



# *Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods*

May 21, 2015– 7:05 PM - **Minutes**  
Chambers of the City Council, City Hall, Room 214

## **NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS**

**MEETING: COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & NEIGHBORHOODS**  
**DATE: MAY 21, 2015**  
**TIME: 7:05 P.M.**  
**PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214, MUNICIPAL BUILDING**

**PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIRMAN; KERRY WINTERSON, VICE-CHAIRMAN; DAVID ALVES; HENRY BOUSQUET; NAOMI CARNEY; DEBORA COELHO; JOSEPH LOPES; STEVEN MARTINS; LINDA MORAD; DANA REBEIRO**

**ABSENT: COUNCILLOR JAMES OLIVEIRA**

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Councillor Gomes informed the Committee that Councillor Alves wanted to make a presentation tonight to Ted Taylor of Phoenix Services on their 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Councillor Alves presented Mr. Taylor with a Citation from the City Council congratulating him on twenty (20) years of service.

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Councillor Gomes called the Public Safety & Neighborhoods Committee Meeting to order and took attendance. The Clerk read a Communication from Mark Mahoney, Emergency Management Director stating he would not be in attendance as he has a conflict with his monthly meeting of the Southeast Massachusetts Emergency Management Directors' Association. This communication was received and placed on file by Councillor Alves and seconded by Councillor Winterson.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillor Martins, requesting that the City Council hold a meeting to examine response plans and procedures in the City of New Bedford regarding the Ebola virus, since there is no known vaccination for the Ebola virus, Healthcare Providers caring for Ebola patients and family in close contact with the infected patients pose the highest risk of contracting the virus, since the outbreak the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has provided training opportunities for healthcare providers; and further, that the residents of the City of New Bedford should be aware of the City's procedures and policies in place in handling the Ebola virus in order to reduce the risk to healthcare personnel including protective equipment, oversight, monitoring, enhanced training and response plans; and further, that this informational meeting be held in the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods, along with the New Bedford Health Department, Public Safety Personnel, Representative from South Coast Hospitals Group and other interested parties wishing to attend (Ref'd 10/23/14) was received and placed on file by Councillor Alves and seconded by Councillor Winterson. (1)

Councillor Martins asked to hear from Dr. Weiss, Health Department director to give an overview of how they addressed the Ebola situation last year. Dr. Weiss explained that they had met two days a week with Mark Mahoney, the CDC and MEMA when the issue was at its height. The good news was that nothing really happened in the Greater New Bedford area; but the city was ready for it.

Fire Chief Gomes was recognized on the same issue. He explained that statewide protocol included training that was provided to first responders which primarily dealt with protective equipment, and to ensure that first responders were protected properly. He was also involved as the issue ramped up in Massachusetts as well as when it ramped down.

Steve Arruda, Assistant Director for EMS was recognized on the same issue. He explained that they reviewed the procedures in place for the epidemic should the need arise to respond. They had a procedure in place which included the investment of protective gear and guidance from the state. They not only dealt with the Ebola concern but they also deal with other diseases as a first responder. He had a handout that he provided to the Committee as it relates to the steps that are taken by EMS personnel as first responders. Councillor Morad made a motion to receive and place on file the handout, which was seconded by Councillor Alves.

Steve Camara of South Coast Hospitals was recognized to speak on the issue. He explained that the Hospital took out plans which considered protective plans following CDC guidelines. They had weekly conference calls with the state. A lot of the staff training took place. The initial thought was to receive a patient and then send them to the necessary hospital. There were eight (8) hospitals that were recognized across the state. Thankfully they did not have to use the plan.

Karen Regan, Supervisor NBPS Nursing was recognized to speak on the issue. She explained that the nurses had a plan in place as well and that they had issued notification of the possible problems in contracting the Ebola virus in three languages. These flyers were sent home to parents.

On motion by Councillor Martins and seconded by Councillor Alves, the Committee VOTED: To take "No Further Action" on this matter at this time. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a Written Motion, Councillors Gomes and Martins, requesting that the Committee on Public Safety and Neighborhoods meet with any teachers and Security Resource Officers from New Bedford High School, or the three Middle Schools in the City for the purposes of discussing exactly what is going on in our schools, exactly how significant is the disruptive behavior and violence against student and teachers; and further, that the Committee also set up a meeting with the students for the purposes of getting their input on exactly what is their perspective on what is going on in our schools; and further that Lou St. John, President, New Bedford Educator's Association, also be invited to said meeting (Ref'd 02/13/14, 04/22/15 - tabled) was removed from the table by Councillor Alves and seconded by Councillor Lopes. (2)

The Chairman made a statement that any teacher at this evening's meeting willing to speak on the issue and may fear any retaliation towards them that the Council will stand firm with them.

