

Alma del Mar disappointed with death of compromise deal

Alma del Mar's Executive Director Will Gardner released the following statement. You can read the New Bedford Educators Association's response [here](#).

"We are disappointed by the news that we will be unable to move forward with a local compromise deal that would have given 450 children the opportunity to access a high-quality public school in their neighborhood.

We have spent the last few months getting to know the kids and families zoned into what would have been the new Alma campus in the Kempton neighborhood. We listened as families shared their hopes and dreams for their incoming Kindergartners, and we've been grateful to see those families commit to enroll their children at Alma.

This week's news is difficult for our community. To the families that decided to entrust us with their children under this new compromise model: we are sorry, and we commit to continuing to support you in partnership with New Bedford Public Schools to ease this period of transition. We will continue to do everything that we can to ensure that all New Bedford children have access to high-quality public schools.

We also remain committed to the hundreds of children on Alma's waiting list. We will begin contacting those families soon to begin the enrollment process, as the next school year begins in August.

We want to thank Commissioner Jeff Riley, who chose to take a courageous risk in facilitating this local compromise. We are also grateful to the special attention that our local legislators gave this matter.

We deeply appreciate Mayor Jon Mitchell, Superintendent Thomas Anderson and our colleagues at the district who made every effort to make this vision a reality for the kids and families of New Bedford. We look forward to maintaining the spirit of collaboration of our agreement and to working with them to improve educational outcomes for all kids in New Bedford.”

New Bedford Educators Association: ‘Coalition welcomes charter scheme’s demise’

The following statement was published on the New Bedford Educators Association’s Facebook page. You can read Alma del Mar’s response [here](#).

The Alma del Mar charter school expansion scheme in New Bedford, which would have required legislative approval to bypass state law, has rightfully been abandoned.

“Any deal cut behind closed doors without community involvement is not something that is being done in the community’s best interest,” said Ricardo Rosa, co-chair of the New Bedford Coalition to Save Our Schools.

Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley, Alma Del Mar CEO Will Gardner, New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell and Schools Superintendent Thomas Anderson engineered a deal under which the city agreed to give the privately run charter school a public building and land at no cost, construct a new “neighborhood zone” from which students would automatically be

enrolled in the charter school, and allow payment for all of the charter school seats even if they were not filled, in exchange for a slightly smaller expansion than the state was willing to approve.

The property transfer and automatic enrollment in place of a citywide lottery that charter schools are required to use required approval by the state Legislature.

After state legislators delayed action on the controversial bill, Riley said today that he will no longer pursue that plan and that instead he will grant Alma del Mar a 594-seat expansion.

“This whole plan is based on coercion, which is no way to implement education policy,” Rosa said. “The coalition will continue to oppose any expansion of charter seats because our district public schools remain drastically underfunded.”

He continued, “I believe this is an opportunity for advocates for strong public schools in New Bedford to work together to secure the funding all of our students deserve. We have the 2020 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year at our high school. We have one of the top-performing elementary schools in the state. We also have our challenges, but if given the proper resources and community involvement, we can overcome them.”

The Massachusetts Teachers Association and New Bedford Educators Association are members of the coalition.

“The MTA joined the coalition because of the broader implications raised in this deal,” said Merrie Najimy, president of the MTA. “This was an attempted end run around the will of voters, who in 2016 rejected charter school expansions.”

She continued, “The way students were being chosen for Alma del Mar II raised many questions, as research of the new zone indicated a pattern that excluded higher proportions of black

and Hispanic residents, as well as leaving out residents from larger multi-unit housing. “

MTA Vice President Max Page said that if the Alma del Mar deal had been approved, poorer districts across the state would be targets of similar proposals that transfer public funds and property to private charter operators, who get to determine which students they enroll.

“This plan embodied some of the harshest aspects of education privatization that we have seen in Massachusetts,” he said.

Visitors declare “We LOVE New Bedford, especially the people!”

“Hey folks. Hope this finds each of you well and looking forward to a great summer.

In short, I travel a lot and have lived in 5 different cities across America for the past 30 years. I visit home often (New Bedford) since my mom and family are still there. Well, yesterday while enjoying Memorial Day with friends in Annapolis, MD I met a woman who has been vacationing in New Bedford for 25 years. She and a group of friends from around the country visit once on the ‘4th of July’ and then on Labor Day.

THEY LOVE NEW BEDFORD!!!! While I was with them they talked about the great restaurants and the surrounding beaches. She and her friends shared amazing photographs. But what they spoke most highly of, *were the people*. Some of the best people

they have met anywhere!

They also shared with me that every city in the world has its problems. Some cities hide it better than others, and some cities manage it better than others. What they said, and what I have come to believe, is that New Bedford is a great place and the people are wonderful.

