

Landlords of thousands of Massachusetts apartments agree to pause evictions

Chris Lisinski

State House News Service

Several major property owners representing hundreds of thousands of rental units nationwide agreed Monday to pause evictions for failure to pay rent until 2021 and to work with tenants who are struggling amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Greater Boston Real Estate Board announced.

By signing the board's housing stability pledge, property holders and landlords said they would communicate with tenants experiencing financial hardship about emergency support programs that could help them cover rent. They also said they will pursue repayment plans and seek mediation as first steps before turning to formal eviction proceedings.

Massachusetts leaders implemented a moratorium on most non-emergency evictions and foreclosures for the first six-plus months of the pandemic, but Gov. Charlie Baker allowed it to expire in October as he unveiled a \$171 million plan that allocates more funding for rental assistance and streamlines applications. Despite that effort, many housing justice advocates have warned that a flood of evictions is already starting, which could push Bay State renters into crowded living conditions while the virus remains a threat or onto the street.

"With this pledge, we reaffirm our ongoing commitment to support tenants and to ensure owners don't have to resort to eviction of those who are not able to pay their rent because of financial hardship due to COVID-19," GBREB CEO Greg Vasil said in a press release. "We stand with our members who have

been working with their residents in good faith and have taken this pledge to continue to maintain housing stability across Massachusetts throughout the pandemic.”

As of Monday, at least 10 companies signed onto the board’s housing stability pledge, according to a press release: Chestnut Hill Realty, Avalon Communities Inc., National Development, Windsor Property Management, Winn Residential, Equity Management Realty, Wingate Management, Schochet Companies, Peabody Properties Inc., and Corcoran Management Company. Collectively, they own thousands of apartment units in Massachusetts and more than 300,000 nationally, according to a GBREB spokesperson.

New Bedford announces 100 acres Advanced Manufacturing Campus at Whaling City Golf Course

Mayor Jon Mitchell, Senator Mark Montigny, Representative Christopher Markey, other members of the New Bedford legislative delegation, and City Councillors joined together today to announce a plan for an Advanced Manufacturing Campus (AMC) on 100 acres of the 275-acre Whaling City Golf Course on Hathaway Road. The AMC has been expressly developed with a view toward the needs of the state’s and region’s leading industries, and will incorporate the amenities, landscape and building design, and other features seen in high-quality business parks.

Building on a business park concept first introduced in 2017, the AMC refines the City's development approach, incorporating fresh information from real estate and golf industry professionals, conservation organizations, and state economic development experts. In addition, studies commissioned by the City and its state partners have now confirmed several earlier, preliminary assessments.

Among the findings announced today, the Advanced Manufacturing Campus would:

- Capitalize on high demand among major commercial real estate interests as the pandemic accelerates a pre-existing trend which saw focus shifting to large, highway accessible, "greenfield" sites in eastern Massachusetts outside the I-95 and I-495 corridors.
- Create 1 million square feet of new industrial/office space assessed at \$80 million
- Generate \$2.7 million in annual property tax revenue
- Produce more than 1,000 new jobs

Mayor Jon Mitchell said, "Constructing a new business park from scratch is no small undertaking and a complex challenge for any city, but if we are serious in New Bedford about reducing the property tax burden, regenerating our local economy, and keeping local government financial stable, we have no choice but to find a way to succeed. And with our existing business park at full capacity, it is critical to have a new driver of commercial growth. The plan we are announcing today will create that driver.

"Several years of study, planning, and revision have brought us to this day. The plan is significantly better for those efforts. It is more pragmatic, achieves more of our goals, and is more responsive to the community. Most important, the project is grounded in a robust body of research that gives us

confidence in our approach.

Mitchell added, "Of course, none of this would have been possible without the continued support of our local legislative delegation, our City Council, the New Bedford Economic Development Council, Lauren Liss and her team at MassDevelopment, and Secretary Kennealy and the Baker-Polito Administration. For all their efforts I am grateful."

"Redeveloping the municipal golf course into a 21st century business park will spur local job creation and provide strong environmental stewardship," said Senator Mark Montigny, who has led legislative efforts to secure state funding on numerous economic development projects in the city including the Star Store CVPA campus, Route 18 redevelopment, and the ongoing State Pier revitalization.

