

# OPINION: “New Bedford’s Mayor and councilors are showing no value to their employees”

*The following is an opinion sent to New Bedford Guide. It does not reflect the opinion of New Bedford Guide, nor is it an OP-ED. In fairness and objectivity, we share opinions from our readers whether we agree or disagree with their opinion.*

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“New Bedford Residents, please read:

New Bedford’s Mayor and councilors are showing no value to their employees of the city. The city councilors that New Bedford residents elect to gain your confidence are letting the Mayor do what he’s doing to your city servants and police.

What is he really doing with your tax dollars is the question. If the Mayor isn’t helping keep these positions filled, the city employees with the police are applying for jobs and obtaining them in surrounding towns and cities for a better wage. What is this telling the New Bedford residents? Wake up, people! This is your city.

The City of New Bedford has over 60 positions available because the City doesn’t provide a fair and competitive wage. The numbers are rising!! Residents have to start asking where your your tax dollars are going!

It’s happening with your safety and your public servants! What are the city councilors that you elected doing for you???

**Your city workers are:**

- Building custodians that clean your city buildings
- Mechanics that maintain city vehicles, fire, police, Ems,

sanders & plows, all city vehicles

- Electricians, plumbers, carpenters that take care of your buildings, lights and plumbing issues.
- Welders that take care of all equipment to run the city
- Dispatchers that watch over your safety & police & Ems
- Animal control that take care of the city with wildlife
- Airport staff that takes care of the airport
- Various positions at your water dept that takes part of your water & sewer issues, to maintaining your city streets
- Zoo dept that takes care of your public zoo
- Building inspectors that inspect your buildings for codes
- Sanitarians that look over your city to make sure your health is important
- Numerous positions in every office throughout the city that takes care of entering all work of everyone, to billing all vendors for all this work being done on a Daily Basis.
- Parking enforcement to make sure everyone is following parking issues

All these positions that are a big part of the city, a lot of the people don't know are out there. Positions the people pay for. This city needs a fair wage and your Mayor and councilors are holding back your money and holding back your services that the city is supposed to be providing you, the people of New Bedford.

### **The numbers are rising**

It's on the AFSME Greater New Bedford Page. Please help us to get this out to all who read your page. This page is a great resource for the people of New Bedford and we hope to have your support! 0Robert Vicente."-AFSME LOCAL 851.

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# Senators Warren and Markey Reintroduce Resolution Memorializing Those Lost to COVID-19

United States Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) reintroduced a resolution to memorialize those lost to COVID-19. The resolution would designate the first Monday in March as “COVID-19 Victims Memorial Day.” The resolution was first introduced in August of 2021.

“Many of our families, friends, and communities are still struggling with the impact of COVID-19 and coping with the loss of loved ones the pandemic stole from us too soon,” said Senator Warren. “This resolution will give long-overdue recognition and honor to those we have lost to COVID-19.”

“Too many families know the pain and have felt the heartbreak that is losing a loved one to COVID-19,” said Senator Markey. “As we approach the third year of this pandemic, we must continue to honor the lives of the more than one million of our fellow Americans – friends, neighbors, loved ones – who have been lost to this horrible disease. This resolution recognizes our nation’s immeasurable mourning and serves as a reminder for Congress to renew its commitment to protecting communities from this ongoing public health crisis.”

There have been more than 100 million cases of COVID-19 in the United States, and over 1.1 million Americans who have tragically lost their lives to this disease. COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on low-income communities and communities of color, exacerbating existing inequities that were already prevalent in our health systems and that must be addressed.

The resolution is supported by the advocacy organization, Marked By COVID.

“We must mark our losses together to brace against a nation’s crushing sadness. Upstanders like Senator Warren and Rep. Stanton, as well as countless activists and individuals, have shown me and my family solidarity in both pain and progress,” said Kristin Urquiza, co-founder of Marked By Covid. “We are unified in our commitment to observe Covid Memorial Day – and remember people like my dad Mark – on the first Monday of March, in perpetuity.”

