



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
DATE: SEPTEMBER 15, 2025
TIME: 7:01 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS IAN ABREU, CHAIR; SHANE BURGO (7:09); NAOMI CARNEY; LEO CHOQUETTE; MARIA Giesta (7:09); BRIAN GOMES; JOSEPH LOPES; LINDA MORAD; SHAWN OLIVER; RYAN PEREIRA (7:09)

ABSENT: DEREK BAPTISTE

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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 Burgo and Giesta explaining their tardiness to the meeting. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Oliver.

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CITIZEN'S INPUT TIME – Not to exceed the first thirty (30) minutes of the meeting.

CITIZEN'S INPUT TIME – Joseph Quigley, 192 Walnut Street, #8, New Bedford, 02740, speaking on "Tenant Perspectives". (Referred to the Committee on Appointments and Briefings – June 23, 2025.) (Referred to the Special Committee on Housing – July 22, 2025.)

The Chair explained that Mr. Joseph Quigley, 192 Walnut Street, #8, New Bedford, MA had previously appeared before the Committee on Appointments and Briefings during Citizen's Input Time and that his comments went beyond the permitted three minutes. A motion was made to refer his issue to the Special Committee on Housing so that he may complete his comments.

The Chair recognized Mr. Quigley, who reiterated his concerns on how seniors and those who do not have the means are being forced out/evicted from housing to accommodate new owners, specifically LLC's who are looking to rent their units at higher rents. This corporate move has created an increase in homelessness, due to those unable to find affordable housing. He went on to suggest that the City must look to slow down the eviction process and provide services in helping to locate affordable housing for those being forced out of their homes through no fault of their own. He stressed this is bordering on an epidemic and needs to be addressed now.

Mr. Quigley asked how many Councillors reviewed the email he had sent to them. The Councillors stated they did not receive said email. The Clerk confirmed he was not in receipt of an email. Mr. Quigley stated he would resend the email to be distributed to the Committee members.

Citizen's Input Time was concluded.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: to recommend that the City Council take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the matter at this time.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the City devise a plan to address the homeless issue in New Bedford, and further; that the City call a summit to include the New Bedford Health Department, the Administration, the State Health Department, our State Legislative representation along with every drug and health agency that is available with local offices and officials to assist with a plan of action to address the issue that is becoming a crisis in the City of New Bedford. (Matter ID #1361) (Referred – August 13, 2024.) (October 28, 2024 – tabled) (February 10, 2025 – tabled for 6 months)

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: to remove the item from the Table.

The Chair recognized Deputy Director of the Office of Housing and Community Development, (OHCD) Jennifer R. Clarke.

Deputy Director Clarke provided the Committee with the six-month update that was requested by the body to include that the City has convened leadership in the Continuum of Care to establish specific action steps, timelines and responsible parties for each of the TAC Report's recommendations through regular biweekly meetings.

Among the actions taken over the past six months:

Recommendation #1: Diversifying Housing and Services

Members of our Continuum of Care have been meeting with a developer who recently and very successfully converted a former nursing home in Dighton into permanent housing for elderly people who were homeless. Those meetings focus on the potential for new development, specifically serving seniors experiencing homelessness.

Deputy Director Clark, went on to explain that the Dighton development helped a New Bedford residents – a recent individual in a wheelchair from Sister Rose's Place had been living there after over a year in emergency shelter with no options. Now he's stable in his own home.

The Office of Housing and Community Development has begun reviewing a model with the New Bedford Housing Authority encouraging residents (in Permanent Supportive Housing who can live independently) to move on/move out to other permanent housing in the community in order to open up our homeless to the housing pipeline with additional units.

Agencies have begun undertaking efforts to leverage Medicaid based programs like Community Support for Homeless Individuals (CSP-HI, etc.). This has extended to looking for medical respite opportunities for people experiencing homelessness along with exploring deeper partnerships with our health facilities (like SouthCoast Health and the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center).

Also looking at long-term opportunities for medical respite locations by working with the Vacant Property Manager to identify any opportunities suited to respite housing for those experiencing homelessness.

Efforts at expanding the existing portfolio of housing for the homeless with the introduction of additional non-HUD funded units.

Initiating a newly awarded rapid rehousing project through PAACA set to open this fall with five (5) new Rapid ReHousing apartments units subsidized under the Continuum of Care program.

