



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS & BRIEFINGS
DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2025
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

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

ABSENT: COUNCILLOR BURGO

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Councillor Carney called the Appointments & Briefings Committee meeting to order, took attendance, and explained that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed. The Clerk reported no Communications for the record, and Councillor Burgo was noted as absent.

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

Joyce Rowley, 58 Mott Street, New Bedford, 02744, speaking on "Buttonwood Park Zoo and Emily the Elephant's Retirement". (Referred – October 28, 2025.); Allen Ganeto, 415 County Street, Apt. 105, New Bedford, 02740, speaking on "Keep Our City Streets Clean". (Referred – October 29, 2025).

Ms. Joyce Rowley was recognized by the Chair but prior to Ms. Rowley speaking, the Chair recognized Councillor Morad, who provided a history of Ms. Rowley's continued criticism of the City, the Zoo, and its employees. During the Councillor's remarks, Ms. Rowley objected to the comments. Councillor Morad asked if any colleagues would join her in leaving the Chamber in protest. Several Councillors then stood and left the Chamber, resulting in the loss of a quorum and preventing the Committee from continuing its meeting.

The Chair called a recess at 7:08 PM due to a lack of quorum. The meeting was reconvened at 7:11 PM. By that time, Ms. Rowley had departed, and the item was no longer addressed.

Upon reconvening, Councillor Gomes was recognized. He explained that although he strongly supports "Citizen's Input", he left the chamber because he felt the speaker had excessively utilized this time, to the extent that it had become both a disruption and creating an unnecessary financial burden for the City.

Mr. Allen Ganeto was recognized by the Chair, who spoke on the importance of maintaining clean city streets. Mr. Ganeto, a retired postal employee, expressed concern about the abandoned property at 319 South Second Street. He noted that the property has been boarded up and vacant for several years, becoming a blight on the neighborhood, and requested that the City take action to address the situation.

Councillor Baptiste was then recognized and acknowledged that the property has been a longstanding issue. He explained that, although progress has been slow, the City is actively working to resolve the matter.

Citizen's Input Time was concluded.

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On motion by Councillor Morad and Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To remove the following matter from the table.

COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting the APPOINTMENT of CONNOR WORDEN, New Bedford, MA to the CONSERVATION COMMISSION, Mr. Worden will be replacing Dennis Audette, who has resigned; this term will expire June 2027. (Matter ID #1553) (Referred – September 25, 2025.) (October 23, 2025 – tabled)

The Chair recognized Mr. Connor Worden, who provided a brief overview of his background. He noted that he has a degree in wildlife management and is familiar with natural resources. Mr. Worden is currently employed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation at Horseneck Beach and expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity to serve on the Conservation Commission.

Councillor Abreu inquired how Mr. Worden learned of the position. Mr. Worden explained that he was approached by both the City's Conservation Agent and a member of the Conservation Commission, who invited him to serve, and he agreed.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPOINTMENT of CONNOR WORDEN, New Bedford, MA, to the CONSERVATION COMMISSION; this term will expire June 2027.

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COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting the APPOINTMENT of CHERYL ANN VIVEIROS, New Bedford, MA to the TRAFFIC COMMISSION, replacing Angela Johnston, whose term expired in December 2024; this term will expire in December 2027. (Matter ID #1702) (Referred – October 23, 2025.)

The Chair recognized Ms. Cheryl Ann Viveiros, who explained that she is a retired New Bedford Public Schools teacher with 30 years of service. Having retired for some time, she expressed a desire to become involved in activities that allow her to give back to the City.

Councillor Oliver inquired how Ms. Viveiros became aware of open Board positions within the City. Ms. Viveiros stated that she was approached by the Administration to gauge her interest in serving on a City Board. She was presented with several positions for consideration and determined that the Traffic Commission was the best fit for her. She further noted that, having operated a transport business with her husband for twenty-five years, she is well acquainted with traffic issues that may arise.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPOINTMENT of CHERYL ANN VIVEIROS, New Bedford, MA, to the TRAFFIC COMMISSION; this term will expire December 2027.