Montigny added, "Additional tax revenues generated by this project will also provide some relief to hardworking taxpayers across the city. Overall, the addition of advanced manufacturing operations alongside a new golf course will enhance the quality of life in New Bedford. I look forward to continuing our efforts with MassDevelopment and Mayor Mitchell to make sure this property is transformed into an economic engine for our community."

Representative Christopher Markey, in whose district the AMC will be located, summarized his view of the project: "I am happy that the City of New Bedford will be able to expand its tax base. This project has the potential to assist in long-term economic growth in our community. It will help fund schools and the future of our city. This project, along with South Coast Rail will have the greatest impact on economic growth for our region for the next several decades. I'm glad the state and city are working so well together for this project to take place."

City Council President Joseph Lopes said, "We must continue to

do everything we can to create jobs and expand the tax base in New Bedford by encouraging new commercial development, and the business park campus and golf course is a major step toward that goal.”

Rick Kidder, the Co-CEO of One Southcoast Chamber highlighted the project’s positive impact on City’s tax base, saying, “One SouthCoast Chamber believes that we must continue to look for creative and bold ways to expand the commercial tax base in New Bedford and the region. This proposed new development for a portion of the golf course by the City will go a long way growing the tax base and will help mitigate the burden on existing New Bedford businesses while creating significant new job opportunities just when we will be ready to fully emerge out of the COVID-19 crisis.”

Anthony Sapienza, the President of the New Bedford Economic Development Council, noted the project’s contribution across many areas, saying, “At the NBEDC our mission is to take all steps to cultivate and promote an environment for private sector investment that benefits the citizens of New Bedford. The redevelopment of 100 acres at the golf course into an advanced manufacturing campus will do just that.”

Sapienza added, “The City’s thoughtful proposal provides the stage for new commercial investment, vast job growth, improved golfing amenities, and a safer Hathaway Road. We look forward to working with all parties in bringing this proposal into reality as proof that New Bedford can do big thing to regenerate its economic future.”

Collaboration with Conservation Community Leads To “Article 97” Solution

Today’s announcement also included news that a solution had been developed to resolve an important legal hurdle related to the business park project. When protected recreational land is repurposed for development, municipalities are required by the

Commonwealth to enact special legislation which lifts the development prohibition and places into protection comparable land elsewhere.

A 2017 decision of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, *Smith v. City of Westfield*, expanded the definition of lands classified as protected by Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution. The City was consequently required to place into protection new land equal to the entire 100 acres proposed for the business park, a figure well beyond the City's initial estimate of 25 acres.

After consultation with local conservation organizations and officials, including the Buzzards Bay Coalition, the Town of Dartmouth, and the Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust (DNRT), the City determined that the only viable strategy for compliance with the state requirement was to partner with the DNRT to place a conservation restriction on 156 acres of a 224-acre property owned by the City on Woodcock Road in Dartmouth.

In January, the City and DNRT entered into a memorandum of understanding for this purpose; the associated special legislation has been prepared for filing by Mayor Mitchell with the New Bedford City Council. Council approval will allow the bill's legislative supporters, led by Senator Montigny and Representative Christopher Markey, to then work to secure its anticipated passage in early 2021, clearing the way for continued advancement of the AMC.

"DNRT is very pleased to work with the City of New Bedford to protect this large block of intact woodland, including mature oak-pine uplands and lush forested wetland. Moreover, it fills a one-mile gap to create a nearly unbroken 7-mile corridor of protected land stretching from Buzzards Bay to UMass-Dartmouth. This project will benefit the entire region by helping to protect our air and water quality, preserve our native biodiversity, and mitigate the effects of climate

change,” said Dexter Mead, DNRT Executive Director.

Golf Future Brightens

The 2017 business park concept reduced the number of operable golf course holes from 18 to 9 based on preliminary engineering reports. Subsequent surveys led to an adjustment of the business park borders and reduction in size, which has allowed for reconsideration of several golf course options.

Under the proposal announced today, the City would leave open the option of an 18-hole course, an option for a 9-hole course, and an option for 9+ “flex solutions” that create opportunities for a course operator to change active holes for various purposes or events. Under all options, a new clubhouse and parking area (comparable to existing facilities) will be constructed, and additional enhancements will be considered, including a driving range and practice areas. The course option and amenities ultimately selected will be based on continued stakeholder input and a further assessment of market trends.

