



Committee on Public Safety

June 30, 2014 – 7:03 PM - **Minutes**
Chambers of the City Council, City Hall, Room 214

****View Agenda****

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & NEIGHBORHOODS
DATE: JUNE 30, 2014
TIME: 7:03 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214, MUNICIPAL BUILDING

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIRMAN; HENRY BOUSQUET, VICE-CHAIRMAN; NAOMI CARNEY; DEBORA COELHO; JOSEPH LOLPES; STEVEN MARTINS; DANA REBEIRO (7:07); KERRY WINTERSON

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS DAVID ALVES; LINDA MORAD; JAMES OLIVEIRA

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Councillor Gomes called the Public Safety Committee Meeting to order and took attendance. A Communication from Councillor Morad was read into the record stating she is unable to attend due to a prior commitment. This Communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Martins and seconded by Councillor Coelho.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillors Martins, Lopes, Coelho, Dehner, Gonsalves, Saunders, Alves, Duarte, Lawrence and Council President Gomes, requesting that Chief Teachman be invited to the next Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods Meeting to discuss the rising number of pedestrian injuries and fatalities on the streets of New Bedford and what measures are being taken by the Police Department to enforce the laws against irresponsible and reckless drivers who don't follow the law by allowing pedestrians to cross safely; and further, that the Chief provide said Committee with a record of how many Citations were issued in the last three years to drivers who break the law by not allowing pedestrians to cross the streets safely; and that the Committee meet with DPI Commissioner Labelle to discuss how to better utilize crosswalks by paint or design to get pedestrians to use them again (Ref'd 1/13/11, 2/23/11 - tabled to next meeting) was removed from the table by Councillor Martins and seconded by Councillor Coelho. (1)

Councillor Martins asked Chief Provencher if he had any recommendations for the Committee as far as what could be done legislatively to address this ongoing issue, and whether or not there is an increased awareness within the department about it.

Chief Provencher replied that the department, under former Chief Teachman, had applied for a Grant in 2013 for Pedestrian Safety improvements, but did not receive it. He did say that the department will once again apply for that grant and hopes to receive it this year. He stated that over 160 tickets are given out to motorists per year on average. He also stated that they are reviewing reflective paint for the crosswalks as well as enforcing crosswalk laws with both motorists and pedestrians. He stated that it is only a one dollar fine for jay-walking.

Councillor Bousquet asked about the speed limits in neighborhoods, and there was discussion as to how the speed limit in a particular area could be reduced to lower than 20 mph.

Councillor Gomes stated that he believes in order to reduce the speed limit lower than 20 mph, it has to go through the State.

On motion by Councillor Martins and seconded by Councillor Coelho, the Committee VOTED: That this matter be referred to the Committee on Ordinances in order to discuss the possibility of increasing the fines for crosswalk violations as they pertain to both pedestrians and motorists. This motion passed on a voice vote.

On a Related Motion by Councillor Martins and seconded by Councillor Coelho, the Committee VOTED: That the Committee ask the State Department of Public Safety/Traffic as to what the appropriate method is in requesting that the speed limit in a particular area be reduced.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillors Gomes and Gonsalves, requesting, that the School Department immediately look into the possibility of alarming all schools in their main office with panic buttons that would alert our Police Department in case of an emergency; and further, that we look into the possibility of alarming every classroom and at what cost would it be to do this throughout the city; and further, requesting that no new schools in the City of New Bedford be built without putting this safety mechanism in place in all classrooms and offices for the purposes of making our schools safe in the City of New Bedford for our students and faculty, making our school system one of the first in the Commonwealth to implement such a security system in order to guarantee the parents and the taxpayers of this City that their kids are attending school in a safe atmosphere with a resource to get immediate emergency response in case of any type of attack or emergency within each school building; and further, if implemented that the city look into if the panic button system can work in conjunction with the camera systems installed at some of our schools. (Ref'd 2/14/13, 3/25/14 - tabled) (2)

