



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
DATE: MARCH 16, 2026
TIME: 7:01 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS JOSEPH LOPES, CHAIR; IAN ABREU; DEREK BAPTISTE (7:16); SHANE BURGO (7:11); NAOMI CARNEY; BRIAN GOMES; SHAWN OLIVER; SCOTT PEMBERTON; RYAN PERERIA (7:12); JAMES ROY

ABSENT: COUNCILLOR LEO CHOQUETTE

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Councillor Lopes called the Finance 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 Choquette explaining his absence. The Communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Pemberton.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Oliver, requesting, that the Committee on Finance meet with Chief Financial Officer, Bob Ekstrom, and MAA Administrative Assistant to the Board of Assessors Sherie Pinzino, to review the current criteria for tax exemption eligibility at age 70 and to consider taking the necessary action to lower the eligibility age to 65; and further, that the Committee on Finance discuss any other exemptions that the City of New Bedford may implement in an effort to assist the City's senior property owners. (Matter ID #1499) (Referred – September 11, 2025.)

The Chair recognized Kendra Parker, Assistant City Assessor, who said that to apply and qualify for a Senior Abatement you need to be seventy years of age. She stated that the Council could lower the age to sixty-five. This would need to be done by Ordinance.

Ms. Parker explained that there are two elderly exemptions available, Clause 41 C and Clause 77 D. The Board of Assessors is currently accepting exemption applications through April 1st. She was asked historically how many seniors opt to take advantage of the programs offered. Ms. Parker replied that in 2024 there were 320 applications, and in 2025, there were 331 applications.

Councillor Oliver asked what the biggest disqualifier was for not being approved for an exemption. He was told it would be the income amount. He was told that to change the exemption language you would need to review Massachusetts General Laws - Chapter 59, Section 5, 41-c. Councillor Oliver suggested that the item be tabled so that the Legislative Counsel could draft the appropriate language to lower the approval age.

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

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COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting a LOAN ORDER, appropriating \$12,610,194.00 for the purpose of making critically needed repairs to City-owned buildings including, but not limited to, projects for the repair and renovation of public safety facilities, recreational facilities, general office space, replacement of capital equipment and vehicles, and road and infrastructure improvements. (Matter ID #0106) (Referred – January 22, 2026.) and LOAN ORDER, (Matter ID #0107) (Referred – January 22, 2026.)

Each item was taken and discussed separately.

Capital Projects 01: Zeiterion Theatre Renovations (\$750,000)

The Chair recognized Rosemary Gill, Executive Director of the Zeiterion Theatre. Councillor Oliver asked what additional steps the organization was taking to acquire additional funds to support the renovation project. Ms. Gill replied the \$750,000 requested was due to unforeseen overages, including hitting bedrock/ledges during construction and the City's request to continue the Spring Street sewer piping along the building as well as including power issues at the facility. The organization is still in the process of raising funds to close the overage gap. The current gap is \$2mil and the \$750k requested will be a part of that gap. Ms. Gill stated that they did scale back the entire project based on the funding they had received, but the overages were at the time unforeseeable.

Councillor Gomes asked if the invoices provided were for the work that had to be done. He was told yes. Ms. Gill explained that one of the unforeseen issues is that when the cement flooring was removed it was discovered that the soil beneath was contaminated and it had to be removed. The Councillor asked if the theatre would come back later on seeking additional funding. He was told no.

Councillor Burgo asked what the pre-Covid cost was for the project and what the final cost post-Covid ended up being. He was told pre-Covid \$18mil and post-Covid \$37mil. Councillor Burgo asked what the funding amounts the Zeiterion received from the City were. He was told \$5mil in ARPA funds, \$750k in CIP funds not yet including the additional \$750k currently being requested.

Councillor Roy asked what the Zeiterion Theatre provided economically to the City. Ms. Gill gave an overview as to how the shows at the Zeiterion Theatre affect local businesses and contribute to the local economy.