Hold on to what has made the SouthCoast special, because the word is getting around that New Bedford, Dartmouth, Fairhaven are charming places that are reasonably affordable in comparison to Boston, Providence and New York City and that opportunity to start new lives in the New Bedford area is something to consider. Gentrification/economic development has made its way throughout America. Small towns like our home of New Bedford will not be spared.

But to close on a more positive note. I think you all should be really proud (me too) about living and growing up in such a wonderful place.

This isn't the first time I've had this conversation over the years with people who think highly of New Bedford!

I hope you understand this post and I hope that the attention and some of the small changes that will come to New Bedford are things that we will embrace while we still value who we have always been: Wicked Good People." – Joe Pereira



OPINION: Brooklawn Park visitors litter and park in resident parking spots

“Are there any other residents living in the Brooklawn Park area that are getting a little irritated with a not being to park in front of their own homes with the baseball game going on?”

I could understand if there were no parking spots available but as a resident that has to park at the park – in front of my house – I often can’t because non-residents are in my spot.

I would like to know why North end residents do not have the same courtesy as the South and beach residents, they have signs clearly posted that the parking is for **residents only**. Why are we not given that same courtesy?

Also, there are a lot of residents in this area that agree we don't need to pick up park trash all over our lawns on a daily basis!!

Sorry about the venting! I do think it's a great program for the children I just wish the parents/visitors would be more respectful of the residents." – [Cathy Poirier-Henriques]

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Lack of recreational marijuana sales will cause headaches for 2019 New Bedford incumbents

One of the biggest negative issues incumbent New Bedford city councilors and Mayor Mitchell will face in this year's election will be the lack of delivering a recreational marijuana store to New Bedford residents. The usual issues like potholes, high property taxes, and high crime will most certainly be an issue, but those will always be an issue.

At the time of this writing, 21 businesses have been given licenses to sell retail marijuana in Massachusetts by the Cannabis Control Commission. Locally, one recreational store is operating in nearby Wareham and three are already operating in Fall River with as many as 10 more hoping to be operating by the end of 2019.

There is little traction for a store in New Bedford because of the very [strict zoning](#) that the City Council and Mayor's office have imposed on any business hoping to operate in the city. It's crystal clear that places like Fall River want recreational stores in the city and New Bedford politicians do not. Last month, [Whisk & JANE was denied a zoning variance](#) to

operate a recreational marijuana facility at the old strip club spot on Pope's Island.

For the first time, New Bedford will have a mayor's race that will allow the winner to serve a 4-year term. 2019 will also be the first time Mayor Mitchell will likely face some real competition since his first race in 2011 when State Representative Tony Cabral and City Councilor Linda Morad battled Mitchell for the vacant spot left by Scott Lang who didn't seek re-election. Mitchell ran unopposed in 2013. He then ran against Maria Giesta in 2015 and Charlie Perry in 2017, but they weren't challengers with much of a chance of winning.

With a 4-year term that includes a salary of almost \$120,000 a year, I would expect plenty of people entering the race – who wouldn't want a 4 year, nearly half a million dollar contract? With two more years of higher taxes and the lack of a retail marijuana facility in the city, a strong opponent would have a lot to run on.

New Bedford City Councilors, especially the at-Large ones, generally have to die or retire to be replaced – unless you are Jon Saunders who voted to give himself a 44% pay raise and said, "If people don't like the job I'm doing, they can vote me out." He was voted out the following year.

I have a feeling with another year of [increasing property taxes](#) and the lack of recreational marijuana sales, the incumbent city councilors and the mayor will be vulnerable in this year's New Bedford elections. Even a usually apathetic New Bedford might decide enough is enough. If New Bedford doesn't see a recreational store by this summer, expect the natives to get restless and put up a fight at the ballot box in October and November.

Historical Perspectives: From old-fashioned Opium Den to their modern version, injection sites

History often repeats itself. We are supposed to learn from our past, so if it repeats itself several times, in theory, we should not repeat our mistakes. At a bare minimum with each occurrence, we should improve upon it. Recent discussions in Massachusetts revolving around funding and designating injection sites is in fact, one of these occurrences. In the 19th century, we called them opium dens, now we call them injection sites.

So what can we learn this time around? What can we do to improve the concept? What mistakes were made?

Opium which is derived from the poppy plant has been in use since 3,000 B.C.E. mentioned in cuneiform tablets from ancient Sumer. Even the ancient Egyptians and Greeks used the “joy plant.”



In the early part of the 19th-century opium entered the medical community for its effects on pain through the application of morphine or laudanum tinctures. The side effects were a peaceful, happy, oblivious feeling – something attractive to those who were not undergoing any physical pain and in need of something like morphine. Have insomnia? A migraine? Parents even gave small doses to their cranky children. Even companies like Bayer got involved.

