasm for the proposed developments, asserting that they would undoubtedly make the airport a more attractive business hub and increase revenue. He suggested that there is potential for the area to resemble a smaller version of Newark, as the City currently offers access to planes, trains, automobiles, and ferries. He emphasized that this reinforces the importance of investing in the airport's future.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To table this item for 90 days.

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Councillor Abreu made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Oliver.

The meeting adjourned @ 7:44 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence Jr.
Clerk of Committees