Representative Greg Stanton (D-Ariz.) reintroduced this resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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## **REALTOR® Association Disappointed in Last Night’s Decision on Rent Stabilization by the New Bedford City Council**

The following was submitted to us by The REALTOR® Association of Southeastern Massachusetts:

On Thursday, March 9, 2023, the New Bedford City Council passed a motion “that the following nonbinding public opinion advisory question, or other question of similar form and context as determined by the City Solicitor, be placed on the municipal general election ballot on November 07, 2023: ‘Should the City of New Bedford adopt an Ordinance stabilizing

rents, in order to prevent displacement in the local housing rental market?'"

"We are very disappointed in the outcome of this vote", states Paul Chasse, Chief Executive Office of the REALTOR® Association of Southeastern Massachusetts, who goes on further to say, "A simple non-binding yes or no ballot question does not do this very serious issue justice. We would rather see the city take part in a series of public meetings and debates that include residents representing tenants, landlords and owner-occupied home owners, housing professionals and city housing officials to have conversations about the cost of rental housing in New Bedford and what can be done to mitigate such a serious issue that has been building for years."

Rent stabilization is rent control, and based on past performances in the 1980's and early 1990's, it did not solve rental cost issues, which is why it was voted out by Massachusetts residents. Rent control has reduced the quality and quantity of rental housing wherever it has been tried. An impact study based on extensive research on the effects of rent control across the country shows that rent control leads to a decrease in apartment supply and property tax revenue. Economists overwhelmingly agree that price controls on rent are inefficient and counterproductive, and lead to serious negative impacts for housing markets that hurt low income households and socio-economic challenged families the most.

Rent control is not the solution, but rather a short-term band aid on a larger issue. Currently, there are over 100 units in the construction pipeline in New Bedford, but developers cannot afford to build without the assistance of programs like the Massachusetts Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP). The HDIP is woefully underfunded at 10 million for the entire state but the recent budget proposal by Governor Healy would bump that to 50 million for the first year and a continued 30 million for future years. We need to foster investment incentives for future construction. We also have to

work with all surrounding communities to increase the housing stock in Bristol County, in addition to available public housing. Finally, we need to advocate the state and federal government for a more robust housing voucher program and assist city residents with the education and training needed to improve their quality of life.

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# **Council Approves Boston Rent Cap Plan On 11-2 Vote**

By Chris Lisinski  
State House News Service

Beacon Hill, it's your turn to take a stance on rent control in Boston.

The Boston City Council voted 11-2 on Wednesday in favor of Mayor Michelle Wu's home rule petition seeking to carve an opening in the statewide rent control ban voters approved nearly three decades ago.

Wu plans to sign the measure in the coming days, a final procedural step that will send the matter to Legislature for review and kick off the next phase in a heated debate that has already drawn a six-figure opposition campaign from one real estate group.

Backers of the policy said Wednesday they view it as an imperfect but necessary tool to soften the financial pressures Bostonians face and to keep people in their homes.

"Boston is increasingly out of reach for a majority of our seniors, immigrant populations, families and individuals,"

said Councilor Gabriela Coletta. “Bad actors who take advantage of a bullish rental market can and do price gouge in a way that is displacing hardworking individuals who just want to be able to live in this city and contribute to our local economy. There is urgency to get this done, especially in my district, and I feel this urgency every single day.”

Councilors Frank Baker and Erin Murphy, both of Dorchester, voted against the home rule petition.

Baker argued that the policy would villainize property owners who he said have “created generational wealth for the middle class in Boston.”

“It’s not easy being a landlord, especially a small landlord,” Baker said, later adding, “The landlord, the owner, is evil in this discussion, and that has to stop. It has to stop because the good landlords, if they’re not ready to go now, they’re getting ready to go. Just on its face, rent control, I believe, is bad policy.”

The home-rule petition Wu filed would limit the amount landlords could increase rent each year to 6 percent plus the change in the Consumer Price Index, with a combined maximum total of 10 percent. In lower-inflation years where the CPI grows 2 percent, the rent cap would be 8 percent; in higher-inflation years, rents could not grow more than 10 percent.

