



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

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

DATE: AUGUST 19, 2025

TIME: 7:01 P.M.

PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

**PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIR; IAN ABREU;
DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO; NAOMI CARNEY;
MARIA GUESTA; JOSEPH LOPES; LINDA MORAD;
SHAWN OLIVER; RYAN PEREIRA**

ABSENT: COUNCILLOR CHOQUETTE

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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.

Prior to the reading of the agenda, the Chair recognized and formally introduced Chief Jason Thody, the newly appointed Chief of Police, to the Committee. Chief Thody thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Council and shared that he has held the position for the past five weeks and has been acclimating to his new role. He provided a brief overview of his background in law enforcement which began in Connecticut as a police explorer at the age of 14, followed by service as a police cadet at 19. Over the course of 29 years, he served the Hartford Police Department as an officer, detective, and finally Chief from 2019 to 2024. After retiring from Hartford, he sought a new chapter in his career, which led him to apply for the Police Chief position in New Bedford. Police Chief Thody expressed his enthusiasm about being in New Bedford and shared his intention to meet with each Councillor individually to introduce himself and address any questions or concerns they may have.

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

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) (March 11, 2025 – tabled for 90 days)

Councillor Gomes informed Police Chief Thody that this matter has been reviewed multiple times and that the Council members were last updated about ongoing negotiations with the Union addressing this request.

The Chief noted that he had not yet discussed it with the Union and was unaware of any existing issues or concerns on their part. He expressed his support for the initiative as there are ongoing challenges with fully staffing all detail positions. He clarified that active officers are given first right of refusal, followed by retired officers. However, he would include the condition that any retired officer over sixty-five would need to obtain medical clearance. He stated that he would reach out to the Union to identify any potential issues and agreed to report back to the Committee within 45 days.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Abreu, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter for forty-five days.

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

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Oliver, Morad, Abreu, Lopes, Baptiste, Giesta, Carney and Gomes, requesting, that Police Chief Paul Oliveira, Executive Secretary to the Traffic Commission Laurie Alfonso, City Solicitor Eric Jaikes, Chief Financial Officer Robert Ekstrom, and a representative from the Traffic Division, meet with the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods to discuss current policies, procedures and Ordinances surrounding campers, RV's, boats and trailers that are left unregistered and abandoned throughout the various streets and neighborhoods within the City of New Bedford; and further, to discuss improvements and initiatives to address these matters in a timelier manner so as to not pose significant safety risks and eyesores, and to the improve the overall cleanliness within the City. (Matter ID #1214) (Referred – July 18, 2024.) (August 26, 2024 – VOTE: Purchasing Agent draft an RFP for a company to take, store and/or demolish campers, RV's, boats, etc.; VOTE: Ask Department Heads if they have space to store boats, campers, RV's, etc.; tabled)

The Chair recognized Police Chief Thody to speak on the item. Chief Thody noted that he had reviewed the matter prior to the meeting. He reported that the Traffic Division has initiatives in place to address the issue citywide. To date, 46 campers and boats have been identified as public nuisances. Of these, 23 remain on the streets and are currently registered, 5 have relocated, though their new locations are unknown, and 18 have been towed, with 11 sent for destruction and 7 awaiting demolition. This week, two additional units were removed, one from Morton Court and a boat near the intersection of Summit and Maxfield Streets. The Chief added that a similar issue had occurred in Hartford, though not as widespread as New Bedford.

Councillor Oliver inquired about the management of vehicle towing and storage in Hartford. He learned that the agreements between the City of Hartford and towing companies include provisions for both towing and pickup services. Councillor Oliver requested information about the vendor performing the work and who is responsible for financing the removal and destruction of the vehicles.

Assistant Deputy Chief Carola was recognized and explained that the Department of Facilities and Fleet Management (DFFM) assumes possession of the property. South Coast Towing is responsible for towing and destruction of the vehicles, with destruction costs set at \$100 per foot. DFFM covers both towing and destruction expenses.

Councillor Abreu inquired whether an uninsured and unregistered boat or camper could be subject to removal from the City streets. Police Chief Thody confirmed that they could; and he suggested the development of a comprehensive Ordinance to provide the Police Department with the necessary authority to address these situations. He further emphasized that the Ordinance should be statute-specific, including permissible attachments for the unit and the duration it can remain stationary.

Councillor Giesta raised concerns regarding the presence of campers, trailers, and oversized vehicles in the City, noting that the Council is actively working on an Ordinance to address these issues.

Councillor Baptiste expressed the same concerns, particularly regarding campers parked close to schools.

Police Chief Thody emphasized that there are ways to address the issue, starting with improved outreach to residents of the units. This could involve offering services aimed at helping them transition from their current circumstances. He stressed the need of equipping the police department with the proper tools to enforce the law providing clear legal authority. He concluded by reiterating the need for strong, enforceable language that enables the Police Department to take meaningful action.

Councillor Gomes asked Legal Counsel, Atty. David Gerwatowski about the possibility of establishing an Ordinance to restrict how long a camper, RV, or boat can be parked on city streets. Atty. Gerwatowski confirmed that such an Ordinance could be developed. He explained that a similar Ordinance is currently in place, allowing for the towing of unattended units and imposes a fine of \$300 per day until it is removed.

