



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS & BRIEFINGS
DATE: DECEMBER 09, 2025
TIME: 6:07 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS NAOMI CARNEY, CHAIR; IAN ABREU;
DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO; MARIA GEISTA;
BRIAN GOMES; LINDA MORAD; SHAWN OLIVER;
RYAN PEREIRA (6:16)

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS LEO CHOQUETTE; JOSEPH LOPES

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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 read a Communication from Councillor Choquette explaining his absence. The Communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Oliver.

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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) (November 18, 2025 – tabled)

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

Councillor Gomes was recognized and asked Atty. Eric Jaikes to update the Committee on the Host Community Agreement (HCA) process for Social Equity Applicants.

The Chair recognized Atty. Eric Jaikes, City Solicitor. He explained that his office recently received correspondence from the Cannabis Control Commission (CCC). The CCC clarified that a Social Equity Program (SEP) HCA can be issued even if the City's HCME (Host Community Marijuana Establishment) Agreement has not yet been approved. He noted that although the City's SEP submission is still pending with the CCC, the City is nevertheless allowed to enter into an HCA.

Based on this new information, Atty. Jaikes notified the Mayor of the CCC's guidance. The Administration indicated that it is willing to open a new round of applications limited solely to Social Equity Applicants. However, he also informed the Committee that Houz of Diesel is not the only Social Equity organization that has expressed interest to the Planning Board in pursuing an HCA with the City in recent years.

Atty. Jaikes reminded the Committee that the City has not formally accepted any Social Equity applications. He noted that Houz of Diesel's submission was received as a courtesy, but it was never officially accepted. He explained that now that the Mayor has directed the Planning Board to begin accepting applications, Houz of Diesel, and any other Social Equity applicants, will be able to submit for formal consideration. He added that the Mayor believes the process must be open and should not favor an applicant simply because they have been pressing the issue.

Councillor Gomes asked, given how long this matter has been ongoing, when did it become known that other Social Equity parties were also interested. Atty. Jaikes responded that the City is aware of one other interested party, and that Houz of Diesel would need to resubmit their application as part of this new round. He reminded the Committee that their original submission was declined only because the City was not accepting new applications at that time.

Atty. Jaikes acknowledged that the CCC has imposed a deadline that could affect Houz of Diesel financially but emphasized that this situation was created from the CCC's lack of response to the City's inquiries since August, not from any action by the City.

Councillor Baptiste was recognized and expressed concern that Houz of Diesel has put in significant work to bring this matter before the Council, and that other organizations may now benefit from those efforts. He stated his belief that the Administration would not have revisited the SEP process if Houz of Diesel had not brought the outstanding issues to the Council's attention.

Councillor Gomes asked Atty. Jaikes when the Administration last called a Cannabis Committee meeting. The Solicitor replied that he did not know. The Councillor then asked why the City could not issue a temporary agreement to Houz of Diesel. Atty. Jaikes responded that the City will accept their application, along with any others, to ensure the process remains open and transparent.

Councillor Morad was recognized and asked how many HCAs the City intends to grant in this round. Atty. Jaikes explained that the City will grant at least one and may have the ability to issue additional HCAs. Under the SEP structure, one HCA must go to a Social Equity applicant, and the next may be open to any applicant.

Councillor Carney was recognized and asked what the process will be for accepting applications going forward. She was informed that Planning staff will reach out to all candidates who identify as Social Equity Applicants and allow them to submit applications for consideration. The Solicitor added that the City's website will be updated to specify that only SEP applicants are eligible to apply during this round. He noted that the process will move forward once the Council resolves the matter, and he anticipates it will proceed quickly once the Planning Board moves forward.

Councillor Gomes asked Atty. Jaikes to clarify his earlier comment suggesting the process would take six months. The Solicitor explained that the policy the City submitted to the CCC states that only SEP applications will be accepted for the next six months. Councillor Gomes then asked whether the Mayor was aware of Houz of Diesel's application, and the Solicitor confirmed that the Mayor was informed of the application.

Councillor Abreu was recognized and asked whether only one SEP HCA would be issued in this round. The Solicitor responded that at least one would be granted, with the possibility of additional approvals.

The Chair recognized Shamar James, Founder of Houz of Diesel. Mr. James stated that some of the comments made earlier did not, to his knowledge, reflect the facts. When his organization first attempted to submit its application, the City accepted it only as a courtesy, stating it could not be officially received. However, he said the City urged them to submit because no other Social Equity applicants were interested at the time. He expressed concern that after Houz of Diesel completed all requested work, the City is now opening the process to anyone, making his organization feel as though it has been pushed out of line. He added that it feels as though they may have upset someone and are now being penalized, despite having helped move the SEP process forward.

The Chair then recognized Tyrone Gomes, a consultant for Houz of Diesel. Mr. Gomes stated that he had several concerns. He asked whether the Committee had reviewed the CCC's communication, noting that it said the City could proceed with a model HCA while working on its local licensing process for Social Equity applicants. He expressed concern that the Solicitor's proposed plan had not been approved by the CCC; and the plan seemed to return to a licensing process he believes to be noncompliant. He also questioned the need to open another application round, stating that what he and his client most want is a clear timeline of when a final decision will be made.

Councillor Giesta was recognized and asked whether the applicants owned the building where they planned to conduct their business. They said they did not. She added that she had looked up the parcel and, in her opinion, the reason the Administration has not been very supportive is because the area is one they want to redevelop with hotels and restaurants. She suggested this might explain why the Administration has not been very kind to the applicants.

Councillor Gomes agreed with Councillor Giesta's point. He expressed his concern that the process could drag out for six months, which he feels would be unfair to the applicant.

The consultant explained that if Houz of Diesel could get a decision, or at least some kind of update, before the CCC's deadline on Thursday, December 11, 2025, they might still qualify to apply for reimbursements being offered by the CCC. He clarified that they could apply for the funding before any negotiations take place, but they would only receive the money if and when an HCA is actually granted.

Councillor Baptiste apologized to the applicants for what they had to go through, saying he believed that if the applicant came from a different demographic, this situation likely would not happen. Councillor Gomes echoed his concerns.

On a RELATED MOTION by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To immediately send a letter to the Mayor asking him to enter into a Host Community Agreement (HCA) with the Houz of Diesel enabling the organization to seek reimbursement from the State for funds previously expended. This passed on a roll call vote of Yeas 9, Nays 0.

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

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

This meeting adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence Jr.
Clerk of Committees