This led to a world gripped by recreational use of opium, and opium dens – establishments where opium could be bought and

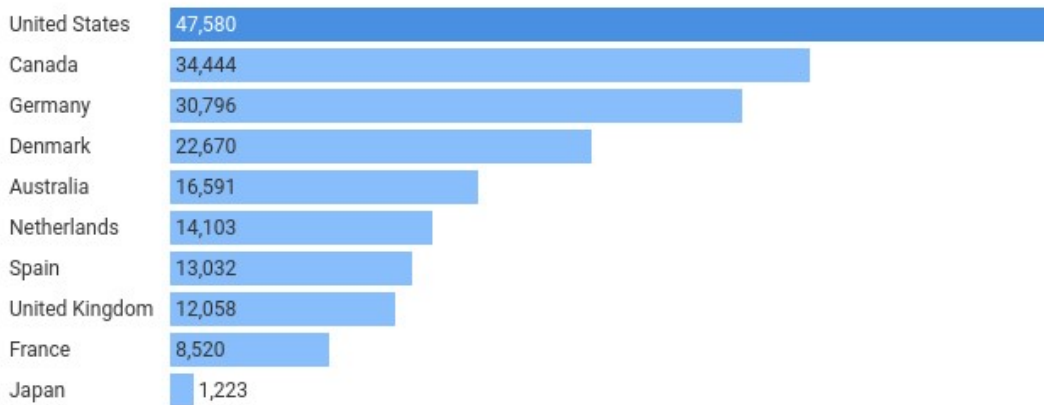
smoked at one's leisure – popped up all over the world, including North America. New England loved the stuff so much that at one point in 1840 24,000 pounds of it came in through U.S. Customs who, of course, promptly put a duty fee on it. Large shipments like these were feeding New England's appetite. These opium dens would provide a safe, relaxed environment for opium addicts to get high and even provide the oil lamps and special pipes with which to smoke it. Many had female attendants who would also offer sex for a price.

In the 1870s many large cities in the U.S. began to ban these opium dens and just like the Prohibition that would come in the 1920s it fueled public displays whereby the "product" would be destroyed. Confiscated opium and its paraphernalia would be dumped onto massive bonfires right out in the open.

And just like during the Prohibition it just forced use underground – into back alleys, "Speakeasies" or onto street corners in low-income neighborhoods. This, of course, raised crime, addiction and death rates. Opium use was so prevalent and such a large societal problem that in 1911 the New York Times said *"Of all the nations of the world, the United States consumes most habit-forming drugs per capita. Opium, the most pernicious drug known to humanity, is surrounded, in this country, with far fewer safeguards than any other nation in Europe fences it with...we can buy it, in almost any form, in every tenth one of our drug stores."*

Consumption of narcotic drugs

Compared to the rest of the world, the U.S. has the highest level of daily doses of narcotics per million inhabitants per day.



Some countries not shown.

Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: [International Narcotics Control Board](#)

3 years after that headline the Woodrow Wilson administration would enact Harrison Narcotics Tax Act which restricted the distribution and sale of heroin, opium, and cocaine. Eventually, Congress would make it illegal to produce, import or sell heroin. This had a dramatic effect on users who were addicted, millions of Americans.

Then, as now, opiates affected every stratum of society, rich and poor, homeless and those with extravagant homes, from the plumber to the doctor, men and women alike. So while the form of the poppy plant derivative has changed – from a small, sticky “rock” placed in a pipe bowl to a prescription pill. We now have Vicodin, Demerol, Dilaudid, Percocet, Fentanyl, Codeine, Oxycontin, Methadone and other narcotics handed out to the general populace by doctors.

Our country is now in quite a “pickle.” We have an estimated 30 million Americans addicted to some opiate. As addiction rates rise so do crime and overdose rates. We have a full-blown epidemic on our hands and there is no segment of society unaffected – we all know someone who is or was addicted.

So here we are – we’ve come full circle. The sad aspect of the story is that this means that opiates never went away when it comes to the scale of usage, crime rates, and addiction. It

simply fluctuated. Back “then” we thought putting laws on the books would address the problem, it clearly didn’t work. All the laws, the “War On Drugs” has done nothing to address drug use and the crime that comes with it. It is an outdated idea that hasn’t been proven to work, yet people persist in promoting it.



So what is the new tact we must take? Do we need to think outside the box? Consider more progressive ideas? Model another nation’s success story if that exists?

If we continue to practice an ineffective idea and expect it work we are perpetuating the epidemic. The proverbial maxim states “The definition of insanity is doing something over and over again and expecting the same result.” Einstein echoed this maxim when he said: “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” We need to **see**