



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
DATE: MAY 15, 2025
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS IAN ABREU, CHAIR; NAOMI CARNEY;
LEO CHOQUETTE; MARIA GIESTA; BRIAN GOMES;
JOSEPH LOPES; SHAWN OLIVER

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO;
LINDA MORAD; RYAN PEREIRA

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Councillor Abreu 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 Baptiste, Burgo and Morad explaining their absences. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Oliver.

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The following matters were taken up together, without objection:

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Carney, Abreu and Oliver, requesting, that the Administration look into leasing or purchasing the nursing home facilities in the City that are closed, such as the former Hallmark Nursing Home on Rockdale Avenue and the former Sassaquin Nursing Home on Acushnet Avenue, to help combat the housing crisis that the City is currently facing by creating additional affordable housing units in New Bedford; and further, that the City Council reach out to our State and Federal Delegation for assistance in obtaining supplementary funds for this project, by way of grants and/or other available resources. (Matter ID #0566) (Referred – March 23, 2023.) (March 20, 2024 – tabled)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Carney, Lopes and Oliver, requesting, that the City of New Bedford's Office of Housing & Community Development appear before the Special Committee on Housing to discuss efforts to identify vacant properties and encourage their return to occupancy. (To be Referred to the Special Committee on Housing, the Office of Housing & Community Development, and the Mayor's Office.) (Matter ID #0317) (Referred – March 13, 2025.)

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Choquette, the Committee VOTED: To remove from the table the matter regarding the lease or purchase of former nursing homes in New Bedford with the intent to create additional affordable housing units.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Choquette, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file a copy of the presentation provided by the Office of Housing and Community Development.

Joshua Amaral, Director of Housing and Community Development, was recognized. Mr. Amaral stated that the City has moved forward with an initiative called ‘Building New Bedford’. As part of this program, a Vacant Properties initiative was launched, and using ARPA funds, Jordan Latham was appointed as the Vacant Property Development Manager within his Department. Mr. Amaral noted that Ms. Latham has been with the City for about a year and a half and introduced her to the Committee.

Jordan Latham was recognized and explained that the 2008 Vacant Building Ordinance prompted the City to address vacant properties in response to neighborhood complaints. Recognizing the need for a more comprehensive process, a dedicated department was established to identify vacant properties, understand the reasons for their vacancy, and assist their reintegration into the community.

Ms. Latham proceeded to deliver a PowerPoint presentation to the Committee on the Vacant Properties Initiative. She detailed how her role has enabled her to develop a coordinated approach for identifying vacant properties. The tools she utilizes when reviewing vacant properties include the following:

- Tax Title
- 2023 Vacant Building Registry
- Code Enforcement
- Neighbor Complaints
- DPI Water Usage
- Vacant Property Working Group Monthly Meetings
- Windshield Analysis
- VBR Letter and Follow Up

During the presentation, the Committee learned that the Vacant Property Working Group is comprised of representatives from the Office of Housing & Community Development, the Department of Facilities and Fleet Management (DFFM), the Department of Public Infrastructure (DPI), Treasurer’s Office, Assessor’s Office, Health Department, Management Information Systems (MIS), Inspectional Services, Police, Fire, the Mayor’s Office, the Mayor’s Neighborhood Task Force, Solicitor’s Office, Environmental Stewardship, and Data Management.

Ms. Latham provided the Committee with various examples of how vacant properties are identified and how her Department collaborates with the previously mentioned entities to engage with property owners, whether they are heirs or financial institutions, to assist in the return of these properties to the market.

Ms. Latham explained that often, property owners are deceased, leaving the homes entangled in probate. Her Department collaborates with the current property owners to navigate the probate process, assisting in the sale of the properties and enabling the City to collect the outstanding back taxes owed. She clarified that her Department aims to legally rehabilitate vacant and distressed properties, utilizing receivership under the City’s nuisance Ordinance. Additionally, her Department seeks to explore probate solutions, acknowledging the high demand for vacant properties in the City. She emphasized that effective interdepartmental collaboration has led to many successes in returning these properties to the tax roll.

Councillor Lopes inquired about the origin of Ms. Latham's position, which was funded through ARPA, and how long this funding would last. Mr. Amaral responded that it would continue until the end of 2026. Councillor Lopes asked about the tax differential for properties before they fell into distressed conditions compared to their current status. For instance, he mentioned a distressed property tax of \$2,500 and sought to know the current tax rate for properties that have returned to the tax rolls; he further inquired about the number of properties that had improved from tax delinquency to being tax current. Mr. Amaral replied that the average increase was about \$1,500 per property and that their sampling indicated that slightly over 50% of properties had moved from tax delinquency to tax current. The Councillor requested a detailed breakdown for the Committee, to which Mr. Amaral agreed to provide.

