



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

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

DATE: MARCH 09, 2026

TIME: 7:01 P.M.

PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

**PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIR; SHANE
BURGO; NAOMI CARNEY; LEO CHOQUETTE; JOSEPH
LOPES; SHAWN OLIVER (7:34); SCOTT PEMBERTON;
RYAN PEREIRA; JAMES ROY**

ABSENT: IAN ABREU; DEREK BAPTISTE

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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. The Clerk read a Communication into the record from Councillor Abreu explaining his absence. The Communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Roy.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Gomes, Lopes, Abreu, Carney and Giesta, requesting, once again, that Mary Rapoza, Director of Parks, Recreation & Beaches, install 4' x 8' plywood signage at East Beach, West Beach, Hazelwood Park, and Fort Taber; this signage would welcome visitors to these areas and also provide instruction on the laws, rules and regulations of the parks and beaches in the City of New Bedford, including the noise ordinance, no public drinking, parking, and the hours that these spaces are open to the public. (Matter ID #1262) (Referred – July 17, 2025.)

Councillor Pemberton inquired of the Chair as to whether or not Brooklawn Park was included in the request for signage. The Chair informed Councillor Pemberton that yes, Brooklawn Park was discussed at previous meetings and would be receiving signage.

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file an informational packet submitted by Mary Rapoza, Director of Parks, Recreation and Beaches.

Mary Rapoza, Director of Parks, Recreation and Beaches, was recognized and addressed the Committee. She stated that, along with the Council, she and her department had been working on signage for approximately five years. As a result, her department had secured Community Preservation Act funds to pay for the signs and installation. Phase 1 includes all of the City's major parks and beaches while Phase 2 will cover the smaller parks. Referring to the packet that she distributed, Ms. Rapoza informed the Committee that a company from Texas was making the signs and a local contractor would be installing them. Each sign will list the Rules for all City parks and beaches. Each sign will be in both English and Spanish and also include visual icons, QR codes and equipment rental policy/instructions. She stated that the signs for Phase 1 will be ready by the end of June and according to the contractor, installed by that time. Ms. Rapoza stated that this may be a little too optimistic, but she does expect that Phase 1 signs will be installed by the end of the 2026 Summer at the latest.

Councillor Pereira asked Ms. Rapoza if she could provide the Committee members with a list of all the sign locations and the RFP for Phase 1. Ms. Rapoza replied that she would do so.

Councillor Lopes similarly asked if she would provide a report with the number of signs per location and where each sign would be placed in each park. Ms. Rapoza replied that, again, she would do so. Also discussed was the fact that these signs are made to be ‘graffiti-proof’ meaning that graffiti is easily washed away with minimal effort; and that there is a 25-year warranty on the signs themselves regarding fading, etc. She was, however, unsure about the warranty for the installation of the signs.

Councillor Gomes asked about the size of the signs and if Ms. Rapoza would please include/consult with individual Councillors when placing the signs. Ms. Rapoza said the signs are 5 ½ feet x 3 feet, and 4 inches in depth; she agreed to consult and include the Councillors when placing signage.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter for ninety (90) days.

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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 is 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) (August 19, 2025 – tabled for 45 days)

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

The Chair recognized Deputy Chief of Police Derek Belong, who provided the Committee with an update on the matter. He stated that both Chief of Police Jason Thody and the Police Union agree that it would be beneficial for a retired Police Officer over the age of 65, but fit for duty, to be allowed to be called for detail work. Chief Thody’s concern is that these retired Officers must pass a physical fitness test, etc. There are details which must be worked out, and Chief Thody feels that this can be accomplished in as little as 60 days.

Councillor Pereira asked David Gerwatowski, Legal Counsel, if there is currently a Home Rule Petition in place for this. Atty. Gerwatowski responded that he is not aware of one, but he would look further into Chapter 32 of Massachusetts General Laws, which is the Section of the law that pertains to retirement. He also indicated that he would consult with the City Council staff to determine whether or not there is an actual Home Rule Petition already written or not.

Councillor Lopes asked Atty. Gerwatowski and Deputy Chief Belong how this might affect Police Officer’s pension/retirement status. Both Atty. Gerwatowski and Deputy Chief Belong indicated that detail work would not interfere with the retirement status or benefits of any Officers.

Councillor Gomes asked how this process works for retired Officers who currently work details. Deputy Chief Belong replied that there is a process in place. Retired Officers apply as a new employee. They supply their own equipment and go through in-service training like CPR, firearms qualification, etc. Then, once all requirements are fulfilled, they go on the detail list – retirees are placed on a ‘2nd Tier’ list (Current/Active Police Officers are on the ‘1st Tier’ list). If no active Officer wants the detail assignment, then the Detail Officer begins contacting retired Officers on the second list.

On motion by Councillor Roy and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter for sixty (60) days.

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The following matter was taken out of order, without objection:

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that Mayor Mitchell and Police Chief Thody consider immediately filling vacant positions within the New Bedford Police Department, including the Deputy Chief position, the North End Captain position and several Sergeant positions; these leadership positions are needed for the successful operation of the New Bedford Police Department. (To be Referred to the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods, Mayor Mitchell and Police Chief Thody.) (Matter ID #1710) (Referred – October 23, 2025.)

