



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

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

DATE: MARCH 11, 2025

TIME: 7:04 P.M.

PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

**PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIR; DEREK
BAPTISTE (7:12); SHANE BURGO; NAOMI CARNEY;
MARIA GUESTA; JOSEPH LOPES; LINDA MORAD;
SHAWN OLIVER**

**ABSENT: COUNCILLORS IAN ABREU; LEO CHOQUETTE; RYAN
PEREIRA**

* * *

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 Councillors Abreu, Choquette and Pereira explaining their absences. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Burgo.

* * *

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting that an amendment to Section 1 of the Home Rule Petition with the State, regarding the Appointment of Special Police Officers in the City of New Bedford, the change of the wording in Chapter 32 of the general law it should read: "No retired Police Officer shall be eligible for an appointment of a Special Police Officer if the applicant has attained the age of 70 and any Officer so appointed shall be terminated upon attaining the age of 70"; this is a home rule petition amendment to enable New Bedford Police Officers over the age of 65 the ability to be assigned to detail work in the City in New Bedford. (To be Referred to the Mayor, the Police Chief, our local State Delegation and the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods.) (Matter ID #1388) (Referred – August 18, 2022.) (September 06, 2022 – RETURNED UNSIGNED by the Mayor.) (September 28, 2022 – tabled 60 days) (February 21, 2023 – tabled) (June 27, 2023 – tabled 90 days) (February 28, 2024 – remain on the table) (August 26, 2024 – remain on the table)

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To remove the matter from the table.

Deputy Police Chief Derek Belong was recognized, and he provided an update on the discussions that Police Chief Paul Oliveira has been having with the Massachusetts Police Chiefs Association regarding ongoing negotiations. He noted that current discussions include provisions for establishing a third tier of police detail requirements, similar to those for construction flaggers. This change would enable retired officers, and other qualified individuals, to work police details beyond the age of 70. Negotiations between the City and the Police Union are still in progress.

Councillor Oliver inquired what the reason was for establishing a third tier. Deputy Chief Belong explained that this decision was motivated by liability concerns, particularly as individuals age and judgment may become compromised, particularly regarding the use of firearms. This third tier would enable retired police officers to manage certain responsibilities, without carrying a firearm. The Deputy Chief noted that the third tier would not only include retired police officers, but other city employees as well.

Councillor Morad inquired whether negotiations were underway to raise the age limit for special police officers from 65 to 70 years. She was informed that the third tier would allow service up to 70 years of age.

Councillor Lopes asked how many municipalities currently have third-tier programs in place. Deputy Chief Belong responded that there are a few communities with such programs. The Councillor requested that the Committee be provided with a list of these communities and an overview of their program structures.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter for ninety days.

* * *

COMMUNICATION, Councillor Gomes, submitting a copy of a letter sent to the New Bedford YMCA relating to two complaints filed with the Commission for Citizens with Disabilities regarding accessibility issues, and a report of the Commission's subsequent review. (Matter ID #0024) (Referred – January 09, 2025.)

Mr. Blair G. Shanklin, Architectural Consultant for the Commission for Citizens with Disabilities, was recognized and delivered a presentation detailing the issues and challenges associated with handicapped parking on and around the YMCA property.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file a copy of the presentation given by Mr. Shanklin relative to handicapped parking on and around the YMCA property.

Mr. Shanklin noted that they have not yet had the opportunity to meet with the YMCA to address the Commission's concerns, but he provided the Committee with the following recommendations for their consideration. He also pointed out that while the existing parking spaces at the YMCA meet ADA compliance, they are not convenient. The following recommendations were proposed for consideration:

- Add directional signage from the Water Street parking and drop-off areas to the Second Street accessible entrance and through the parking area.
- Provide two additional in-lot handicapped parking spaces adjacent to the Second Street sidewalk.
- Have the YMCA install two on-street handicapped parking spaces, with curb-cuts, at the Second Street entrance.

Mr. Dennis DeMarinis, Jr., Chair of the Commission for Citizens with Disabilities, was recognized and noted that this issue had been brought to the Commission's attention, prompting a call for a study. It was at this time that Mr. Shanklin's services were requested, and he provided the Commission with the overview just presented to the Committee. He mentioned that the Commission intends to meet with the Director of the YMCA to review the report; however, that meeting has not yet taken place. The YMCA was invited to the Commission's last meeting but was unable to attend.

Councillor Burgo raised concerns about the proposed addition of two parking spaces on the Water Street side, noting that this could further congest an already crowded area.