Capital Projects 02: Assessor's Office Renovations: (\$480,480)

The Chair recognized Jennifer Vieira, Commissioner, Department of Facilities and Fleet Management. Ms. Vieira gave an overview of the work to be done in the Assessor's office.

Councillor Gomes asked if any of the work would be done in-house or contracted. It was explained that they would use as much in house labor as possible. \$51k of the money being sought would be used towards the design for the renovation.

Capital Projects 03: City Hall Deferred Maintenance: (\$541,476)

Ms. Vieira explained that the entire roof needs to be redone. It is a flat roof, and the interior is currently suffering from water infiltration. This also includes the much-needed repointing of the building.

Councillor Burgo asked, as this would affect handicap access to the building, what would the turnaround time be for the work to be completed? He was told nine months. Councillor Roy asked if there was a backlog of repairs needed to City buildings. He was told yes.

Capital Projects 04: Hillman Street Complex Building 3 improvements: (\$1,560,818)

Councillor Pereira asked what the requested amount entailed. He was told it would include the first phase design which would be put out to bid and then the work. Building 3 suffers from water infiltration issues, and ADA compliance guidelines.

Councillor Carney asked if the requested amount could be cut in half and only one of the projects being requested could be done. Ms. Vieira stated they would do their best with what they have, but costs would increase if jobs were put off. Councillor Carney asked if the funds being requested would be enough to complete the necessary repairs. She was told it would.

Councillor Baptiste spoke about the need to properly address the building issues. Councillor Abreu echoed Councillor Baptiste's comments stating that the City should not take a band aid approach towards building repairs.

Capital Projects 05: Roadway Reconstruction: (\$3,000,000)

The Chair recognized Department of Public Infrastructure Commissioner Jamie Ponte.

Councillor Pereira asked how the money would be allocated. He was told by the severity of the street damage as determined by the computerized system they have in place.

Councillor Baptiste stated that the \$3mil was too little to address the street issues the City is facing.

Councillor Oliver asked if the \$3mil would be used solely for street reconstruction. Mr. Ponte stated it could be used for other roadway issues if needed.

Councillor Roy asked what the overall condition of the City's roads was. He was told fair.

The Chair recognized Christina Connelly of the Mayor's office. Councillor Pereira asked if there has been any discussion towards increasing the funding for road improvement. He was told that there have been such discussions.

Capital Projects 06: McCoy Turf Field Replacement: (\$1,764,000)

Capital Projects 07: Walsh Field Lighting: (\$496,000)

The Chair recognized Assistant Superintendent of Finance for the New Bedford Public Schools, David Flynn. Mr. Flynn explained that the turf currently in place at McCoy Field has passed its life expectancy and needs replacement. The lighting and current scoreboard are also in need of replacement. The field is currently separating and lifting at many seams creating a safety hazard for those using it.

The Walsh Field lighting is antiquated and needs replacement. This will provide a safe and engaging environmentally responsible facility for the students and community using the field.

Councillor Baptiste asked what the life expectancy is for an artificial turf field. He was told ten years and currently the McCoy Field turf is twenty years old.

Councillor Abreu stated his support for improving the lighting at Walsh Field. Councillor Abreu asked if any consideration has been given to securing a commercial sponsor to help with the purchase of a new scoreboard, like other schools seem to have done. If they have not, he suggested they look into some type of sponsorship.

Councillor Carney asked if Walsh Field was being used to its full capacity. She was told it was not because of the lack of lighting. Football games have had to be held during the day.

Councillor Gomes asked if the new lighting would cover the entire complex at Walsh Field. He was told that it would.

Capital Projects 08: Zoo Harbor Seals Habitat: (\$150,000)

The Chair recognized Emily Budas, Zoo Veterinarian and Kristy Kaeterle, Assistant Director for the Buttonwood Park Zoo. They explained that currently the seal habitat has passed its life expectancy. One or both units are at risk of failure which directly impacts the pool temperatures. This project is to create a larger habitat for the seals to live in, when regular maintenance on the pool is occurring. A larger habitat for the seals to live in when regular pool maintenance is occurring is needed.