This matter was left on the table.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillors Bousquet and Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods invite the Mayan community leaders to a Committee meeting to share their concerns with the Council and Station Headquarters Captains Flood and Cordeiro, it is our feeling that with increased patrols and bilingual Officers placed in targeted areas, better witness accounts can make an impact on the hostile climate these individuals face, and as Citizens of New Bedford legal or not, they do not deserve to be victims of hate crimes (Ref'd 11/14/13, 12/9/13 – tabled, 3/25/14 - tabled) was removed from the table by Councillor Winterson and seconded by Councillor Lopes. (3)

Human Relations Commission Executive Director Marcelina Pina-Christian addressed the Committee. She informed the members that a meeting was held on May 16th to address the safety concerns and that Councillor Rebeiro was present and Councillor Carney was also present via phone. She stated that it was well attended by the community and issues discussed included lighting in the North Front Street area, the possibility of an Advocate for the Mayan Community being placed within the Police Department in order to help overcome the communication and trust issues that currently exist.

Additionally, the topic of Hate Crimes was discussed. She relayed that the Mayan community feels that often the crimes committed against them are Hate Crimes, but feel that the Police Department does not always see it that way, and all agreed that this topic should be discussed further at a future meeting.

Councillor Gomes expressed that the Council has already requested that the lighting in the North Front Street area be increased and asked that he be notified of when the next meeting is.

Chief Provencher expressed how it is often difficult to prove a Hate Crime, because witness/victim accounts do not necessarily reflect or provide evidence to substantiate such a charge.

Councillor Rebeiro discussed that additional bus routes should be added to this area in order to provide safer transportation for the residents there, rather than them having to walk everywhere they go.

On motion by Councillor Bousquet and seconded by Councillor Coelho, the Committee VOTED: That the Committee send a letter to SRTA asking them to review the possibility of establishing additional bus routes in both the mornings and evenings in the area of North Front Street. This motion passed on a voice vote.

On motion by Councillor Rebeiro and seconded by Councillor Coelho, the Committee VOTED: That a letter be sent to the FBI asking what steps can be taken to make crimes against the Mayan Community of New Bedford official "hate crimes." This motion passed on a voice vote.

On motion by Councillor Winterson and seconded by Councillor Rebeiro, the Committee VOTED: That a letter be sent to DPI Commissioner Ron Labelle asking for an update on the status of the streetlights and, if they have not been increased, that he please do so immediately on North Front Street, from Cove Road north to Coggeshall Street. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillor Martins, requesting, that Fire Chief Michael Gomes be invited to the next Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meeting to update the Committee members on the status of the 889 red fire alarm boxes, 809 of which need an upgrade; and further, the City owns about 100 properties, many of which connect to fire alarm boxes and the public should be informed of any new update to said fire alarm system, this Councillor would like to see this issue addressed, to see if this is a long-term capital plan. (Ref'd 2/28/13, 5/14/13 – tabled, 3/25/14 – tabled) (4)

On motion by Councillor Martins and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To keep this matter on the table. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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On motion by Councillor Bousquet and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To follow the Chair's recommendation and take the recommended action on items five (5) through seven (7). This motion passed on a voice vote. They are as follows:

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillor Gonsalves, requesting that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with the Commissioner of Inspectional Services, the Director of Public Health, a Representative from Coastline Elderly Services and a Representative from the Fire Department's Fire Prevention Division to explore the possibility of creating a task force to address hoarding as has been done in other cities in Massachusetts including Gloucester, Newton and Beverly. (Ref'd 1/14/10, 10/19/10 – table for six months, 3/12/12 - tabled – invite Cynthia Wallquist instead of Romanowicz) and a Communication/Article, "When Clutter Turns to Crisis", by Stephanie

Schorow, from Boston Globe Magazine dated January 10, 2010. (Ref'd 1/14/10, 10/19/10 – table, 3/12/12 - tabled – invite Cynthia Wallquist instead of Dan Romanowicz) ***Refer to the Community Services Department*** (5, 5a)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillor Coelho, requesting that after the recent vandalism to the historic century old Whale man Statute in front of the Downtown Main Public Library that the City move to install cameras at the Downtown Bus Station, City Hall and the Main Public Library and that these cameras should be equipped with a live feed to the Police Station, in an effort to provide higher security to the Downtown area. (Ref'd 5/23/13, 3/25/14 - Letters) ***Refer to the Legislative Delegation*** (6)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillor Gonsalves, requesting that the Engineering Division of the Department of Public Infrastructure review the current design of County Street, between Hawthorn and Union Streets, to determine whether any changes can be made to make the roadway safer given that the repeated accidents continue to occur at the curve just north of Clinton street, most recent occurring last night on May 22nd. (Ref'd 5/23/13) ***Refer to the DPI Engineering Department*** (7)