Councillor Morad asked if the Traffic Commission had been consulted regarding the new handicap-accessible spots and was informed that they had not. She also expressed concern that, even if approved, any vehicle displaying a handicap plate or placard could park in those spots on the street.

Councillor Baptiste inquired about the possibility of adding a curb-cut on the South Second Street side. Mr. Justin Chicca, Deputy Director for the Department of Public Infrastructure, responded that the property owner, the YMCA, would need to submit the request along with a permit, and also cover all associated costs for the curb-cut.

Councillor Lopes raised concerns about the potential removal of current parking spots used by individuals with disabilities who are not wheelchair-bound. Councillor Oliver proposed that the Committee take an additional 30 days to further discuss this matter. Councillor Morad agreed and mentioned her intention to reach out to the Director of the YMCA to have a discussion on the issue.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter for thirty days.

* * *

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Morad, requesting, that Department of Public Infrastructure Commissioner Jamie Ponte and the appropriate representative from Eversource's Roadway Repair Division appear before the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods to review the detailed listing of streets in the City of New Bedford that are scheduled to be repaved and restored in the 2024 construction season. (Matter ID #1215) (Referred – July 18, 2024.)

Councillor Morad inquired whether all the streets designated as "dig streets" in 2024 had been completed and repaved. Mr. Anthony Veilleux, Community Relations Specialist for Eversource, was recognized and confirmed that the majority of these streets and most of the 2024 projects are now finished. Mr. Veilleux noted that he regularly collaborates with the Department of Public Infrastructure (DPI) to ensure that necessary street work is completed and overlooked sections are quickly addressed once identified.

Mr. Veilleux was asked whether the same contractors are utilized for all street repairs and paving. He confirmed that Eversource engages the same companies for these tasks. They have recently stopped working with a contractor that presented difficulties; and the situation has improved significantly with the two remaining companies.

Mr. Justin Chicca, Deputy Commissioner for DPI, was recognized and discussed the current agreement between Eversource and DPI. According to this agreement, if there are two street cuts and one extends beyond the center of the street, Eversource is obligated to pave the entire section. However, if the cut does not reach beyond the center, Eversource is only responsible for paving the half of the street where the construction occurred. Mr. Chicca noted that DPI manages each project to ensure that repairs and repaving are completed effectively and on schedule. He also mentioned the introduction of a new program called "co-op," which involves a partnership between the City and Eversource. Under this program, Eversource will pay the City to do the paving work at designated locations within the City.

Councillor Lopes asked Mr. Chicca what would happen if DPI completes the paving at an agreed-upon price, but the funds received were insufficient to cover the total cost. Mr. Chicca indicated that he believes the funds would be directed to a revolving fund. Councillor Lopes inquired whether the City collaborates with Eversource on projects in areas undergoing construction in order to minimize the duration of street disruptions. Mr. Chicca confirmed that this does occur, citing the lead pipe replacement project as an example, and explained that the City notifies Eversource of upcoming work and encourages them to proceed with planned projects in that area. The Councillor also asked when the Pavement Condition Index (PCI) was last updated, to which he was informed it was updated in 2024.

Councillor Morad asked for the name of the revolving fund; Mr. Chicca responded that he did not know. The Councillor stated she was unaware of a revolving fund within DPI and requested that he follow up with the name of the fund. Mr. Chicca assured her that he would obtain that information and forward it to the Committee.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on the matter at this time.

* * *

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Public Safety & Neighborhoods Committee meet with Police Chief Paul Oliveira, Fire Chief Scott Kruger and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Director Michael Thomas for the purpose of implementing EpiPens and nasal spray treatments in every Emergency Department and First Responder Unit throughout the City in order to safely and effectively treat severe allergic reactions. (Matter ID #1766) (Referred – October 24, 2024.)

Michael Thomas, Director of Emergency Medical Services (EMS), was recognized and shared with the Committee that every EMS and Fire Department vehicle is equipped with EpiPens and Narcan units. Mr. Thomas noted that EMS has utilized these products since 2003.

Deputy Fire Chief Brian Medeiros was recognized and stated that fire apparatuses have been equipped with Narcan since 2014, and EpiPens since 2017.

Deputy Police Chief Derek Belong was recognized and explained that although their police vehicles carry Narcan, they do not carry EpiPens because it is cost prohibitive. He mentioned that his officers are trained in the use of EpiPens; however, they do not carry them in their vehicles. Mr. Thomas stated that each EpiPen unit costs approximately \$600.