Deputy Chief Belong was recognized and explained that Chief Thody wanted to get ‘the lay of the land’ so to speak upon his arrival, prior to issuing high level promotions. Now that he has had that opportunity, Chief Thody has filled the Deputy Chief position, along with the North End Station Captain position. While Lieutenant positions remain vacant, the Chief feels he needs to fill three Sergeant positions, which were abruptly vacated very recently. Once these positions are filled, it is Chief Thody’s intention to fill the Lieutenant spots as quickly and judiciously as possible.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Roy, 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, 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 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) (August 19, 2025 – VOTE: Legal Counsel and City Solicitor to draft an Ordinance prohibiting campers from parking on city streets; tabled)

Deputy Chief Belong was recognized and explained that there is a complex process when it comes to removing RVs, boats, etc., from City streets. For example, if an RV is legally registered and insured, it cannot be towed unless it is deemed abandoned or unsafe. Often, an RV is being utilized as someone's home. In these cases, the Police Department must seek to provide appropriate alternative services. Another challenge is that there are not many towing companies that want, or are equipped, to remove these types of vehicles. There is considerable expense in removing, storing and destroying these vehicles. The Department of Facilities and Fleet Management (DFFM) has taken on a lot of this work, but even that department has limited space and resources.

Councillor Oliver stated that he is specifically interested in how the Council can best help the Police Department remove those RVs and Boats that are, in fact, deemed abandoned and unlawful. Deputy Chief Belong stated that while Big Wheel Towing & Recovery and SouthCoast Towing have been very helpful, they are really the only two companies, for the most part, that are able to take on this type of work. DFFM stores many of these vehicles as they go through them, making them safe for destruction, etc. Once space becomes available, DFFM notifies the Police Department, and more are brought in. But there is always a backlog due to the nature of the work involved.

Sgt. Paul Fonseca from the Police Department/Traffic Division further explained the situation. He indicated that the Police Department must track down where the RV/Boat is from, to whom it is registered, who owns it, etc. These vehicles must, by law, be held by the City for 45 days before they can remove anything from it, clean it out and/or prepare it for destruction.

Deputy Chief Belong added that DFFM became involved with storing and destroying these vehicles sometime around 2024, and that has made a big difference.

Councillor Gomes asked how expensive this is for the City, to which Sgt. Fonseca stated that it can be very expensive. Clothing, property, etc., must be removed and stored at the City's expense. Then there are storage costs (other than at DFFM), and often, RVs have chemicals and propane that need to be safely removed prior to destruction.

Councillor Oliver asked City Solicitor Eric Jaikes what other municipalities are doing to address abandoned RVs and Boats. Atty. Jaikes indicated that he does not know what any other communities are doing.

Councillor Pemberton asked Atty. Gerwatowski if the Ordinance that the two of them have been working on applies to this issue. Atty. Gerwatowski stated that the language which is currently pending in the Committee on Ordinances is, to his knowledge, more comprehensive as it deals with large commercial trucks, trailers and other vehicles – more than just RVs and Boats.

Councillor Pemberton distributed a copy of the proposed Ordinance, titled "RELATIVE TO PARKING RESTRICTIONS", that he and Atty. Gerwatowski had been working on during the meeting.

On motion by Councillor Pemberton and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file a copy of the proposed Ordinance.

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To table the matter for sixty (60) days.

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On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To follow the Chair's recommendation and take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the following matters:

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Baptiste, requesting, that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods invite Chief of Police Paul Oliveira to a meeting to discuss the Police Department's policy and procedures on reporting crime to the public and to City officials, specifically regarding shootings taking place in New Bedford, and what can be done to better inform the public and City officials of the basic facts related to shooting incidents in a timely manner without jeopardizing any Police investigation into a particular matter; and further, that the Committee discuss with the Chief Oliveira how general crime statistics for New Bedford can be made available on a regular basis to members of the Committee. (Matter ID #1870) (Referred – November 09, 2023.) (February 28, 2024 – tabled)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Morad and Lopes, requesting that the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods convene a series of sub-committee meetings to include representatives from the Traffic Division, Traffic Commission, Department of Public Infrastructure, New Bedford Police Department, Solicitors Office, Legal Counsel for the City Council and four City Councillors (two Ward Councillors and two At Large Councillors), for the purpose of researching and ultimately recommending various alternatives of traffic control(s) to be implemented within the City of New Bedford. (Matter ID #0427) (Referred – March 26, 2024.) (July 15, 2024 – sub-committee appointments made; tabled)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the New Bedford Board of Health hold a public hearing on the proposed waste transfer facility by Parallel Products, doing business as South Coast Renewables, with the residents of the far north end of New Bedford; this meeting would provide an opportunity for the residents that were not notified or aware of the last public hearing to address the proposal and ask questions of the New Bedford Board of Health; and further, requesting that this meeting be held before the Board of Health votes on the proposal by Parallel Products, doing business as South Coast Renewables. (To be Referred to the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods and the Board of Health.) (Matter ID #1357) (Referred – August 21, 2025.)

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

ATTEST:

Dennis W. Farias
City Clerk / Clerk of the City Council