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On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Carney, the Committee VOTED: To take “No Further Action” on items eight (8) through thirteen (13). This motion passed on a voice vote. They are as follows:

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillors Coelho, Lopes, Dehner, Alves, Gonsalves, Gomes, Saunders, and Duarte, requesting that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods invite Animal Control Director Emmanuel Maciel to their next meeting to discuss any recent reports of dog attack incidents occurring in the City of New Bedford, and to discuss the results and effectiveness of the Dangerous Dog Ordinance to determine whether any changes and/or amendments to the Ordinance may be desirable to further assist Animal Control in their enforcement efforts. (Ref'd 4/22/10) (8)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillors Coelho, and Martins, requesting that the Committee on Ordinances and the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods look into methods of ensuring that all dogs are properly licensed in the City of New Bedford, especially in more densely populated, residential inner-city areas, where “Pit Bulls” have been seen roaming at will on the City streets menacing pedestrians; and further, considering that these dogs have a long history of dangerous/violent behavior, that the Committee on Ordinances research any restrictions that may be placed on the owners of these dogs and the landlords of these buildings where the dogs reside, including requiring landlords to carry some form of insurance, as some other communities in Massachusetts already require property owners to do, further requesting, that the Committee on Ordinances look into creating an Ordinance similar to the one in Boston, “Responsible Pit Bull Ownership”. (Ref'd 6/10/10) (9)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with Fire Chief Michael Gomes, Union President of the Fire Department Bill Cabral and a representative from the Administration to discuss the situation presently facing our Fire Department, that antiquated equipment is being used in the City and the replacement of equipment that has not been done which jeopardizes the public safety aspect of our firefighters, at the present time we have several pieces of fire equipment that is down and needs to be addressed immediately due to the fact that taxpayers pay their taxes and the best equipment should be available not only for firefighters but for the Citizens of the City of New Bedford. (Ref'd 2/14/13) (10)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillors Gomes and Oliveira, on behalf of the Police Department and its men and women of the SRT Swat Team, requesting, that the City take immediate action and look for funding for the purchase of a tactical development vehicle for the City of New Bedford's Swat Team, this vehicle is very important to the deployment and actions taken in situations that call for this type of unit, it is imperative that the City make this purchase as soon as possible due to the increasing amount of calls coming in that relay on this tactical unit and for the purpose of giving the needed equipment to the SRT Swat Team to deal with situations that arise throughout our City. (Ref'd 4/11/13, 5/14/13 tabled) (11)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that an emergency meeting be held with the Mayor, Fire Chief Gomes, IAFF Local 841 Union President William Cabral, Finance Chair Gonsalves, Chairman Gomes and Vice-Chairman Oliveira of the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods, along with any members of said Committee who wished to attend, to address the issue of the deplorable condition of fire apparatus in the City and what emergency actions can be taken to ensure that there is proper equipment available to the Fire Department as the City Council and the Administration look for revenue to replace the antiquated fire apparatus in the City; and further, requesting that Rule 40 be waived. (Ref'd 9/12/13) (12)

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with Department of Public Infrastructure Commissioner Ronald Labelle and a representative from the Administration for the purposes of discussing protocol when it comes to icy road condition and request for sanding and salting of roads; and further, who makes the decision whether to put trucks out there after numerous requests from Police and Emergency Responders; and further, asking, that upon requests from Police or any other emergency agency, that we immediately put into service what is needed to keep our streets safe for vehicular traffic and more importantly, first responders. (Ref'd 227/14) (13)

Councillor Carney made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Winterson.

This meeting adjourned @ 8:10 p.m.

ATTEST:

Clerk of Committees