Developed a comprehensive list of all street outreach (housing-driven) efforts in New Bedford (like Steppingstone, Seven Hills, Veterans Transition House, etc.) helped us inventory all specializations/services offered and connects street teams with our Coordinated Entry Team.

OHCD received HUD funding to undertake feasibility studies and has partnered with our New Bedford Board of Health in leveraging funding by accessing a State Grant for similar purposes.

OHCD contracted with NeighborWorks to conduct a feasibility study for expansion of existing emergency shelter capacity and development of additional Permanent Supportive Housing units.

OHCD contracted with NeighborWorks to conduct a feasibility study for potential development of a Day Facility to include opportunity/space for multiple service providers, Coordinated Entry Team, clinical/medical teams, etc.

OHCD provided Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding assisting: 300 people in emergency shelters, 14 households with rapid rehousing, 60 households with homeless prevention funds and 83 unsheltered households on the streets, total of over 450 people across all ESG projects in the period ending June 30th.

Recommendation #2: Using Policy Levers to Maximize Housing Resources

OHCD partnered w/South Coast Fair Housing for Fair Housing training for homeless and housing providers in July.

Developing a Continuum of Care presentation for housing court staff, South Coastal Counties Legal Services and similar stakeholders this coming January focusing on what housing/homeless programs do and what providers undertake prior to moving forward with any eviction to ensure clarity about exhaustive efforts agencies make with project participants prior to eviction actions are sought in court.

OHCD looking at options available to develop a Landlord Partnership Package to strengthen and add existing/potential landlord relationships or those housing those who were formerly homeless. Includes reviewing:

- potential development of a risk-mitigation fund (that could provide some funding for damages or unpaid rent to landlords housing the homeless),
- landlord signing bonuses,
- single 24/7 support line for landlords
- guaranteed rapid problem response
- potential pro bono legal services for landlords.

February 2026 is being scheduled for a potential Continuum of Care meeting inviting landlords in for conversation about the Continuum of Care potential issues and opportunities between them and our Continuum of Care programs.

- Exploring set-aside requirements in all new developments specific to homelessness
- Begun conducting biweekly By-Name List meetings. Best practice model across the county; Coordinated Entry Team facilitates discussion person by person who is in a shelter or living on the streets; ensures triaged team approach to faster stabilization and housing solutions.
- Reinforcing the approach among homeless providers that we are working to serve “our” vs. “agency-specific” clients.

- Updating Coordinated Entry Operating Standards to ensure pathway to placement for those w/severe needs/vulnerabilities to potentially prioritize them over chronically homeless who have lesser physical needs. (This flags “imminent mortality” and “acute vulnerability” in our system so someone medically fragile can move ahead of others for housing when justified).
- Met with Officers Cunha and Viera (Downtown Patrol Division) to advise them of the Continuum of Care resources to ensure stronger connection between law enforcement and existing opportunities for people served by the New Bedford Police Department.

Recommendation #3: Strengthening Continuum of Care Governance

Adopted new Continuum of Care bylaws that create a Leadership Council with those experiencing homelessness to help ensure we develop successful interventions in the City for that population.

OHCD publishes/maintains an online homeless database including placement of a new “dashboard” on the Bristol County Community College website where anyone can access recent data and get a comprehensive look at who is being served by Continuum of Care programs. Dashboard addresses whole Continuum of Care but there is a New Bedford only filter.

Began developing a data-driven performance scorecard tool for all homeless housing programs to ensure high efficiencies and excellence in program operations, something that will eventually be made available to each of our programs so they can also regularly monitor themselves.

Community Meetings: OHCD and Continuum of Care members regularly participate in Community Crisis Intervention Team meetings, School Department’s McKinney Vento community partner meetings and other community organizations to maximize connectivity with related sectors including health, youth and seniors.

Continuing improvements of the publication of Street Sheet and have now introduced an online version directly linking folks.

Couple of other items of note:

Convened an initial Cold Weather Overflow Shelter meeting in New Bedford to discuss logistics for 2025-2026 winter months.

Bristol County Community College is hosting its second annual “Homeless Summit” on-Friday morning, November 21, 2025, at White’s of Westport.

Committed to convening a HEART Task Force to revisit and revise the outdated 2017 Heart Team protocols for those who are unsheltered in the City.

OHCD received funding from HUD for technical assistance for training Continuum of Care and ESG providers to improve outcomes across programs.