Wu previously told councilors that advertised rents across Boston increased 14 percent in 2022, and prices jumped more than 20 percent in some neighborhoods.

“Today, the City Council delivered a strong message that the city of Boston needs the tools to address our housing crisis,” Wu told reporters after the vote. “We hear from residents across every single neighborhood just how dire it is, and we see families who are getting pushed out of the communities they grew up in and helped build. This is affecting everything from how our businesses and economy can recover to our school

enrollment and the stability of every part of our neighborhoods.”

The proposal includes several exemptions. Newly built, added or converted units would not be subject to rent control until their owner occupancy certificates are 15 years old.

Owner-occupied buildings with six or fewer units would not be subject to a limit on rents, and landlords would not face a cap the first year a new tenant moves in, allowing them to reset the price to market value.

Councilor Ricardo Arroyo said the proposed cap would apply to about 55 percent of the city’s rental units.

“This is a monumental act for the city of Boston,” Arroyo said.

During Wednesday’s meeting, the panel rejected an amendment proposed by Councilor Michael Flaherty that would have extended the exemption to properties held by any Boston resident with six or fewer units, not just those where the owner lives in one of the units.

“They should be exempt as if they are owner-occupied because in many instances, it’s the house next door to them. A family member left it to them, or they bought a brother or sister’s house,” Flaherty said.

Councilors shot down the change 9-4, with Baker, Flaherty, Murphy and Council President Ed Flynn in support.

Other tenant protections in the home rule petition include a requirement that landlords have a demonstrable cause to evict tenants.

Several other U.S. cities including San Francisco and Washington, D.C. have rent control policies, which Wu said served as a basis for her proposal.



Boston is home to some of the highest rents in the country, leaving many residents to pay a sizable share of their income on housing, and prices continue to climb amid competition for a limited number of open apartments. According to Councilor Liz Breadon, only about half of 1 percent of Boston's rental units are vacant.

"The reality is this is not a normal market. This is a desperation market," said Councilor Kenzie Bok. "Because of the half a percent or less of vacancy that Councilor Breadon referenced, it's a 'your money or your life' kind of situation. That's not the kind of situation that government should enable."

Real estate and landlord groups that oppose rent control argue it would stifle housing production, exacerbating a crisis of high prices and displacement fueled in large part by insufficient supply.

The Greater Boston Real Estate Board launched a nearly \$400,000 campaign involving digital ads and mailers trying to rally voters against the policy.

"We are disappointed but not totally surprised by the Boston City Council's vote in support of rent control. That is why our campaign was always focused on the long game," Greg Vasil, the group's CEO, said Wednesday. "And make no mistake, the fight is just beginning. As the bill makes its way to Beacon Hill, we are prepared to expand the Rent Control Hurts Housing campaign to educate voters and legislators on the serious harm rent control will have on the residents of the Commonwealth. We look forward to promoting pro-housing policies focused on decreasing red tape, additional costs, and regulatory burdens, while increasing production as the path to overcoming the state's affordability crisis."

The pricey campaign underscores the intensity of the fight already playing out. Councilor Ruthzee Louijeune said

Wednesday that rent control opponents sent a “tracker” to one of her events with constituents to monitor her remarks about the topic.

“We’re doing something good when the real estate industry is so scared and when they are making sure that they are putting in so much money to prevent this from passing,” Louijeune said from the chamber floor.

Whether the state’s most populous city can implement an annual cap on rent increases applying to more than half of its units will now land firmly and completely on the shoulders of House and Senate Democrats who have shown little interest in the idea in the 29 years since voters narrowly approved a ballot question prohibiting rent control across Massachusetts.

In 2020, the House rejected a Rep. Mike Connolly amendment to a sweeping economic development bill that would have authorized several local-option tenant protection measures including rent control.