Councillor Roy asked if the lack of space is currently posing a health risk for the seals. He was told that it was.

Capital Projects 09: Zoo Regulatory Deferred Maintenance: (\$180,000)

Dr. Budas and Assistant Director Kaeterle explained that this funding would be applied to much needed HVAC repairs and building upgrades, including repairs to the bison holding barn, the bison medical chute and replacement of deteriorating fencing.

Capital Projects 10: Airport Markings: (\$225,000)

The Chair recognized Scot Servis, Manager, New Bedford Regional Airport who explained the funding request is for the upgrade and repainting of runway markings, including reflective surfaces.

Councillor Gomes asked how often the runway markings should be repainted. He was told the standard is every two years. Councillor Gomes asked why the maintenance figure was not included in the airport budget. He was told that they do not have it within the operational budget to pay for the work.

Equipment Acquisitions 03: Public Safety Communications (\$250,000)

The Chair recognized John Costa, IT Manager. He explained that this request is being made to erect the second of two towers. The Council previously allowed for the funding of one tower and this request will complete the second communications tower to be utilized by public safety entities.

Councillor Pereira asked if the funding being requested would cover the cost to erect the unit. He was told that it would.

Equipment Acquisitions 04: Computer and Switch Requirements: (\$140,000)

Mr. Costa explained that all the City's computer switches are antiquated and need replacement. The City is on a five-year plan to replace both end-user computers and computer switches. If the City does not move forward with this project, it opens it up to possible security vulnerabilities network wide.

Equipment Acquisitions 05: Backup Power Supply Replacement: (\$100,000)

Mr. Costa explained that the power supply that provides backup power to the City Hall Data Center during blackouts and other emergency situations has failed and is no longer capable of providing interim power during the transfer interval to generator power. The unit needs to be replaced.

Councillor Pereira asked what the life expectancy is on such a unit and was told eight to ten years. The current unit is nearly fourteen years in age.

Equipment Acquisitions 06: Cisco Call Management System Replacement: (\$462,000)

Mr. Costa explained that this upgrade request is critical for the City's phone system. The current system is near the end of its life and there are critical security patches that cannot be done anymore as the equipment is failing. The current system is approximately thirteen years old.

Equipment Acquisitions 14: Airport Aqueous Film-forming Foam: (\$30,000)

Airport Manager Scot Servis was recognized and explained that this will allow for the disposal of the foam they currently have on hand as the PFAS foam has been upgraded. This will satisfy an Environmental Protection Agency requirement once a suitable Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) foam is approved and available for purchase.

Councillor Oliver asked if this request was being imposed by the Federal Aviation Administration on the City. Mr. Servis replied, not yet, but he was expecting it and was trying to be preemptive.

Section 3: Vehicle Acquisitions and Replacements.

An overview was given on the program which allows for CIP City vehicles by means of a rolling stock, to maintain a uniform level of investment in the City's fleet. This CIP request includes 24 vehicles, including 26 in the General Fund and 11 in various Enterprise Funds as identified.

Councillor Oliver asked Emergency Medical Services Director Michael Thomas if the ambulance replacement was covering a downed unit. He was told it was not, but rather it would result in the retirement of a unit which is at the end of its life. The unit to be retired is a 2018 ambulance which is operated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Councillor Gomes asked New Bedford Police Chief Jason Thody if his department's vehicle request would be appropriate at this time. Chief Thody said it would. They want to purchase four hybrid Police front line patrol cars.

New Bedford Fire Chief Brian Mederios explained that his department request would retire older SUV's dating back to 2013. The Fire Department is trying to establish a three-year replacement cycle for vehicles.

Councillor Roy asked how many vehicles would be replaced and was told 3 Ford Explorers.

The School Department will also look to replace end-of-life vehicles.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: to recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the LOAN ORDER in the amount of \$12,610,194, for the purpose of making critically needed repairs to City-owned buildings including, but not limited to, projects for the repair and renovation of public safety facilities, recreational facilities, general office space, replacement of capital equipment and vehicles, and road and infrastructure improvements. This motion passed on a roll call vote of Yeas 10, Nays 0.