Peter Boswell, Chairman of the New Bedford Park Board, said, “Success for me is a plan that brings fresh interest to New Bedford’s golf scene and preserves the course as unique asset for generations to come, and I think we have that in the approach being presented today.”

Boswell added, “I also want to recognize the good working relationship that our current course operator has with the City and their commitment to collaborating with the City through any transition period and beyond, so that the course continues to be operated seamlessly in a high quality fashion.”

Massachusetts puts cap on number of Marijuana delivery licenses

By Colin A. Young

State House News Service

After wading through a raft of comments from municipal leaders, established industry players, and advocates, marijuana regulators on Tuesday ironed out the final wrinkles of their plan to establish a structure for home delivery of marijuana and create new business opportunities – and rejected a proposal to delay delivery until 2023.

Home delivery of marijuana has long been allowed under the state's medical marijuana program, and advocates pushed for a delivery-only license in the recreational market, arguing that it will help level the playing field between large corporations and small businesses because the barriers to entry for delivery are typically far less burdensome than those for retail licenses.

The Cannabis Control Commission has been thinking about a delivery framework for almost three years and will launch delivery with a period of exclusivity for participants in the CCC's Social Equity Program and certified economic empowerment applicants.

"Consumers want delivery, we wanted delivery for a long time, and equity and economic empowerment businesses are ready to be a significant part of this market," Commissioner Shaleen Title said. She added, "We as a commission have taken it very seriously since day one ... to live up to this mandate to include disproportionately harmed people in the industry and today was another significant step towards that. I'm really looking forward to it becoming reality sometime next year."

The CCC met Tuesday morning to consider feedback and hold a final discussion about its draft delivery policy, which would create two delivery license types: a “wholesale delivery license” that could buy products wholesale from growers and manufacturers and sell them to their own customers, and a “limited delivery license” that would allow an operator to charge a fee to make deliveries from CCC-licensed retailers and dispensaries.

As the meeting began, Chairman Steven Hoffman said there were 23 distinct topics that one or more commissioners flagged for further discussion based on public comments. “Some are going to be quite contentious,” he said.

The first issue addressed was not contentious in the least: regulators agreed to rename the planned license types “marijuana delivery operator” and “marijuana courier,” respectively. But it didn’t take long for the commission to start batting around weightier issues, like a proposal Hoffman made to prohibit any individual or entity from holding more than one delivery license, therefore limiting each delivery business to one warehouse. He said his intent was to prevent one or two organizations from dominating the delivery marketplace in Massachusetts.

“This is not to protect retailers; that is not my logic or my motivation. My motivation is to allow for multiple entities to participate and compete in the delivery market and I’m very worried that someone can get a head start, be well-capitalized and make it very difficult, if not impossible, for other entities to get into this market,” he said. “So I actually believe what I’m proposing is actually defending and enhancing equity not limiting it.”

Hoffman’s proposal was met with pushback from commissioners who felt it would be counterproductive to create a new license type that is specifically meant to provide more business opportunities and at the same time cap the number of those

licenses that any one person or business can have.

Ultimately, the CCC agreed to allow up to two delivery licenses – either two marijuana delivery operator licenses, or two marijuana delivery courier licenses or one of each – as a compromise. Existing CCC regulations already limit a person or entity to three total CCC delivery or retail licenses.

“So with just one, I think it really becomes whoever has the most central location and the biggest warehouse suddenly has a major advantage over everyone else. But if you can have two warehouses, I feel like it’s less of a zero-sum game because then there’s more of an opportunity to build your business the way you want it, based on how you set it up with the two warehouses,” Title, who was opposed to Hoffman’s initial proposal, said.

The CCC also forbid what Hoffman described as the “ice cream truck model” of delivery and made explicit that all inventory on a marijuana delivery vehicle must be associated with a specific order. The chairman said he thought that clarification was especially important if there is going to be a cap on the number of licenses (and therefore warehouses) any one business can hold.

“This might be being paranoid, but I don’t think so. A potential way around that restriction is for an entity to preload delivery vehicles, strategically position them around the state with inventory that matches their anticipated orders, and be able to respond quickly to those orders because they had these delivery vehicles scattered around the state,” he said. The commission also agreed to study the health of the delivery marketplace after two years of operations.