A few other Potential Longer Term/Future Actions under consideration:

Identifying, soliciting and deploying flexible funds to pay for IDs, phones, car repairs, fees, arrears, application costs, small dollars that remove big barriers.

Expanding street medicine and behavioral health in reach, pairs outreach with a clinician and a benefits specialist.

Exploring and implementing new techniques in communicating with those who are unhoused, educating providers and encouraging the use of techniques (for providers not already doing so) like micro-engagements that start conversations with what *they* want (phone, wound care, replacing stolen gear).

Using HOME-ARP for development of new permanent housing in support of vulnerable/homeless populations (Qualified Populations).

The Chair opened the floor to questions.

Councillor Gomes stated he was very happy to hear about some of the things that were going on. He was pleased that local organizations were collectively working together towards solving the homeless problem. He stated that the City had received nearly \$3mil in opioid settlement funds which he hoped could be applied to housing the homeless. He asked if the agencies were working towards creating a one stop shopping module to assist those in need, to include shelter and food services. He was told that the City was in the process of conducting a feasibility study on the creation of such a place. The study includes identifying a location, what services would be provided and how the operation would be paid for.

Councillor Pereira asked what the expected timeline was for the feasibility study to be completed for the emergency homeless and service shelter. He was told they believed it would be completed by the end of December. This will include a location and cost analysis. Councillor Pereira asked if the study would identify organizations that could possibly run the facility. He was told yes; the study would include an emergency and day facility as discussed. The Councillor asked who commissioned the study. Ms. Clarke answered the City commissioned the study and received the funding. Funding also came from HUD and the Board of Health.

Councillor Pereira asked once the study was completed what would be the next step. He was told it would be presented to the Continuum of Care for review. It would be reviewed by all parties involved, and any additional questions may be presented at that time. Councillor Pereira asked as far as a timeline from where we are currently, after completing the review, identifying sources and funding, what could we expect as groundbreaking for a building or a facility. He was told this was a very difficult question to answer because there are so many “ifs” within it to provide a definitive answer.

Councillor Lopes was recognized and complimented Ms. Clarke on the success statuses that were noted during her presentation. Councillor Lopes said that the use of the term flexible funding was mentioned a number of times during the presentation. He asked if anyone had calculated what amount of funding would be required in the course of a fiscal year for the needs referenced. Ms. Clarke said she was not in a position to reference a figure, but as the process moved along a figure would become clearer and at that point, they would look to fund it properly, be it from grants or philanthropical donations, etc.

Councillor Oliver was recognized and asked when flexible funding is received, would the funding be applied to one project or others. He was told it could be applied to a single project or distributed among other projects. Councillor Oliver asked if any homeless are currently turned away when they reach out to the department for assistance. He was told that all requests received go through their coordination team. If a person is unsheltered or in an emergency shelter, they look to assist them using local entities.

Councillor Pereira asked that in consideration of the new Federal guidelines for securing funding, what is the State doing to address the new steps in place. Deputy Director Clarke explained there was a program in place at the end of the Biden Administration, however that money was rescinded and the current Administration announced that they were going to change the guidelines to secure funding.

The new system incorporates a number of check boxes rather than the narration that used to be submitted. With that being said, they do not know what the final requests will look like. She did know that a number of the changes are being challenged through the court system by a number of non-profit entities.

As an example of the new Federal requirement, the form would include six guidelines which must be met in order to be eligible for funding. Currently, Massachusetts meets three of the six guidelines. Ms. Clarke went on to explain that as written, there are only eighteen States that meet the Federal requirements.

Councillor Burgo was recognized and thanked Ms. Clarke and her department for the good they were doing. He went on to state his displeasure about the Mitchell Administrations lack of concern about the homelessness issue in the City. He stated that the initial report addressing the issue came out over a year ago, September of 2024. Councillor Burgo said the original request began in November of 2023. He said that tonight the Committee is being informed of yet another study which will take them to 2026. He stated this Administration should be more aggressive in addressing this situation.

Councillor Choquette was recognized, and asked that the Reverend Bob Hughes of House of Hope be invited into this process.

The Chair recognized Carl Alves, CEO, Positive Action Against Chemical Addiction (PAACA) and Reverend David Lima, Executive Minister, Inter-Church Council of Greater New Bedford.