Supporters might feel more optimistic about Boston’s chances now that Gov. Charlie Baker, who opposed reviving rent control, is no longer in office. Gov. Maura Healey has not explicitly endorsed Wu’s push, though she has said generally that she supports the efforts of local leaders to make their own decisions about the policy.

The petition’s advancement comes as Healey mounts an effort to address what she describes as a housing crisis, a problem so significant that she wants to create an entire Cabinet secretariat focused on coming up with solutions.

Asked Wednesday about the chances of success in a Legislature where home rule petitions do not always find a favorable audience, Wu said, “We all represent the same constituents.”

“We all hear from the same families who are struggling to hang on in the city as prices at the grocery store go up, as prices

at the pump go up, as prices in housing and rent go up. I think we all share an urgency in knowing that this can't stand for Boston," she said. "We cannot be a place where people get pushed out from the communities that they want to continue contributing to. We'll make that case up at the State House, and we are going to go up strong with a big voice from city government in doing so."

Boston might not be the only major metropolitan community seeking state permission to revive rent control at the local level despite the 1994 ballot question banning it.

Somerville City Council President Ben Ewen-Campen said his panel will start work this week on its own "rent stabilization" measure, an idea that its mayor, Katjana Ballantyne, endorsed during her campaign.

"With Boston making unprecedented progress to limit rent-gouging, and with a new Governor who has supported municipal decision-making on this issue, the time is now for us begin working in earnest on a policy that works for Somerville," Ewen-Campen tweeted on Tuesday on Tuesday.

The Boston City Council on Wednesday also approved, with an identical 11-2 vote featuring opposition from Baker and Murphy, a separate home rule petition Wu filed that seeks to overhaul the Boston Planning and Development Agency structure.

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## **South Coast Rail Announces Safety First Program**

The following is a statement from Jean Fox, the Director of Community Engagement for South Coast Rail.

“The MBTA’s South Coast Rail (SCR) Phase 1 service between Boston and Southeastern Massachusetts will soon become a reality. MBTA passenger trains will begin service to and from stations in Middleborough, East Taunton, Freetown, Fall River, and New Bedford, with layovers in Fall River and New Bedford.

Safety First is an education program aimed at promoting safety throughout the railroad corridor and consisting of materials, meetings, and briefings. Presentations, brochures, videos, and conversations will emphasize Safety First for every age, occupation, and resident. For more information or to request a presentation, send us an email at [SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us](mailto:SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us) with “Safety First” in the subject line. We’ll be reaching out to schools, libraries, organizations, and neighborhoods. In the meantime, watch our safety videos and our Safety Basics vignette, and please think Safety First.

The first rule of Safety First is always to stay clear of the Right-of-Way (ROW). It is very dangerous and illegal to trespass onto the railroad ROW: it is never safe to be near or around railroad tracks. Only cross tracks in designated locations and obey all warning signs and signals. We’ll be sharing these and other safety basics as we near testing and service. Our goal is to bring an understanding of safety rules to every Southeastern Massachusetts city and town.

We are excited to return passenger rail service to your communities for the first time in 60 years! With passenger trains soon to be operating on the ROW, it’s important to remind everyone that safety is MBTA’s top priority throughout the region. While SCR is eagerly awaited, staying safe around tracks and trains is essential. We don’t want you, your family, friends, or pets to end up in a dangerous situation. Keeping the ROW clear for the trains will make your trip by rail safe and reliable, too.

Because the region has not seen passenger trains in decades,

people have become comfortable using the ROW for recreation, such as dog walking, ATV and dirt bike riding, running, and taking shortcuts. Sheds, swimming pools, and encampments have been built on and near the tracks, which have also become a dumping grounds for trash and debris. Since 1959, the tracks in this area only saw freight trains a few times a day at relatively low speeds, only recently increasing to 25 mph in certain areas. In the coming months, MBTA test trains will begin operating more frequently at speeds up to 80 mph.

Stay tuned for more information on SCR safety: check the SCR project website and sign up for our email updates. Thank you for remembering to put Safety First.”