After the commissioners worked through each of the 23 policy issues Hoffman highlighted at the start of the meeting, Commissioner Jennifer Flanagan made a motion to delay the implementation of non-medical home delivery until January

2023.

"It is clear that there are two lobbying entities going on here. One is trying to say that we shouldn't have licensing, it's going to interrupt a certain marketplace that we already have. It's saying things like local control is not going to exist and things like that. And then we have an entity that is talking about, really, sort of just handing the keys and letting this delivery get up and running," Flanagan, a former state senator appointed to the commission by Gov. Charlie Baker, said. "Given the ... policy discussion items that we have today and the conversation that we have had, it's clear there's still a lot of questions and it's clear that there's still a lot of uncertainty around delivery. I've said from the beginning that I'm uncomfortable with delivery this soon. I think we should have waited for that."

The other three commissioners rejected Flanagan's motion and she was the sole commissioner to vote "no" when the time came to vote on the totality of the delivery policy decisions made Tuesday. Her comments, though, ran parallel to concerns raised by 19 state lawmakers in a letter last week.

The bipartisan group of lawmakers told the CCC that they "believe that the wholesale delivery license category proposed in the draft regulations was not contemplated, nor supported, by the enabling legislation" and asked the commission to reconsider its plan to take a final vote on the regulations next week.

The CCC did not directly address the lawmakers' concerns during Tuesday's meeting, but Hoffman told reporters afterward that the commission feels comfortable that it has the authority it needs to move ahead with its delivery regulations.

"We do respectfully disagree ... We absolutely feel that we do have the authority under the statute," Hoffman said. "We

certainly wouldn't have taken the action we took today without believing we have the authority."

Other lawmakers also weighed in during the comment period – like Reps. Maria Robinson and Lindsay Sabadosa, who signed onto comments related to the CCC's proposed two-driver minimum for delivery vehicles, and Rep. Mike Connolly, who wrote to support the CCC's draft delivery framework.

"The new 'wholesale' license type exclusively for social equity and economic empowerment is a major step toward fulfilling the intent of the law that we in the legislature enacted for an equitable industry," Connolly wrote to the commission. He added, "In this time of COVID-19, delivery of adult-use cannabis is particularly important, as it offers the potential for better social distancing within the retail sector, and it also offers numerous opportunities for economic empowerment in this time of economic hardship for so many."

At the start of Tuesday's meeting, Hoffman said the CCC received comments from about 80 people or organizations and picked up on the disagreements that were evident.

"They were well-reasoned, compelling arguments and, unsurprisingly, not all aligned," Hoffman said. "I want to acknowledge this is a very important issue, it's a very contentious issue, it's a very difficult issue, and certainly the public comments that we received reflected that."

The CCC released the public feedback it received and summarized comments related to the regulations, and the documents show a stark divide – one portion of commenters generally propose tweaks to what the CCC has adopted while the other portion tends to argue that what the CCC adopted is either in conflict with state law or is the result of a rushed process that left municipalities out.

"I'm more comfortable pushing forward with delivery based upon today's discussion because I do think we listened to a lot of

the concerns that people had,” Hoffman said. He added, “We’ve been patient here, we’re not rushing into anything. We started talking about this in the fall of 2017 and in our draft regulations in the winter of 2018, we had delivery. We had a public comment period ... we got a lot of pushback and a lot of ‘learn to walk before you run’ and we listened to that and we deferred this for three years now.”

The CCC will meet again on Oct. 29 to review the actual regulatory language of the policies discussed Tuesday and to vote on the full suite of regulations.