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COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting the attached updated City's Fund Balance Management Policy. (Matter ID #0158) (Referred – February 12, 2026.)

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Pereira, the Committee VOTED: to recommend to the City council APPROVAL of the updated City's Fund Balance Management Policy.

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COMMUNICATION, (Matter ID #0159) and AN ORDER (Matter ID #0160) submitted by Mayor Mitchell, for the TRANSFER of \$5,037,282.00 from FREE CASH to CABLE ACCESS, STABILIZATION FUND. (Referred – February 12, 2026.)

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council ADOPTION of the ORDER for the TRANSFER of \$5,037,282.00 from FREE CASH to CABLE ACCESS, STABILIZATION FUND.

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COMMUNICATION, (Matter ID #0161) and AN ORDER (Matter ID #0162) submitted by Mayor Mitchell, for the TRANSFER of \$60,386.00 from FREE CASH to PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE, PURCHASE OF SERVICES. (Referred – February 12, 2026.)

On motion by Councillor Pereira and Councillor Pemberton, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council ADOPTION of the ORDER for the TRANSFER of \$60,386.00 from FREE CASH to PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

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COMMUNICATION, (Matter ID# 0163) and AN ORDER (Matter ID #0164) submitted by Mayor Mitchell, for the TRANSFER of \$175,000.00 from FREE CASH to WASTE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL, PURCHASE OF SERVICES. (Referred – February 12, 2026.)

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Baptiste, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council ADOPTION of the ORDER for the TRANSFER of \$175,000.00 from FREE CASH to WASTE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

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COMMUNICATION, (Matter ID #0165) and AN ORDER (Matter ID #0166) submitted by Mayor Mitchell, for the TRANSFER of \$84,700.00 from FREE CASH to TOURISM, PURCHASE OF SERVICES. (Referred – February 12, 2026.)

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council ADOPTION of the ORDER for the TRANSFER of \$84,700.00 from FREE CASH to TOURISM, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

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COMMUNICATION, (Matter ID #0167) and AN ORDER (Matter ID #0168) submitted by Mayor Mitchell, for the TRANSFER of \$70,000.00 from FREE CASH to RECREATION AND PARKS, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

Councillor Oliver asked what this funding would be applied to. The Chair recognized Mary Rapoza, Director, Department of Parks, Recreation and Beaches, who explained that the funding would be used for the yellow cottage at Hazelwood Park.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the ORDER for the TRANSFER of \$70,000.00 from FREE CASH to RECREATION AND PARKS, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

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COMMUNICATION, (Matter ID #0169) and AN ORDER (Matter ID #0170) submitted by Mayor Mitchell, for the TRANSFER of \$63,662.00 from FREE CASH to MIS, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: to recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the ORDER for the TRANSFER of \$63,662.00 from FREE CASH to MIS, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

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COMMUNICATION, (Matter ID #0171) and AN ORDER (Matter ID #0172) submitted by Mayor Mitchell, for the TRANSFER of \$17,610.00 from FREE CASH to AUDITOR, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the ORDER, for the TRANSFER of \$17,610.00 from FREE CASH to AUDITOR, PURCHASE OF SERVICES.

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The following items were not read.

COMMUNICATION, Councillor Morad, submitting a letter from Joseph Gomes, expressing his concerns regarding property taxes and senior adjustments, highlighting the difficulties seniors face in making ends meet and remaining in their homes. (Matter ID #1798) (Referred – November 13, 2025.)

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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COMMUNICATION, Councillor Morad, submitting a copy of a letter issued by the Law Offices of David J. Hoey P.C. to the City of New Bedford, pursuant to M.G.L. Ch. 258 § 4, relating to claims regarding the Estate of the late Paul N. Coderre, Jr. and his widow, Jane Coderre. (Matter ID #1451) (Referred – September 12, 2024.)

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.
Clerk of Committees