Melody Gonsalves, 47 Willis Street, addressed the Committee on concerns with safety within the public school system. She explained she had just returned to New Bedford from California and she had been dealing with issues as it relates to her daughter and attendance, safety and bullying issues at the Parker Elementary School. She gave an overview of the bullying that's been taking place toward her daughter and the lack of response from the Administration and faculty.

Lou St. John, 160 William Street, President of the New Bedford Educators Association addressed the Committee and answered questions.

Councillor Gomes asked if a person goes to an alternative school, when there is an issue, who makes that decision; is it the School Adjustment Counselor Bob Motta?

Mr. St. John explained that the District does not report to the NBEA. Any incidents of violence or assaults are only received when Union Members approach him or when he meets with the Superintendent. When he receives a complaint he reaches out to the Superintendent to make sure that the correct steps are being taken to address the issue. He explained that he follows up with his members to see if what they are told happened was correct; and if it matches what the Administration has been telling them on how they addressed the teachers' issues. He went on to say that 99% of the students are good students but there are some of those that disrupt the classroom and make it impossible for leaders to teach and for students to learn. He believes that the District needs additional alternative schools at every level; not just the high school level. Those children who have issues should receive the proper services to address them.

Councillor Lopes asked how many incidents were Mr. St. John aware of. Mr. St. John said that compared to last year there were a lot of them but there are less this year. Every incident that has been brought to his attention resulted in his meeting with the Superintendent and was satisfied with the way it was being addressed. He did go on to say that some teachers are afraid to report incidents for fear of retribution.

Councillor Winterson said that he feels that teachers are fearful in reporting things that may happen because they might be put on a list and face possible retribution. He stressed the need to have a discipline policy in place and is also in favor of alternative schools.

Mr. St. John explained that the School Committee is turning a deaf ear to the concerns regarding what teachers are telling them as far as discipline and safety issues within their schools. It appears that we ask everyone else but the teachers what the problems are and how to address the problems. For example, you don't ask the business community how to address a school problem, you should ask a teacher.

Councillor Carney asked how many members are there in the Teachers Union; she was told there were 1,025. She asked when the teachers make these complaints that there is a disruption in their class and they come to you to get some resolution to work with the Superintendent are they anonymous or do they have to state the classroom and who the teacher is. Mr. St. John responded that in order to have some weight behind the complaint they have to recognize who the teacher is that is bringing forth the complaint. Councillor Carney voiced her concern that teachers are not being able to teach.

Councillor Rebeiro discussed the alternative school question and she agrees that there should be an alternative measure for grades six (6) through twelve (12). She asked how many kids are currently in the alternative schools and was told by Mr. St. John that he did not know that number. She asked if he knew what this graduation rate was for the alternative schools to which he did not know the answer for that either. She asked if the teachers supported the alternative schools. Mr. St. John said that the class size at the alternative school is currently too big, there are five (5) to six (6) children there now with severe issues and more faculty is needed. Councillor Rebeiro expressed the need to get students up to par and to reintegrate them into the school system. Mr. St. John agreed.

Joanne Maura, 73 Jones Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, was recognized. She introduced herself as the teacher that was hit with a chair in a classroom when she took a cell phone away from the student. She said that was only the tip of the iceberg; that she was afraid even though she was retired to appear before the City Council; but she is here for high school colleagues who are afraid to speak. She said there was another issue that was going on at the same time as hers which resulted in the Student Resource Officers not being able to help her because there was an assault taking place on a Guidance Counselor in the Guidance Department. She went on to tell the story about when she was being reviewed by the Headmaster in her class another student had started a similar issue as it related to cell phones. The Headmaster just sat there and did not help her at all and she was reprimanded. The problem is that when a student is removed from class ten (10) minutes later the student is back in class with no consequences, there has to be consequences. She asked the Committee to please support the teachers.