Massachusetts unemployment rate drops to 9.6%

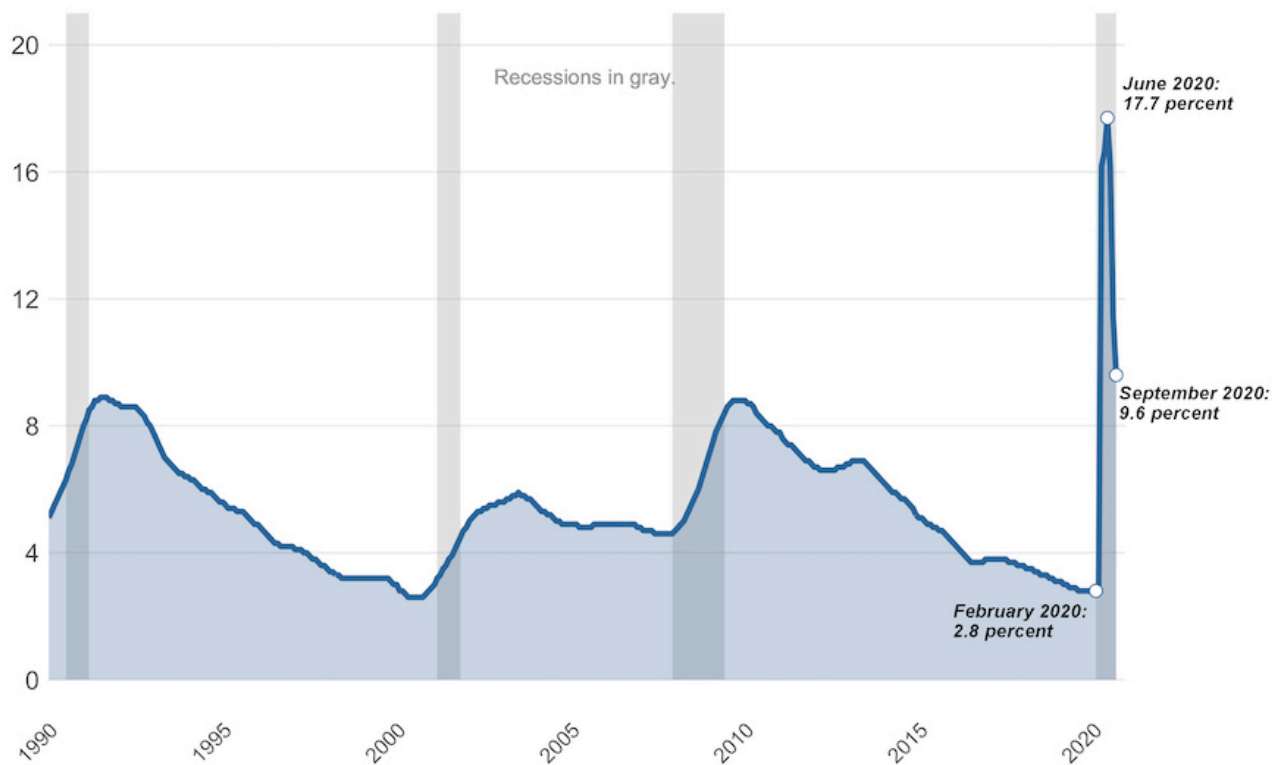
By Chris Lisinski
State House News Service

The state’s unemployment rate dropped into single digits in September after spending five months above 10 percent, as employers reported adding 36,900 jobs and Massachusetts continued its economic recovery from the sudden COVID-inflicted recession.

The Massachusetts unemployment rate dropped into the single digits in September, though at 9.6 percent, it still remains higher than at any point since at least 1990.

Massachusetts unemployment rate drops below 10 percent

September rate of 9.6 percent still above previous records



Source: Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

[Graphic: Chris Lisinski/SHNS]

State labor officials announced Friday that the unemployment rate declined to 9.6 percent in September, 1.8 percentage points below the revised August rate of 11.4 percent.

The state unemployment rate is now the lowest it has been since March, the last month of data that did not fully reflect the massive layoffs prompted by government-mandated shutdowns and large-scale shifts in consumer behavior to avoid public health risks.

The previously reported U.S. unemployment rate checked in at 7.9 percent in September.

While still substantial, the pace of job growth slowed in September with 36,900 jobs added last month, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data based on a survey of

employers, comparing to the addition of 62,500 jobs in August.

The employer survey put September's total employment in Massachusetts at about 3.34 million. While businesses have reported five straight months of increasing jobs, the roughly 320,000 positions added since April represent slightly less than half of the 690,000 lost in March and April.

The largest job gains in September came in education and health services, which added 11,100 positions, and the leisure and hospitality industry, which added 10,800. Leisure and hospitality has faced the steepest cuts of the 10 categories counted: since September 2019, the industry has lost more than a third of its jobs.

Governments in Massachusetts shed 12,300 jobs in September, according to the state's Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

Weekly unemployment claims have fluctuated in recent months after sharply spiking during the spring, but those figures also remain elevated compared to pre-pandemic levels.

