

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & NEIGHBORHOODS
DATE: OCTOBER 14, 2020
TIME: 7:01 P.M.
PLACE: HELD REMOTELY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS' MARCH 12, 2020 ORDER SUSPENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF THE OPEN MEETING LAW G. L. C. 30A, SECTION 20 AND THE CITY COUNCIL'S VOTE TO WAIVE RULE 21A

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIRMAN; DEBORA COELHO, VICE CHAIRPERSON; IAN ABREU; NAOMI CARNEY; HUGH DUNN; MARIA GIESTA; SCOTT LIMA (7:45); JOSEPH LOPES; WILLIAM BRAD MARKEY; LINDA MORAD

ABSENT: COUNCILLOR DEREK BAPTISTE

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Councillor Gomes called the Public Safety Committee Meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read a Communication from Councillor Baptiste explaining his absence from this meeting. This Communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Abreu.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Council President Lopes, requesting that a member of the Mitchell Administration, the Police Chief, the Fire Chief, the EMS Director, the New Bedford Police Union and the New Bedford Fire Union meet with the members of the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods to discuss the implementation and protection of Qualified Immunity language for the members of the Police Department, the Fire Department, and the Emergency Medical Service (Ref'd 08/20/2020) was received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Abreu. (1)

Councillor Lopes asked Police Chief Cordeiro how the current legislation at the State Capital, as it relates to Qualified Immunity, would affect the local police force. He was told if passed, this would cause a problem with the city along with other cities of the same size in Massachusetts. It may end up preventing the police force from protecting the very people they are trying to protect. Neighborhoods that are struggling will continue to struggle if not more so. A police officer will now be hesitant to be proactive if their decisions to act can be used against them. He believes that the people who should know about the possible problems with Qualified Immunity do not know about it at all. Councillor Lopes expressed his concern for the future quality of police officers this would attract when the department looks to recruit officers; the Chief agreed. The Chief explained that currently the department is operating below their budget and does not have full complement of officers. He predicts an exodus of officers from cities to better communities. The Chief suggested that the Council and other entities flood the State Legislature with calls against the Qualified Immunity proposal. Councillor Lopes expressed his concern of when an Officer uses Narcan to revive a person from an overdose that they can be held liable. The Chief agreed that this could be an issue if passed.

Councillor Abreu asked Chief Cordeiro if he has personally reached out to the local State Legislators to voice his objection to the proposal and he was told he had.

Councillor Markey asked Billy Sylvia of the New Bedford Fire Department Union for his comments. He stated Police Chief Cordeiro hit it on the nose, that this proposal will also affect the Fire Department, especially having to sit back and evaluate a fire and its situation before acting upon it. The same applies to CPA and first responder decisions. Decisions of extracting people from vehicle accidents would now come into play if a fire fighter could be found liable if something went wrong.

Councillor Morad asked if the departments and unions have voiced their opposition to the proposal? She was told there were calls and meetings were being made. She asked if there were any larger gatherings expected to take place to voice opposition. She did not receive an exact answer. Chief Cordeiro did state the Mass Police Association had planned a massive press conference to express their opposition.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Markey, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council draft a letter to our State Delegation voicing the Council's position against the proposed Qualified Immunity Proposition. This motion passed on a voice vote.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Markey, the Committee VOTED: To table the main motion at this time. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Items two (2) and three (3) were taken up together without objection.

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with the DPI Commissioner Ponte or a representative for the purpose of discussing the installation of LED lights and removing the single bulbs in areas that continue to be high risk for criminal activity throughout the City; and further requesting that when the City replaces an existing LED light bulb that it be replaced with a newer LED bulb not continue to use the older type bulbs; furthermore that in the Committee meeting we discuss lighting across the City (To be Referred to the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods and the Department of Public Infrastructure.) (Ref'd 07/16/2020) was received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Giesta. (2)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with Energy Manager Scott Durkee and DPI Commissioner Jamie Ponte, to discuss the present lighting situation in some New Bedford areas; and further that they make available to the City Council the cost savings with changing the street lights, why every neighborhood did not receive LED lighting and the cost savings using the single bulb fixtures and bulb replacements instead of the LED light strips; also provide the Council with how much money has been saved due to the solar farms that have been placed around the City, the reason for this request comes on the heels of asking that LED lighting to be replaced in high crime areas throughout the City (Ref'd 08/20/2020) was received and placed on file by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Giesta. (3)

The Chair explained the motions were sent to Committee because there have been complaints about the brightness of lights throughout the city, and that back in 2015 when the Council approved the funding to change the lighting to LED type bulbs, the decisions were made to apply three (3) different types of LED's depending upon the neighborhood and this was not the original agreement explained to the Council by the then DPI Commissioner.

Both DPI Commissioner Ponte and Energy Superintendent gave an overview of the project and the lighting systems currently being used and how. The original project cost approximately 2.9 million dollars, with rebates granted, the project cost approximately 2.3 million dollars, which was \$600,000 in savings. Currently with the LED's in place the city is saving \$360,000 per year in expenses. All the lights in the city are LED lights, apart from the Historic District, those are globe lights, but those bulbs are LED bulbs

The City currently has 3 types of LED's in place to accommodate main streets (110 watts), secondary streets (50 watts) and neighborhoods (40 watts). Commissioner Ponte showed the Committee what the wattage strips looked like along with the apparatus that holds the light element.

Councillor Giesta expressed her frustration that some neighborhoods and main streets are dark.