Councillor Pereira informed the Committee that the Mayor's office has appointed Neil Mello as the primary contact regarding this matter. He suggested that Mr. Mello be invited to the next meeting for further discussion.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and Councillor Morad, the Committee VOTED: To Receive and Place on File copies of the Committee requests from the previous meeting and the Mayor's Office email response to a memo sent to Department Heads asking if they have space to store boats, campers, RV's, etc. on their property, under their supervision.

Councillor Morad asked Mr. Robert Ekstrom, Chief Financial Officer, whether DFFM had sufficient funding to cover the costs associated with towing and demolition. Mr. Ekstrom responded that these expenses are funded through the Solid Waste budget, which includes a \$25,000 limit designated for these services. Councillor Morad requested that Mr. Ekstrom provide the Committee with a detailed update on the total amount DFFM has spent to date on the removal and demolition of trailers and boats.

Councillor Oliver asked Mr. Ekstrom about whether the Purchasing Department had drafted a Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify a vendor for towing and demolition, as mentioned in the motion. Mr. Ekstrom responded that he was not aware of any RFP being drafted.

Laurie Alfonso, Executive Secretary/Parking Clerk, Traffic Commissioner, was recognized. Councillor Oliver inquired about the measures her department is taking to address the issue. Ms. Alfonso responded that her department primarily serves as the eyes and ears for both the Police Department and DFFM regarding units in violation that require towing. Generally, they refrain from initiating towing until the unit has been tagged, hoping this will prompt removal or resolution of the situation. She noted that there is improved communication between departments in addressing the issue.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To request that Legal Counsel and the City Solicitor draft an Ordinance prohibiting the parking of campers on City streets.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter at this time.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods meet with the CEO or designated representative for E.L. Harvey Trash & Recyclables, along with representatives from the New Bedford Health Department and the Department of Facilities and Fleet Management for the purpose of discussing what was being done prior to the fire to address the rat burrows at said location; and further, to discuss what preventative actions have been implemented to ensure that this type of incident never happens again. (Matter ID #1261) (Referred – July 17, 2025.)

Mr. Cliff Bassett, District Manager, E.L. Harvey Trash and Recyclables, was recognized. Mr. Bassett provided the Committee members with a report detailing the measures taken to address the rat infestation issue that arose following a fire at the E.L. Harvey Shawmut Avenue location.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To Receive and Place on File a copy of the “VECTOR CONTROL PLAN”, from E.L. Harvey New Bedford Transfer Station, submitted by Mr. Clifford Bassett, District Manager of E.L. Harvey New Bedford.

Mr. Bassett guided the Committee through the report, detailing the site assessment and root cause analysis, and rodent prevention and proofing measures that were in place prior to the fire and since added. He explained the steps taken to manage solid waste operations and conditions, the implementation and continuation of the baiting and trapping program, the initiation of burrow treatment protocols, rodent monitoring, and inspections, and the documentation of these efforts and procedures, as well as the cleanup of the rodent-infested areas.

Mr. Bassett stated that E. L. Harvey is collaborating with the Board of Health, the City, and Flynn Pest Control, Inc. to implement a health and safety plan that will be a training requirement for all E.L. Harvey employees. He explained that, following the incident, they have increased the number of bait stations from 90 to 110. Within two weeks of these changes, they saw a dramatic decrease in the number of rodents collected. However, they continue to monitor the traps daily, and since the bait stations were installed, only eight have shown signs of activity.

Councillor Gomes inquired whether Mr. Bassett believed the area was now safe. Mr. Bassett responded in the affirmative. The Councillor agreed and thanked E.L. Harvey for their quick response and resolution of the incident.

Councillor Oliver also complimented their efforts and asked about the future reduction of traps. He was informed that the decrease would be minimal, with 75 traps remaining on site, 50 indoors and 25 outdoors. The Councillor further asked whether local calls relating to rodent activity would still be addressed. Mr. Bassett responded that he collaborates with the Board of Health, noting that they normally receive and respond to initial reports from residents, and then decide on action needed.

Stephanie Sloan, Director, Health Department, was recognized and provided the Committee with an update regarding the situation. She noted that E.L. Harvey is making progress and has been very cooperative, along with their pest control vendor, Flynn Pest Control, Inc. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (Mass DEP) is monitoring the situation as well. Due to the minimal activity in the area, including the airport, the playground in that location was reopened.

Councillor Oliver asked if they would continue to monitor the playground and maintain the bait traps in that area, to which he received confirmation that they would.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **“NO FURTHER ACTION”** on this Written Motion.

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On motion by Councillor Carney and seconded by Councillor Lopes, 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 City immediately install “No Trespassing Anytime, Police Take Notice” signage at the Wilks Library, 1911 Acushnet Avenue, at the back of the property, where the library grounds meet Brooklawn Park; and further, that this action be taken on any City-owned property that has been invaded by criminal activity, trespassing and drug use. (To be Referred to the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods, the Department of Public Infrastructure, and the Administration.) (Matter ID #1443) (Referred – September, 12, 2024.)

COMMUNICATION, Councillor Gomes, submitting a response letter from Mayor Mitchell, relative to the August 26, 2024, Public Safety & Neighborhoods Committee request for information regarding the use of ARPA funds for the purchase of solar radar speed limit signs. (Matter ID #1868) (Referred – November 14, 2024.)

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:29 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.
Clerk of Committees