Doria Bryant, teacher at Keith Middle School, stated that children need a safe environment, they need to be disciplined because lately over the years there has been an increase in aggressive behavior from students; unfortunately addressing antisocial behavior is a waste of time toward the teacher because they feel threatened for their safety. Unfortunately budget cuts have crippled the right amount of staffing. They need additional Principals in the school as well as Assistant Principals. She is in favor of the need for an alternative setting for learning opportunities for students who do not fit into normal settings.

Laura Ramos, Guidance Counselor Intern at Roosevelt Middle School, provided an example that she uses when counseling students that she unfortunately works with a lot of bad kids. More and more are being diagnosed with mental issues without the proper treatment. She supports the Alternative School System and used the Brockton School Department's alternative program stating that they have had a number of success stories. She explained that when she came back from college she was shocked how the discipline and safety issues had grown.

Geraldine Sullivan, 35 Myles Standish Drive, Dartmouth, is a teacher at Keith Middle School. She stated she had been teaching at Keith for over twenty (20) years. She says she has trouble getting kids motivated, the last three years she has watched the discipline and safety decline. There are moments that she gets depressed about it. She feels as though she cannot do her job if she is afraid to report issues. During her midyear review when she met with the Principal she told the Principal that she considered herself a non-effective teacher, and she still feels that way. She stated 25% of her job is teaching and the rest of the time is disciplining and breaking up fights. She said she does not feel safe in the building, and she does not feel that the children feel safe. She explained she joined the Durkin Committee in April 2014 when they had their last meeting and they were broken down into separate groups to address specific issues as it relates to school safety and she found these committees not to be effective at all. She said that unfortunately the issues that are currently going on within the school are far beyond what a teacher can do. She also pointed to Brockton and Fall River and their Alternative School Program stating that their alternative schools are for all three levels, and it may be something the city would want to look at. She said that currently there are not enough bodies to man the hallways, too many cuts, and as many as four fights in one week.

Kathleen La Flash, 205 Princeton Street, was recognized she explained herself as the mother of a son who has a behavioral problem in the School Department. She said that while she tries to be strict at home that there was a lack of discipline at the schools. She said that from November to May of this year her son missed fifty (50) classes. She said there is no accountability within the School Department, she said she gets calls and can only control what he does when at home and tells him how to behave. She said that unfortunately what they are teaching children in school is that there are no consequences for bad behavior.

Councillor Lopes asked Mr. St. John if he was able to give him the number of teachers that have left the school system this year. Mr. St. John does not have the exact number but a lot have left. Councillor Lopes asked if he could get a list to the Council.

Councillor Bousquet was recognized by the Chair, he read a letter that he received from a teacher stating that discipline problems have increased and that the teacher personally saw a child punch another child in the face at recess when he was overseeing eighty (80) children with one other teacher. The consequence for bad behavior is not in place which causes other children having seen this to become a discipline issues as well. We need to empower the Principals to take care of the situations in their buildings and leave the teaching to the teachers.

Councillor Gomes asked Vice Chairman Councillor Winterson to take the Chair so he could speak on this matter.

Councillor Gomes gave his reasons for sponsoring the motion with Councillor Martins because they heard the help cry from the community, teachers, mothers and fathers. He heard the heart wrenching calls and he's taken them at ten o'clock at night. We heard from parents and educators tonight but we haven't heard from all of them. As you know some of them are afraid to come before the Council. He feels that the Council needed to address the issue and that the School Committee needs to adopt a plan of action.

Councillor Martins thanked those who came tonight, he stressed the government is supposed to respond no matter who calls and the government should help when a call is received. Everyone should work together and sit at the same table but it is mind boggling that this is not happening between the School Committee and the City Council, especially when the School Committee sent a letter to the Council asking them to mind their own business.

Councillor Gomes said he was saddened that Dr. Durkin the Superintendent of Schools was not here this evening and that he did not received any communication from her or phone call or email stating why she would not be in attendance. He stated he was very disappointed in her not attending this meeting.

On motion by Councillor Bousquet and seconded by Councillor Gomes, the Committee VOTED: That the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods send letters to Dr. Durkin and the School Committee asking them to listen to the teachers and permit the Administrators to properly discipline the students who need it and remove them from the classrooms that they are disrupting. This motion passed on a voice vote.

Councillor Bousquet explained that the Administration needs to untie the hands of teachers and allow them to directly address the safety and discipline issues with the schools.

Councillor Martins made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Alves.

This meeting adjourned @ 9:41 p.m.

ATTEST:

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Clerk of Committees