Councillor Morad inquired whether the City could explore the option of buying EpiPens in bulk at a reduced price. Mr. Thomas replied that while they could, the savings would be minimal. She requested that he look into it and provide the Committee with his findings. He confirmed that he would.

Councillor Morad asked about the lifespan of each pen; she was told it was approximately two years. She asked how frequently EMS had to administer an EpiPen, to which he estimated around twelve times a year, possibly less.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on the matter at this time.

* * *

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Oliver, requesting, that Fire Chief Scott Kruger and Fire Safety Educator Anthony Poente appear before the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods, to discuss safety protocols and standard operating procedures in anticipation of the new fleet of electric school buses scheduled to be stored in close proximity to New Bedford High School and Keith Middle School, in response to the recent fire which involved 4 electric school buses in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, ensuring we are prepared to secure the safety of the neighborhood, students, faculty, general public and city buildings. (Matter ID #0152) (Referred – February 13, 2025.)

Mr. Travis Rebello, the Hazardous Materials Coordinator for the Fire Department, was recognized and delivered a presentation to the Committee explaining common challenges that fire departments encounter when dealing with Lithium-Ion battery fires.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file a copy of the presentation given by the Fire Department relative to Lithium-Ion battery fires.

Councillor Lopes inquired about the reusability of the blankets used to cover vehicles during battery fires. Mr. Rebello explained that while some of the blankets being used to protect nearby vehicles in close proximity to a fire can be reused, the majority are designed for single use. The Councillor asked about the cost of these blankets, learning that eight disposable blankets cost \$2,000.

Deputy Fire Chief Brian Medeiros was asked whether the locations of the charging stations are sufficiently distant from the High School, Middle School, and Hetland Skating Rink. He confirmed that the locations are far enough apart.

Councillor Oliver raised concerns about the potential domino effect of bus fires, referencing a video from the presentation that illustrated a situation where one bus with a runaway battery issue ignited and subsequently spread flames to three other buses, resulting in a total of four vehicles on fire. Given that they had been informed that only water can fully extinguish such fires, the Councillor asked whether there were sufficient hydrants in the area that could effectively address a battery fire. The Deputy Chief confirmed that there are sufficient hydrants available, mentioning one located across from the skating rink and another at the entrance of the Middle School, both with a 1500 rating, providing adequate water supply if needed.

Councillor Morad inquired about the permitting process for charging stations in the City, specifically whether the Fire Department was involved. Deputy Chief Medeiros responded that he did not think the Fire Department was involved, unless there was participation from the Fire Prevention Department. The Councillor proposed that the Ordinance governing these charging units be amended to incorporate the Fire Department's involvement, and stated that she would conduct some research and if needed, submit a Motion to amend the current Ordinance.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Morad, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on the matter at this time.

* * *

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:

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods, meet with a Representative from the Mayor's Office, Police Chief Cordeiro, the Community Development Director Patrick Sullivan, the President of Neighborhoods United, Scott Downing, Executive Secretary, Traffic Commission, and Chairs from neighborhood crime watch groups from across the City, for the purposes of discussing the creation of new neighborhood crime watch signs; these new signs will be placed in all present areas that have crime watch groups and awarded to new neighborhood crime watch groups that organize and participate in making their neighborhoods safer across the City. (Matter ID #0105) (Referred – January 25, 2018.) (June 26, 2018 – tabled; letters sent to Patrick Sullivan and Ari Sky asking if there are City funds available to create crime watch neighborhood signs to be placed throughout the City.) (March 19, 2024 – tabled 60 days)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Gomes, Baptiste, Carney, Abreu, Oliver and Lima, requesting, that the Mayor take \$100,000 of ARPA monies to purchase 10 to 12 solar radar speed limit signs; this signage is needed throughout the City to reduce speeding. (Matter ID #1431) (Referred – August 17, 2023.) (September 11, 2023 – RETURNED UNSIGNED by the Mayor.) (February 28, 2024 – tabled) (July 15, 2024 – tabled) (August 26, 2024 – tabled)

RELATED MOTION, Councillor Pereira, requesting, that the Mayor inform the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods why the original request for the use of ARPA funds to purchase 10 to 12 solar radar speed limit signs was not acted upon. (Referred from Committee – July 15, 2024.) (August 26, 2024 – resend motion to Mayor requesting a response within 30 days; tabled)

COMMUNICATION, Councillor Gomes, submitting a letter from MassDOT, District Highway Director, in response to an invitation to the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods meeting that was held on March 19, 2024. (Matter ID #0494) (Referred – April 11, 2024.)

* * *

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

This meeting adjourned at 8:39 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.,
Clerk of Committees