Councillor Lopes asked Scott Durkee to send the Committee the original RFP that was approved, and he said he would.

Commissioner Ponte said his department does work with the Police Department when they make recommendations to increase lighting in certain neighborhoods or to light up the area where surveillance cameras are located.

Councillor Morad asked if the LED bulbs reflect light differently. She was told yes, unlike the old lights that were used, which spread out, causing what they call light pollution, the LED lights are brighter but more direct, more focused.

Councillor Lopes asked if it would be feasible to increase the wattage when they had to replace a bulb. He was told that most bulbs last 10 years, that the ones they do end up replacing as of late are those poles that are damaged by automotive accidents. He was told the cost difference should not be significant but that the cost would be deducted from the current savings the city was experiencing the way it is now.

Councillor Morad said she would like to see the cost difference. She was told they would provide the Committee with this information.

The Chair asked that the Committee secure the records of the Siemens meeting that lead the Council to approve the funding for the LED's that are currently in place.

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To Table these matters at this time. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To Waive the reading, take "No Further Action" and report out to the City Council. This motion passed on a voice vote. They are as follows:

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with Police Chief Cordeiro for the purpose of discussing the implementation of using drones to monitor high crime neighborhoods for surveillance across the City, adding another tool in fighting crime; and further requesting, that the drones be used for surveillance and security purposes when the City is holding major events, along with monitoring the City as a whole. (To be Referred to the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods.) (Ref'd 10/27/16) (11/15/16-tabled) (4)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting that Mayor Mitchell and School Superintendent Durkin put together the cost of installing security in all schools throughout the City, which includes panic buttons, cameras, and evacuation plan; and further, consider hiring armed guards possibly using former retirees from the Police Department and/or Veterans; furthermore, that the School Department install a hotline within the school system for students to report unusual activity, threats or even comments about guns or anything that threaten the wellbeing and safety of all faculty and students, title it "YOU HEAR IT, YOU SEE IT, YOU REPORT IT, TOGETHER WE MAKE OUR SCHOOL SAFE." (To be Referred to the Mayor, Superintendent Durkin, the School Committee and the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods.) (Ref'd 02/22/18) (03/14/18-returned unsigned by the Mayor) (05/21/18-tabled 90-120 days) (10/30/18-tabled 90 days) (5)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Gomes and Giesta, on behalf of the Seniors and over 55 residents at Whalers Place, and Whalers Cove on Riverside Avenue, requesting the following action be taken after meeting with residents on safety and quality of life issues; A) that the Traffic Commission and Department of Public Infrastructure paint the following crosswalks yellow, giving motorists more of a visual of where each crosswalk is located; Coffin Avenue, Phillips Avenue, Collette Street, Davis Street and Manomet Street, all streets running to Riverside Avenue; B) requesting that the Traffic Commission install Stop Signs at the following intersections, Phillips Avenue, Davis Street and Collette Street, south east corner, in an easterly direction approaching Riverside Avenue; and further, that the Traffic Commission make Riverside Avenue a "20 MILES PER HOUR" roadway and install signs from Coffin Avenue, north and south to Belleville Road, this request comes with a large population of Seniors and handicap residents that live in this area; C) requesting that the Department of Public Infrastructure check all newly installed handicap accessible ramps leading to sidewalks on Riverside Avenue to make sure that the sidewalk is meeting the street and there is not a lip causing residents to trip or fall; and further, that they fill in all potholes on Riverside Avenue and replace water shut off metal caps; and further, that the Department of Public Infrastructure fill in all the potholes or large holes located in the back of Whalers Cove, and Whalers Place on the paper street owned by the City; D) requesting that Police Chief Cordeiro and the Commanding Officer from Station 3 do periodic speed radar control checks on Riverside Avenue especially during the 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., when traffic is the heaviest; and further, that the Police Chief implement a D run at least twice a night in the area, early evening and after the midnight hour and that the Chief order regular patrols of the perimeter of the buildings due to criminal activity and prostitution taking place behind the buildings; E) requesting, that a

letter be sent to the management at Whalers Place requesting if possible, that they install a surveillance camera on the south east side of the building at Coffin Avenue and Riverside Avenue; and further, evaluate the outside perimeter for additional cameras facing the parking lot on Riverside Avenue and in the back of the building for the safety of their elderly residents; and further, that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with management for an update on action taken and the possibilities of sharing the surveillance cameras with the New Bedford Police Department, that would include Whalers Cove, also if not already participating. (To be Referred to the Traffic Commission, the Department of Public Infrastructure, Police Chief Cordeiro, the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods and the management of Whaler's Cove and Whaler's Place.) (Ref'd 01/10/19) (6)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Coelho, requesting, in the interest of public safety, that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods address what can be done with the matter of pocket parks that are being vandalized by overnight loiterers, the homeless and those engaging in illicit activity, also the trash and debris that is left behind; and further, that representatives from the Police Department and DPI be invited when this matter is heard before the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods. (Ref'd 07/18/19) (10/21/19-tabled) (7)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Dunn and Lopes, requesting, that Health Department Director Damon Chaplin, provide a briefing to the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods regarding any plans to ban the sale of certain tobacco products within the City. (Ref'd 11/26/19) (02/12/2020 – tabled) (8)

Councillor Abreu made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Lopes.

This meeting adjourned @ 8:17 p.m.

ATTEST:



Denis Lawrence, Jr.,
Clerk of Committees