In the week ending Oct. 10, 39,038 people filed claims for traditional unemployment benefits – about 10,000 more than the previous week – while another 11,478 filed claims for the expanded eligibility Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, according to the Baker administration.

Announcement of the continued overall employment gains came two days after Gov. Charlie Baker unveiled a new \$45.5 billion fiscal year 2021 budget proposal, a plan that uses reserves and federal funds to increase spending even though state tax revenues are forecast to fall about \$3.6 billion below earlier expectations.

Lawmakers could still push to scale back public services or impose additional governmental layoffs to rein in spending amid that tax shortfall, but the Baker administration believes

its plan will avoid cuts by deploying a combination of federal funds and long-term savings.

Federal negotiations about another round of stimulus that could help mitigate the economic damage remain rocky.

New Bedford's Congdon Elementary named a National Blue Ribbon School

U.S. Department of Education hails Congdon "an inspiring example" of student success.

The U.S. Department of Education has recognized John B. Congdon Elementary School as a 2020 National Blue Ribbon School. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos in Washington D.C. made the announcement today. "Congratulations on your recognition as a 2020 Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing National Blue Ribbon School! The U.S. Department of Education acknowledges your students' success as an inspiring example of how teachers, parents, and community leaders can work together to help students prepare for what comes next," Secretary DeVos wrote in a letter dated today to Congdon Principal Darcie Aungst.

"The recognition is based on a school's overall academic performance or progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. The coveted National Blue Ribbon Schools award affirms the hard work of educators, families, and communities in creating safe and welcoming schools where students master challenging and engaging content," according to the DOE website.

Nominated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Congdon is one of only six Massachusetts schools receiving the coveted honor and the only one that is not in an affluent district, Principal Darcie Aungst noted. "Five years ago Congdon was ranked in the bottom 20% of schools in the state. Today we were named one of the top schools in the country! This climb to success happened because the staff, students, and community worked together with the strong belief that ALL of our students can achieve at high levels. We vowed to never give up and to improve every day because the work we do every day at this school is too important," she said.

Superintendent Thomas Anderson stated, "We are extremely proud of our outstanding team. Their commitment of putting students first is representative of this hard earned and well-deserved honor. This honor is evidence that effective strategic planning combined with a lot of TLC makes continued improvement along multiple benchmarks not only possible, but the norm that all of us can achieve."

In congratulating the students, staff and families, Mayor Jon Mitchell stated, "Over the last several years, the Congdon School has established itself as one of the best elementary schools in Massachusetts – if not the best. What is striking about today's announcement is that the majority of the other schools recognized by the Department of Education are located in affluent suburbs of major cities. Congdon's sustained excellence is a direct result of the school's first-rate professionals, under the leadership of Principal Darcie Aungst, who have been fervently committed to the proposition that all children, regardless of background, are capable of learning. That one of New Bedford's elementary schools is in the discussion of 'America's best' is also a reflection of how far the school district has come in recent years."

Using standards of excellence evidenced by student achievement measures the U.S. Department of Education honors high-

performing schools and schools that are making great strides in closing any achievement gaps among student groups.

Aba S. Kumi, Director of the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program noted of Congdon, "Your school is one of 367 schools in the nation and one of six schools from Massachusetts to be recognized in 2020."

The National Blue Ribbon School Program is supported through ongoing collaboration with the National Association of Elementary School Principals, Association for Middle Level Education, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

A list of the 2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools is available on both the U. S. Department of Education's website at <https://www.ed.gov/nationalblueribbonschools> and National Blue Ribbon Schools website at <https://nationalblueribbonschools.ed.gov>. Selected profiles of schools are featured on the NBRS website, along with exemplary practices and winning applications and school summaries.



Students celebrate in 2019 Congdon's designation as a Massachusetts School of Recognition for the second consecutive year. The 2020 Blue Ribbon Award places Congdon among the nation's best schools. (NBPS photo)

New Bedford landmark “Chuck’s China Inn” permanently closes doors

The popular New Bedford landmark Chuck’s China Inn has closed its doors and the location is now available to be leased.

The Chinese restaurant has been a favorite destination for generations of hungry eaters and known for its water feature decorated entrance, the wooden dragon carved on the ceiling that at one time used to actually spew smoke from its mouth to the delight and fascination of children, and one of the best spots to sip a Scorpion Bowl.