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## **The Inappropriate And Political Persecution of New Bedford Ward 3 Councilor Shawn Oliver**

As the dust settles and the non-emotional jumping to conclusions ends, it's very clear that newly elected New Bedford Ward 3 Councilor Shawn Oliver is the victim of partisan political persecution that borders on the harassment of an elected official. A night that should have been a proud moment for Shawn, his family, friends, and supporters, turned into a smear campaign and I'm sure a miserable night and weekend because some people can't lose an election gracefully.

During his swearing-in ceremony day last Friday, New Bedford High School students protested in front of their school.

I'm generally supportive of anyone protesting, especially young adults, if they are organic protests, meaning they are started without outside influence. But high school students rarely protest without adult influence. Regardless, the New Bedford High School students mostly had a good message until they started to push anti-white men messages. I was personally attacked on our social media accounts as a middle-aged white man for even posting these videos.

It's a confusing message. If you are organizing a protest against "hate" you shouldn't preach hate. The students were protesting some Facebook posts on a personal account that they had to actively search out. Then one of the students through a microphone asked, "Can I get a screw white men?" to a gleeful crowd who shouted it back. Hate is hate and one has to wonder where they get this hate from. The media? School? Social media? Also, what does this have to do with Black Lives Matter?

Later that evening, Shawn was confronted by protestors led by Rhode Island Democratic Women's Caucus Chair Reverend Donnie Anderson who is a transgender woman and Pastor at Pilgrim United Church of Christ in New Bedford.

The confrontation was inappropriate for many reasons.

First, Reverend Anderson was aggressive with an angry look and tone. Not something I usually see from a Reverend. In the video, you can see the Reverend holding Councilor Oliver's hand and not letting go. This is a power move meant to intimidate and is inappropriate when dealing with an elected official.

Second, Reverend Anderson states "your attitude will cause the death of children." If you've ever touched your toes in politics, the first thing you learn is if you want to get your way, just accuse the other side of not caring about the

children, or even worse, you are killing children. I've seen a Republican Governor in Nebraska state that if a medical marijuana program is passed, "children will die." It's ridiculous and a way to paint your opponent as evil and to end the debate. It also sets up Reverend Anderson's follow on statement "You get on your hands and knees and ask for their forgiveness for the horrible things you've done by posting what you posted." This is a clear case of elected official intimidation.

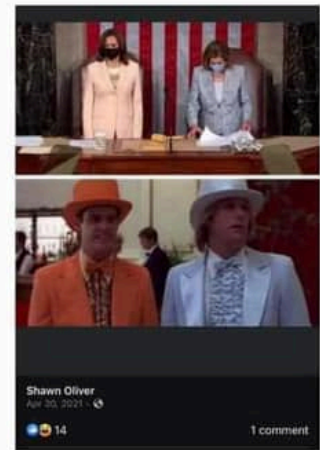
Now, let's start from the beginning and review Councilor Oliver's "hate" posts on social media.

Last November, **Ward 3 City Councilor Hugh Dunn announced that he was stepping down on December 1st**, forcing a final special election last Friday. Generally, Ward elections are small elections and the **New Bedford Ward 3 election had 721 people turn out**. Shawn Oliver defeated Carmen Amaral 414 to 311. Based on most available information, most of the protestors supported Carmen Amaral. To be clear, city councilors have no executive power and earn less than \$30,000 a year. This is not something to attempt to destroy another person's life over, but this smear campaign is the worst case of poor losing I've ever seen in local elections.

Opponents of Shawn Oliver dug up some of his own personal Facebook posts going back many years in an attempt to slander him before the election and then used them in the protests after Oliver won. This is a collage of some of his posts pushed by his opponents on social media, so let's assume they are the worse of his posts. I'll go through each one then individually.