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

COMMUNICATION, City Clerk/Clerk of the City Council, to City Council, on behalf of Duria Arsanios, d/b/a **NEW BEDFORD TRANSPORTATION, LLC**, 11 Franklin Street, New Bedford, MA 02740, hereby submitting a copy of the Application requesting a **NEW PRIVATE LIVERY LICENSE**, to carry passengers for hire over the streets of New Bedford. **(License will expire June 30, 2026.)** (Matter ID# 1502) (Referred – September 11, 2025.) (October 23, 2025 – tabled.)

The Chair recognized the applicant, Ms. Duria Arsanios, who, through an interpreter, explained that she previously operated a similar business in Lebanon and intends to run the same type of operation in New Bedford. Her business will primarily provide transportation for doctors' appointments and medical runs. She plans to operate three vehicles, for which she has secured off-street parking.

Councillor Baptiste requested confirmation that off-street parking was available for all three vehicles, and the applicant confirmed that it was.

Councillor Morad inquired about the type of vehicles to be used, and the applicant stated they would be vans. The Councillor also asked about the hours of operation and whether the vans were equipped with backup noise monitors. The applicant indicated that the business would operate 24 hours a day, and the vans did not have backup beeping monitors. When asked about staffing, the applicant stated that the business would employ five individuals.

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPLICATION for a **NEW PRIVATE LIVERY LICENSE**, on behalf of Duria Arsanios, d/b/a **NEW BEDFORD TRANSPORTATION, LLC**, 11 Franklin Street, New Bedford, MA. **(License will expire June 30, 2026.)**

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COMMUNICATION, City Clerk/Clerk of the City Council, submitting an Application for a **NEW PRIVATE LIVERY LICENSE**, on behalf of Jailene M. Guzman Carrero, d/b/a **DJ TRANSPORTATION**, 458B Maxfield Street, New Bedford, MA. **(License to expire – June 30, 2026.)** (Matter ID #1624) (Referred – October 9, 2025.)

The Chair recognized the applicant, Ms. Jailene M. Guzman Carrero. Ms. Carrero explained that she intends to start a small, family-run transportation company, primarily providing transportation for children to and from school. She plans to operate a single vehicle with a capacity of seven children and will serve as the driver. She noted that she has previous experience driving for other livery companies and is now seeking to establish her own business.

Councillor Baptiste inquired about the type of vehicle she would be using. Ms. Carrero stated that it would be a van and confirmed that off-street parking is available for the vehicle.

On motion by Councillor Baptiste and seconded by Councillor Morad, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPLICATION for a **NEW PRIVATE LIVERY LICENSE**, on behalf of Jailene M. Guzman Carrero, d/b/a **DJ TRANSPORTATION**, 458B Maxfield Street, New Bedford, MA. **(License to expire – June 30, 2026.)**

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COMMUNICATION, City Clerk/Clerk of the City Council, submitting an Application for a **NEW PRIVATE LIVERY LICENSE**, on behalf of Dulfeu Amado, d/b/a **GRACE TRANSPORTATION**, 837 Shawmut Avenue, New Bedford, MA. **(License to Expire – June 30, 2026.)** (Matter ID #1625) (Referred – October 9, 2025.)

The Chair recognized the applicant, Mr. Dulfeu Amado, who stated that he intends to start a school transportation business, beginning with a single vehicle. He indicated that the vehicle will be parked at 837 Shawmut Avenue.

Councillor Oliver asked whether there is sufficient space on the property to store the vehicle off the street. Mr. Amado confirmed that there is, noting that his backyard can accommodate between four and six vehicles.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPLICATION for a **NEW PRIVATE LIVERY LICENSE**, on behalf of Dulfeu Amado, d/b/a **GRACE TRANSPORTATION**, 837 Shawmut Avenue, New Bedford, MA. **(License to Expire – June 30, 2026.)**

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COMMUNICATION, City Clerk/Clerk of the City Council, submitting an Application for a **NEW PRIVATE LIVERY LICENSE**, on behalf of Joao M. Pires, d/b/a **BLUE LINE TRANSPORTATION**, 62 Upton Street, New Bedford, MA. **(License to expire – June 30, 2026.)** (Matter ID #1626) (Referred – October 9, 2025.)