Councillor Lopes also sought information on the payments related to the vacant building registry. Ms. Latham explained that the fees start at \$500 per year and increase to \$1,000, \$2,000 and \$3,000 for each subsequent year of delinquency. She noted that these fees are now being collected from more property heirs and banks, and they are also collected when a property is sold. Lastly, Councillor Lopes inquired whether Ms. Latham could provide the address and current status of the parcels in the vacant property process, ideally organized by ward. He was informed that this information could be provided.

Councillor Carney inquired about the total amount of money collected since the initiation of the program and requested a breakdown of the number of vacant churches in the City. Ms. Latham responded that they would provide that information.

Councillor Oliver asked whether the program is utilizing the NB Connected App, which includes a feature for reporting unmaintained properties. Mr. Amaral indicated that they would look into this. Ms. Latham expressed her appreciation for calls from neighbors who alert her to vacant homes, emphasizing that she acts on those notifications.

Councillor Abreu questioned whether the program has sought support and potential funding from local and federal delegations. Mr. Amaral confirmed that they have reached out and received support from both Federal and State levels. However, the funding available for redeveloping these properties is limited, and with the current Federal Administration, there are concerns that this funding may be reduced or cut entirely.

Regarding the nursing home facilities, Mr. Amaral noted that, although he could not provide details, there has been an increase in interest in the vacant nursing homes within the City for potential apartment development. He added that converting these facilities can be costly, particularly when transforming three nursing home rooms into a one or two-bedroom apartment, with plumbing and electrical work being the primary costs.

Councillor Carney expressed her opinion that the former Hallmark Nursing Home building could serve well as an assisted living complex. Mr. Amaral acknowledged that it would be an ideal choice for this purpose but noted that his Office has not yet received any inquiries from developers interested in pursuing the property for that use.

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

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Carney, Abreu and Oliver, requesting, that the Administration look into leasing or purchasing the nursing home facilities in the City that are closed, such as the former Hallmark Nursing Home on Rockdale Avenue and the former Sassaquin Nursing Home on Acushnet Avenue, to help combat the housing crisis that the City is currently facing by creating and additional affordable housing units in New Bedford; and further, that the City Council reach out to our State and Federal Delegation for assistance in obtaining supplementary funds for this project, by way of grants and/or other available resources.

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Carney, Lopes and Oliver, requesting, that the City of New Bedford’s Office of Housing & Community Development appear before the Special Committee on Housing to discuss efforts to identify vacant properties and encourage their return to occupancy.

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COMMUNICATION, Council President Morad, submitting a copy of a letter from the Realtor Association of Southeastern Massachusetts (RASEM) stating their opposition to the rent stabilization motion heard at the City Council Meeting of March 09, 2023. (Matter ID #0588) (Referred – March 23, 2023.)

The Communication was read into the record.

On motion by Councillor Carney and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on the COMMUNICATION, Council President Morad, submitting a copy of a letter from the Realtor Association of Southeastern Massachusetts (RASEM) stating their opposition to the rent stabilization motion heard at the City Council Meeting of March 09, 2023.

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COMMUNICATION, Councillor Burgo, submitting a copy of an email regarding Rent Stabilization from Zach Boyer. (Matter ID #1791) (Referred – October 26, 2023.)

The Communication was read into the record.

On motion by Councillor Choquette and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on the COMMUNICATION, Councillor Burgo, submitting a copy of an email regarding Rent Stabilization from Zach Boyer.

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COMMUNICATION, Councillor Burgo, submitting a copy of an email regarding Rent Stabilization from Lena Silva. (Matter ID #1792) (Referred – October 26, 2023.)

On motion by Councillor Carney and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on the COMMUNICATION, Councillor Burgo, submitting a copy of an email regarding Rent Stabilization from Lena Silva.

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COMMUNICATION, Councillor Burgo, submitting a copy of an email regarding Rent Stabilization from Maria Rosario. (Matter ID #1874) (Referred – November 09, 2023.)

On motion by Councillor Giesta and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take “**NO FURTHER ACTION**” on the COMMUNICATION, Councillor Burgo, submitting a copy of an email regarding Rent Stabilization from Maria Rosario.

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

This meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.
Clerk of Committees