While no reason has been given as to the cause of the recent announcement, in all likelihood it is another casualty of COVID-19. Most businesses have struggled to stay alive during the worldwide pandemic and restaurants have been some of the hardest hit.

The iconic landmark is situated on Acushnet Avenue alongside scores of businesses, offers 3,700 sq. ft. of space with a 1,700 sq. ft. kitchen, two dining areas that can hold 130 people, a full bar (liquor license can be made available), and a large basement that features a walk-in cooler and adjoining storage space, and has both off-street parking and its own parking lot. This makes it an ideal location for any business, restaurant or otherwise.

Have fond memories of Chuck’s China Inn? What were your favorite dishes on the menu? Leave a comment below or inbox us at info@newbedfordguide.com.

Reports: Incomes rose in U.S., poverty rate fell in 2019

By Katie Lannan
State House News Service

The median household income was up and poverty rates were down in 2019, while the rate of people without health insurance increased over the previous year, according to the latest figures from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The bureau on Tuesday released its annual national statistics on income, poverty and health insurance coverage for the calendar year 2019. The figures reflect a time period before the current recession and before disruption arising from the COVID-19 pandemic sent unemployment rates skyrocketing.

There were 34 million people living in poverty in 2019, according to the bureau, 4.2 million fewer than in 2018. The poverty rate dropped 1.3 percentage points to 10.5 percent last year, marking the fifth consecutive annual decline and the lowest observed rate since estimates were first published in 1959, bureau officials said.

Poverty rates declined across race and ethnic groups last year, to different degrees. The biggest drop was among Asians, for whom the rate decreased 2.8 percentage points to 7.3 percent. A decline of 2 percentage points among Blacks brought the rate to 18.8 percent, the rate for Hispanics fell 1.8 points to 15.7 percent, and for Whites, the poverty rate decreased 1 point to 9.1 percent.

Census Bureau officials said their data show Black and Hispanic people were overrepresented in poverty compared to the share of the total population, with a pronounced difference among the 65-and-older age group. In that age range, the share of Black and Hispanic people in poverty was almost twice the share in the overall population.

A family with two adults and two children was considered “in poverty” in 2019 if their income was less than \$25,926.

Median household income was \$68,703 in 2019, up 6.8 percent from the \$64,324 logged in 2018. In the Northeast, the regional median household income also rose 6.8 percent, to \$76,221.

Median earnings for all workers were up 1.4 percent, to \$41,537. The earnings were higher for men, though women experienced a larger percentage increase. Median earnings for women climbed 7.8 percent, to \$35,826, and earnings for men rose 2.5 percent, to \$48,769.

More than 26 million people, or 8 percent of the population, did not have health insurance at any point of the year in 2019 according to the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. More people had private health insurance (68 percent of people), including employer-based coverage, than had public insurance (34.1 percent) like Medicaid and Medicare.

Massachusetts had the lowest uninsured rate in the country, at 3 percent, and the highest was in Texas, at 18.4 percent, the Census Bureau’s report said.

The Census Bureau’s new reports each carry a note acknowledging that their findings are based on interviews that are conducted annually between February and April, which this year overlapped with the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. The bureau suspended its in-person interviews in March and continued interviews by phone, yielding a lower

response rate for the basic Current Population Survey in March 2020.

“The change from conducting first interviews in person to making first contacts by telephone only is a contributing factor to the lower response rates,” the notes say. “Further, it is likely that the characteristics of people for whom a telephone number was found may be systematically different from the people for whom the Census Bureau was unable to obtain a telephone number.”

Wind projects agree to New Bedford terminal leases

Colin A. Young

State House News Service

It's official: the New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal will be the primary staging and deployment base for the construction of both offshore wind developments that are expected to someday generate renewable power for Massachusetts.

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs announced last week that Vineyard Wind and Mayflower Wind have each signed an agreement to use the New Bedford port as their primary land bases. The agreements, EEA said, “commit the facility to full-time offshore wind work from 2023 into 2027 and are worth more than \$32.5 million.”

The 29-acre New Bedford facility was built by (and is operated by) the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center to support the construction, assembly and installation of offshore wind

turbines, and to handle cargo shipments. EEA said it is “the first port in North America specifically purpose-built to support the staging and installation of offshore wind components.”