## SHAWN OLIVER UNFIT TO LEAD NEW BEDFORD



First, Councilor Oliver dared to post a meme that compared the Dumb and Dumber duo with former Democrat House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vice President Harris. If you've spent 10 seconds on Facebook or Twitter, you'll know that these memes are common, from both sides of the political spectrum. Nancy Pelosi and VP Harris have some of the lowest approval ratings of anyone in politics. **Only 1 out of 10 people view VP Harris as "very favorable" while 4 out of 10 view her as "Very Unfavorable."** Pelosi is even less liked. I'm not sure how this is hate or something to protest over. It's just a common political meme.



Next Councilor Oliver dared to post a pro-Trump meme three years ago. Are we noticing a theme? Councilor Oliver is likely a Republican and that's a major "no-no" in New Bedford.



Current City Council President Linda Morad learned that the hard way when she ran against Jon Mitchell and Tony Cabral for mayor a decade ago.



Next, a meme that plays on famous Trump and Bernie Sanders statements, this one saying “Grab them in the Pursey – Feel The Burn 2020.” Not really getting this one, but I’m guessing no children will be harmed by it.



The next meme basically says if you want to earn more than minimum wage get a skill that pays more than minimum wage. Isn’t that why we go to trade schools or college? Not sure how this targets children or the LGBTQ community. Again, clearly a Republican-themed message and that’s really what this protest is about, a progressive candidate lost to a more middle-of-the-road or right-leaning candidate.



Next is a more highly debated topic: teachers and adults influencing our youth regarding transgender surgery. Across the country, there is a major spike in transgender youth and many hospitals are medically transitioning children at a very young age. Whether you agree with it or not, it’s an appropriate debate whether teachers should be stepping out of academics to introduce transgender and sexual topics to young children or adults on social media influencing kids on the topic. Regardless, the meme appears to say we should teach driving instead of gender. Yes, a hot political potato but far from anti-LGBTQ or hate.



Now for what are likely the two most controversial memes:

First, is the meme that takes on the bathroom debate. Across

the country, Democrat legislators have passed legislation that allows people to choose the bathroom or locker room that they identify with the most. This is controversial as not everyone is comfortable with people who appear to be the opposite sex using their bathroom or locker rooms. Even some public schools are putting feminine hygiene products like tampons in men's restrooms and urinals in women's restrooms. Some states and national organizations also allow transgender athletes to compete in the gender sport of their choice. For this meme, I could see why some of the transgender community see it as inappropriate, but this debate is far from settled.



Finally, this meme appears to joke about how women have transitioned over the decades. While some may consider it inappropriate, I don't know how anyone could consider this or any of the memes shared as a threat to children's lives or considered hate speech. Spend a few minutes on any social media app and these are more common than not, especially during Presidential or congressional elections when many of these memes appear to be shared around.



If you find any of the memes inappropriate, then don't search out the memes. I have a saying, "don't look into the sun for an hour and blame the sun for your blindness." We only see what we want to see on social media and if something creeps into your feed that you don't like, unfollow, hide, report, or scroll past the content. It's that simple. In the case of New Bedford Ward 3 Councilor Shawn Oliver, it's blatantly clear that his opponents actively searched out this content to create a monster, and when they lost, they decided to attempt to destroy someone who shared mildly inappropriate memes, in most cases years before he ran for office. I'd also ask, what have you posted on social media since you started your account? Should you be judged forever?

In the last 24 hours, **Councilor Oliver released a statement apologizing for his Facebook posts.** It's the politically correct thing to do and his opponents should accept his apology and move on. Time to judge the councilor on his city council actions and move on from some silly memes that only impact you if you let them.

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## **New Bedford Ward 3 Councilor Shawn Oliver releases statement**

Shawn Oliver New Bedford Ward 3 City Councilor has released the following statement:

"As an Elected Official, my position is to work alongside the members of our Community, different Groups, and Leaders to gain a better understanding of the issues facing us all. When I began my candidacy I made it clear I was not a politician, just a guy who truly wanted better for New Bedford. My goal has been to bring people together and stop the division while fostering a sense of pride and community that has faded within our City.