The Chair recognized the applicant, Mr. Joao M. Pires, who stated that he has been a resident of the City for over twenty years and is seeking to start his own livery business.

Councillor Oliver inquired about the number of vehicles he plans to operate. Mr. Pires indicated that he would begin with two vehicles. When asked about his prior experience in the livery business, he stated that he has worked for a livery company but is now looking to establish his own operation. The Councillor also asked where the vehicles would be parked, and Mr. Pires confirmed they would be kept in his driveway.

On motion by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPLICATION for a **NEW PRIVATE LIVERY LICENSE**, on behalf of Joao M. Pires, d/b/a **BLUE LINE TRANSPORTATION**, 62 Upton Street, New Bedford, MA. **(License to expire – June 30, 2026.)**

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Choquette, and Pereira, requesting, that HR Director, Jose Gouveia, and CFO, Bob Ekstrom, appear before the Committee on Appointments & Briefings to discuss the City's current Prescription Drug Plan and possible savings options available. (Matter ID #1501) (Referred – September 11, 2025.)

The Chair recognized Mr. Jose Gouveia, Director, Personnel Department. Mr. Gouveia stating that his department has begun exploring alternative prescription providers that may help reduce overall costs to the City. They are working with their consultant, Lockton, to determine whether transitioning to a new plan would be advantageous and/or feasible.

Councillor Pereira inquired whether Piller RX is owned by Blue Cross and Blue Shield and was informed that it is. He further asked if Lockton is evaluating whether to continue with Piller RX or consider a different vendor. Mr. Gouveia noted that the department is reviewing another potential provider, Benestar, and attempting to estimate and compare charges; however, as they are not currently a provider, there are no past claims to review. He added that Piller RX has an advantage in providing accurate cost estimates, as it has been the City's provider for a significant period.

Councillor Pereira noted that the State has indicated a projected rise in prescription drug costs of approximately 25%. Mr. Gouveia confirmed that he had heard this and has observed a steady rise in prescription costs.

Councillor Abreu asked whether medications such as Ozempic have contributed to the increase in prescription expenses, and Mr. Gouveia confirmed that is true.

Councillor Pereira asked Mr. Robert Ekstrom, Chief Financial Officer, whether, under the new premium structure for funding insurance claims, any increase in prescription costs would reduce the amount allocated to the Medical Trust Fund. Mr. Ekstrom confirmed that this was correct. The Councillor then noted that any savings achieved would help increase the Medical Claims Trust Fund, and Mr. Ekstrom affirmed this as well.

Councillor Pereira further inquired about the rebate amounts received in relation to Medical Trust Fund expenses. Mr. Gouveia reported that the City received the following rebates from the current programs: \$712,000 in 2022, \$483,000 in 2023, and \$440,000 in 2024. For 2024, through June, the City has achieved \$262,000 in savings, though the year's review is not yet concluded. The Councillor also asked about Lockton's fee, and he was informed that it is approximately \$40,000 annually.

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

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Abreu, Carney, Choquette and Pereira, requesting, that HR Director, Jose Gouveia, appear before the Committee on Appointments & Briefings to discuss the City's current voluntary benefit package, benefits that are paid for solely by the employee. (Matter ID #1500) (Referred – September 11, 2025.)

The Chair again recognized Mr. Jose Gouveia, Director, Personnel Department, who provided an overview of the voluntary benefits currently offered by the City. Through Boston Mutual, the City provides basic life insurance, with partial sponsorship. Additionally, through TrustMark, employees can purchase coverage through a program called the Cafeteria Plan, which includes voluntary life, accidental, critical illness, disability, and hospital stay plans. Flexible spending account (FSA) options are also available.

Councillor Pereira asked whether all three vendors attended the health fairs offered to City employees and was informed that they did. He then inquired if Mr. Gouveia was considering other providers and was told that the City was exploring options. Mr. Gouveia noted that a large number of employees participate in Boston Mutual programs, while fewer utilize TrustMark offerings. He added that his office conducted seventeen educational sessions on available programs citywide, eight at City Hall and the remainder on-site at various work locations.