“The Baker-Polito Administration has committed Massachusetts to an ambitious net zero emissions target to combat climate change, and offshore wind will be an essential part of meeting that goal,” Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides said. “The New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal will help Vineyard Wind and Mayflower Wind bring more than 1,600 [megawatts] of clean, renewable energy to power our homes and businesses and will engage Massachusetts workers and companies to pioneer this industry in the United States.”

Together, Vineyard Wind I and Mayflower Wind are expected to generate 1,600 megawatts of offshore wind energy, which a MassCEC-commissioned assessment determined would generate between \$1.4 billion to \$2.1 billion in total economic impact for Massachusetts and could support between 2,000 and 3,000 “direct job years” over the next decade. Vineyard Wind, which is poised to be the first utility-scale offshore wind farm in the country, is expecting to learn by the end of the year whether the federal government will allow it to proceed and could be operational in 2023. Mayflower Wind is expected to be operational by December 2025.

Councilor Morad lone “no” vote in support of saving New

Bedford Fire Department Engine 8

The New Bedford City Council voted 8-1 to go on record to oppose the planned decommissioning of New Bedford Fire Department's Engine 8. Councilor Linda Morad was the lone "no" vote with **Councilors Debora Coelho and Hugh Dunn absent from the meeting.**

Two motions were jointly voted on Thursday evening regarding the planned Engine 8 decommissioning that was **announced by Mayor Jon Mitchell as part of his cost-cutting in the FY2021 budget:**

"Due to a recent streamlining of dispatch protocols that has reduced the Fire Department's need to respond to medical calls rather than fire-related calls, Engine 8 will be decommissioned, and ten vacant firefighter positions eliminated. This will not result in the closure of a station. A portion of the savings will be used to assess the future configuration of fire stations in the North End of New Bedford, as was completed for the South End. There will also be added capacity in the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department to effectively respond to medical calls through EMS."

The City Council voted 8-1 to support the following motions – Councilor Linda Morad was the lone "no" vote:

"Councillor Gomes, requesting that the City Council go on record and send a letter to the Mayor in opposition to the closing of Firehouse Engine 8 on Acushnet Avenue and the Downtown Police sub-station on Pleasant Street, the closing of these two public safety buildings will be very detrimental to the areas that they serve; and further that the Council asked Mayor Mitchell to look at alternative cuts or surplus monies

to keep these stations open.”

“Councillors Giesta, Abreu, Baptiste, Lima, Council President Lopes, Councillors Dunn, Markey and Carney, requesting that the Administration immediately reconsider its decision to decommission Engine 8 from the New Bedford Fire Department from its Fiscal Year 2021 budget, as its closure could potentially lead to devastating effects when it comes to the overall public safety of one of the most densely-populated areas of the community; and further that since it is confirmed that a new round of the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) federal grants from FEMA will now be available later this calendar year to help local fire departments rehire or retain firefighters as well as waive the local cost-share due to COVID-19 pandemic, that the City of New Bedford apply for said funding when appropriate to help alleviate any fiscal constraints to our annual fiscal budget, additionally the City does have a \$7.8 million in its “rainy day” fund, which could also be applied to offset any fire department related costs. (To be Referred to the Mayor’s Office, State Senator Mark Montigny, Representatives Antonio F.D. Cabral, Christopher Hendricks, Christopher Markey, William Strauss, and Paul Schmid, United States Senators Elizabeth Warren, Edward Markey, United States Congressman William Keating and Governor Charlie Baker.)”

Councilor Morad did not explain her vote during the City Council session and did not respond to e-mail inquiry sent on Friday.

Massachusetts receives federal approval for additional unemployment funds

Massachusetts currently has the highest unemployment rate in the country at 10.2%, but there some great news for residents without a job because of the worldwide COVID pandemic: Federal Emergency Management Administration Administrator Pete Gaynor announced he has approved the state's request for additional unemployment funds after weekly \$600 federal aid expired.

FEMA's grant funding means those who are currently unemployed will receive \$300 in federal funds. Since Governor Baker has already stated that he would agree to accept President Trump's extended unemployment benefits plan, that means there will be an additional \$100 bringing the total funds to \$400.

For those who have been concerned about the loss of income at the end of July when the \$600 checks they had been receiving, expired: the new payments will be made retroactive to Aug. 1.

As of July, the state's unemployment 16.1%, a drop of 1.6% drop from June with most of the jobs being lost in construction, hospitality, and transportation.