Mr. Alves spoke first, stating that the homelessness issue is becoming more challenging on a daily basis. The problem is the lack of space for a person to lay their head at night. He acknowledged that more needs to be done. Mr. Alves said that the City has a great network of providers, which for the last five years have provided emergency services to people on nights when the temperature falls below 27 degrees. This is insufficient. He went on to say that helping those in the encampments throughout the area is a real challenge as well. He stated that coming up with a facility that addresses all concerns would be a plus in providing services. Mr. Alves added that a summit would go a long way in addressing these issues and concerns. He went on to say that the homeless population is growing in age. He is finding more and more individuals in their sixties are requiring services which was never the norm. Unfortunately, he said that this area is not having serious conversations about the elderly in homeless situations.

Reverend David Lima spoke, expressing concern that the non-profits are losing funding as well. He expressed frustration that while there were funds available for faith-based support organizations, the Federal government has added the caveat that if receiving these funds, you have to allow ICE to visit those locations. He went on to say that no matter what your political beliefs are, in his opinion it is not fair.

Reverend Lima said that being able to keep one more person from becoming homeless though it may not sound like much, is an amazing thing to be able to do. He went on to say that the people who provide these much-needed services are at their limit and while they could move to create more beds it is difficult to staff what services they provide currently. Reverend Lima expressed frustration in having to address the Committee on these issues repeatedly and added that the Committee probably feels the same way. He opined that it is unfortunate that the conversation just continues without any solution. In the end, he said it is going to take all of us to address this issue.

Councillor Oliver asked Reverend Lima, while agreeing that it is frustrating to keep coming in and banging the same drum, if he was aware of any agencies in the faith-based community that have taken Federal funding with the new ICE requirement. Reverend Lima stated there have been a couple of providers that have received funding in the past. He is not aware of any that are accepting funds now due to the ICE requirement. Councillor Oliver asked if in the past, there were any instances of ICE going into these facilities. The Reverend said he was unaware of ICE going into a house of faith in this area. He is aware of them going into other places.

Councillor Morad was recognized and asked when the last time was either Mr. Alves or Reverend Lima had a meeting with the Administration. Mr. Alves stated it was around the last time this issue was discussed with the Committee, to which Councillor Morad indicated that it was at least six months ago. Councillor Morad asked the Chair if anyone from the Administration was present. The Chair explained that a representative from the Mayor's Office was invited but was not present nor did the Committee receive a response to their invitation from the Mayor's Office. Councillor Morad stated that the ability to solve this will require all of us working together but there seems to be a consistent pattern of a piece of us missing.

Councillor Gomes thanked Ms. Clarke, Mr. Alves and Reverend Lima. He stated it was his intent to table the matter but that when the Committee met again, he would like to know the costs involved in creating an emergency and day facility. He would like an update on the feasibility study as well. He also stated that he would like to know what the Administration's position is on the homelessness issue.

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: to Table the matter for six months.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Choquette, Oliver and Lopes, requesting that a representative from the Tunnel to Towers Foundation appear before the Special Committee on Housing to discuss the "Veterans Villages" initiative, and how New Bedford could become a Northeast anchor City for said program, which helps build housing developments for America's un-housed Veteran population; said program provides Americas heroes by offering mortgage-free homes to Gold Star and fallen first responder families with young children and by building specially-adapted smart homes for catastrophically injured Veterans and first responders, which may also include Veteran homelessness. (Matter ID #0151) (Referred – February 13, 2025.)

Councillor Abreu explained that he had been unsuccessful in getting representatives from the Tunnel to Towers Foundation to attend a meeting. They were willing to speak to each Councillor individually via Zoom, but were unable to commit to attending an in-person meeting. The Chair went on to say that in absence of a Tunnel to Towers representative, he asked New Bedford's Veterans Agent, Christopher Gomes to appear before the Committee.

Mr. Gomes asked that as the City is known for zero net homelessness among Veterans, what are we doing that is different from other communities. Mr. Gomes confirmed that as of this meeting, homelessness for Veterans was at zero in New Bedford. He attributed this to the success of such organization as the Veteran's Transition House and other programs available to Veterans in the City. He went on to say the number of homeless Veterans is usually low because the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has programs available to keep Veterans and their families in their homes.

The Chair stated he would still like to have the opportunity to arrange a meeting with representatives of Tunnel to Towers in hope that New Bedford could become a Northeast anchor for the organization.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Choquette, the Committee VOTED: to Table the matter at this time.

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

This meeting adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.
Clerk of Committees