Mr. Gouveia asked the Council for guidance on why the City does not offer a dental plan, particularly since 90 to 95% of municipal communities provide one, and dental health is as important as other benefits. He noted that Fall River offers three dental plan options. He was informed that the issue has been under committee review for eight years. Councillor Pereira offered to discuss the matter with him after the meeting to clarify the obstacles.

Councillor Gomes requested that Mr. Gouveia prepare a summary of potential dental plans to present to the Council. Mr. Gouveia agreed, stating he could do so if the Council is serious about advancing the item. Councillor Lopes suggested that if the Director reviews dental plans, he should also consider vision plans.

The Chair then recognized Mr. Andrew Shaw, Representative from AFLAC, who reinforced several points made by Mr. Gouveia. He emphasized that dental insurance is the second most requested voluntary benefit in the industry and noted the rising national concern over pharmacy costs. Mr. Shaw highlighted that AFLAC has relationships with over one hundred municipalities in the region and is the number one voluntary benefits provider nationwide. He stressed that regardless of the carrier, it is important to have a representative present during open enrollment.

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

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COMMUNICATION, Councillor Gomes, submitting a Host Community Agreement Proposal Application on behalf of Shamar James, Founder/CEO of THConnect, LLC, dba Houz of Diesel, seeking to operate a co-located adult-use marijuana retail and product manufacturing establishment at 301 Herman Melville Boulevard, New Bedford, MA 02740. (Matter ID #0116) (Referred – January 23, 2025.) (February 18, 2025 – tabled)

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

The Chair recognized the applicant's representatives. They informed the Council that they had little new information to provide, as they have had difficulty communicating with the Cannabis Control Commission (CCC). They explained that they were appearing before the Committee to request a vote to approve a draft template Host Community Agreement (HCA) application created by the State's CCC so their company can move forward. According to the representatives, the template was developed to assist municipalities experiencing delays in obtaining state approval for their Social Equality Policy (SEP) HCAs, allowing the process to continue using the standardized form. It was further noted that the CCC has been experiencing internal challenges due to understaffing, resulting in significant delays in processing requests.

The Chair then recognized Mr. Eric Jaikes, City Solicitor. Councillor Gomes asked whether the City was aware of the template referenced by the applicants. Solicitor Jaikes responded that the CCC provides several approved form templates online for municipalities to use. While many communities opt to use these templates, others choose not to. He stated that the City of New Bedford has chosen to use its own agreement form. The Solicitor confirmed that the City has submitted its SEP agreement to the CCC for review and approval but has not yet received a response, despite his ongoing efforts to contact them. He reported that his most recent outreach was an email sent on November 15, 2025, and that on Monday, November 18, 2025, he received an email indicating that the draft had been assigned to the investigative team for review and that a

CCC staff member would follow up with additional guidance. He added that, in his estimation, the submitted draft is likely to be accepted; however, he has not yet been able to obtain a final response.

Councillor Gomes asked why, if the template application could benefit the applicant, the City could not also use it. The Solicitor explained that the Committee could not approve the HCA template as suggested because, under the Ordinance adopted by the City, HCAs must be processed through the Mayor's Office. He added that he would need to research whether the City could proceed without an approved SEP if it were to use the CCC's template. Although the applicant is requesting approval of the template this evening, he noted that, by Ordinance, the City Council does not have that authority.

Councillor Gomes then asked whether the Solicitor would present the applicant's request to the Mayor. The Solicitor confirmed that he would discuss the matter with the Mayor.

Councillor Gomes turned to the applicants and asked if they would allow the Council to bring the issue of the HCA template to the Mayor, given that, under the Ordinance, the application must be submitted by the Mayor. The applicants indicated that they understood and that this would be acceptable.

Councillor Carney asked the Solicitor whether using the recommended template would expedite the process. The Solicitor responded that he could not say for certain. He intended to discuss the option further with the applicant at the conclusion of the meeting. He noted that it is his understanding that a license cannot be issued without an approved HCA agreement, and that no requests can proceed without an approved SEP.

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

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Councillor Gomes made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councillor Oliver.

This meeting adjourned at 9:11 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence Jr.
Clerk of Committees