A few years ago I carelessly and thoughtlessly shared some insensitive memes that have taken away from that message. I never intended for these to be used in a manner that would further fuel this divide. The LGBTQ+ Community continues to struggle with discrimination while facing abuse and fear for themselves and their rights. Although this was never my intention I do see that my actions caused harm and for that, I apologize. No one should ever feel illegitimate, afraid, or unheard. As your City Councilor, I will represent all

residents without prejudice.

A true lesson I hope we can all learn is that although people may post, share and quote different things we must always remember that words have meaning and that the message of fear or hurt may spread while having no intention of ever doing so. There's a human in all of us and we all need to work together toward bridging the gap on different topics to bring back the sense of Community and Belonging we all deserve.

Shawn Oliver

New Bedford

Ward 3 City Councillor."



*Shawn Oliver Facebook photo.*

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# **New Bedford Mayor Mitchell comments on Councillor-elect Oliver's posts on transgender rights**

"I have reviewed the crude images posted on Facebook by City Councillor-elect Shawn Oliver that purport to comment on transgender rights.

I want to make clear that I categorically condemn the postings. Coming from an individual who is about to assume public office, they are especially abhorrent. New Bedford has long distinguished itself as a city that honors and protects the rights of all of its residents, and the messages conveyed by the postings are antithetical to our core values.

No matter how long ago the postings appeared, it is imperative that the councilor-elect repudiate them. The residents of the city and particularly Ward 3 need to be confident that he is committed to serving everyone." -Jon Mitchell.

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## **Beacon Hill Response Looms Over Boston's Rent Control Debate**

By Sam Drysdale  
State House News Service

As the conversation about rent control in Boston heats up,

city councilors have to contend with how aggressively they want to pursue a policy that will eventually need to win approval from state lawmakers who have historically opposed the measure.

Progressive tenant advocates criticized Mayor Michelle Wu's rent stabilization proposal as being too moderate during a public hearing on Wednesday, while the Greater Boston Real Estate Board is launching a \$400,000 campaign against the measure, saying it will lead to decreased development of new units in the city.

Meanwhile, city councilors and the mayor's administration have to consider how much to hedge their bets if they want the rent regulation to pass through the State House.

Rent control was made illegal on a state level in 1994 when voters narrowly decided at the ballot box to prohibit limiting how much rent can grow for tenants year after year.

Wu's rent stabilization and "just cause" tenant eviction proposal before the council would limit annual rent hikes within city limits to 6 percent plus the change in the Consumer Price Index, with a cap of 10 percent in high-inflation years. It would also exempt live-in small landlords in two- to six-unit buildings, as well as new construction for 15 years, in a bid to avoid disincentivizing new development.

In 2023, Boston is expected to be one of the most expensive cities in the country in which to rent an apartment, according to online realtor Zumper, and the median price for a one-bedroom apartment as of February was \$3,040.

If the city council and Wu pass the measure on to the state, the Legislature would then have to approve the policy and send it along to Gov. Maura Healey.

Though Healey, unlike her predecessor, has not spoken out against rent control, she also has not made explicit if she

will sign a measure allowing Boston to revive its own local policy despite the statewide ban, saying she generally supports local efforts to make their own decisions.

Legislative leaders have shown little interest in reviving rent control after the statewide ballot question banned the practice, and several councilors in Wednesday's hearing brought up the "Jim Brooks" bill, which the city passed to prevent "no-cause" housing evictions in 2017, but died at the State House.

Cambridge Democrat Rep. Mike Connelly told MASsterList that lawmakers have filed five bills that address rent stabilization this session, including his Housing for All bill which would allow cities and towns to enact rent control while boosting affordable housing funding.

"We're having good conversations with the Boston delegation, and they're very interested in seeing the home rule that comes up, but they'll have their own hearings," said Boston housing chief Sheila Dillon. "The whole state will vote on this, so I think it's impossible at this point in time to know exactly what they will and will not approve."

Progressive councilors argued during Wednesday's public hearing against aspects of Wu's proposal that they thought were not ambitious enough to solve Boston's housing crisis.

Councilor Julia Mejia pushed back on the 15-year exemption for new construction, saying new developments should also be "accountable in the solutions around stabilizing rents."

"The time is now for us to be incredibly bold, aggressive," she said. "I am looking forward for us to have the political will that this moment is calling for, and I think the harder we can go, the more inclined we are to definitely keep our residents here in the city of Boston."

Later in the hearing as part of a panel of housing and tenants

rights advocates, Rebekah Stovell of New England United for Justice said the new development exemption should be cut down to five years, and that rents should not be allowed to grow higher than the consumer price index (CPI) each year, with a 5 percent cap in high-inflation years.

Councilor Kendra Lara called the CPI plus 6 percent rent cap Wu suggested “untenable.”

From 2012 to 2021 the average annual CPI growth in the city was 1.9 percent, according to Wu’s office. If the mayor’s proposal had been active during these years, it would have meant rent could not be raised more than 7.9 percent. In a high-inflation year like 2022, where the CPI was 7.1 percent, rent increases would be capped at 10 percent.

Boston’s five-year average growth rate in rent between 2017 and 2022 was 4.6 percent per year, according to Forbes.

Lara argued that because rents in recent years have grown at a rate below the cap that Wu’s proposal would have implemented over that span, the policy would give landlords a green light to pursue even larger rent hikes.

“We are not giving people a limit. We are giving them an allowance,” Lara said. “All of the conversations that we’re having here today have made it very obvious that we’re trying to protect profit while also trying to protect people’s right to have a roof over their head ... People are going to do what they can to make as much profit as possible.”

But to others on the council, like President Ed Flynn, the 6 percent plus CPI cap seemed “reasonable” and “like a compromise.”

Flynn asked the panel of housing advocates if they would rather have Wu’s proposal win approval on Beacon Hill, which has historically opposed rent control measures, or take the chance on pursuing a more aggressive cap that might not find a



favorable audience among state lawmakers.

“Do we want something that is higher that might not actually help our folks in our communities because we know it’s going to pass, or do we want to push something that we know would actually be beneficial to people in our community struggling now, even if there’s a chance it won’t pass?” Stovell responded.

City Councilor Michael Flaherty, who worked on the dead-ended Jim Brooks bill to eliminate no-cause evictions, told councilors that before they debate the nitty gritty, they should get a sense of the appetite for rent stabilization on Beacon Hill.

“With housing initiatives, the council gets them through, mayor signs off and then they hit a brick wall heading up the, heading up the hill,” he said. “I don’t want to see us get all, you know, in a [tizzy] and divided and have a big free for all when, you know, if there’s not a likelihood of success. We should probably try to ascertain that sooner rather than later.”

State Sen. Lydia Edwards, who co-chairs the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Housing, declined to comment on the proposed home rule petition. House co-chair James Arciero did not respond to request for comment.

“Out of respect for the process underway in the Boston City Council, I won’t be speaking on this issue,” Edwards, who served on the City Council until she joined the Senate last year, said.

The Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance argued Wednesday that lawmakers on Beacon Hill “would be foolish to even consider” the proposal.

“If the Mayor doesn’t like the direction of rents in her city, the best thing she can do is encourage more housing options as

a way to add more supply. Boston City Councilors would be wise to tap the brakes on this and any rent control proposal and Beacon Hill would be foolish to even consider it," MassFiscal spokesperson Paul Craney said.

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## **New Bedford's Mayor Mitchell appoints Patricia Langis to the Board of the Council on Aging**

"Mayor Jon Mitchell has appointed Patricia Langis to the board of the Council on Aging.

Langis is a lifelong resident of New Bedford who previously worked as a COA dispatcher until she retired at the age of 84. She is also a member of the Neighborhood Association. When asked why she wished to be considered for appointment, she responded "I really enjoy working with the seniors and want to be of help to them in this capacity. Being a senior myself, I know what folks need and I'm eager to be helpful."

The Mayor's appointment is subject to the approval of the New Bedford City Council." -City of New Bedford.