

My challenge for the New Bedford activists: run for elected office in 2021

People in New Bedford like to complain a lot, but few take the time to vote and New Bedford is known for its lack of candidates running for office. After the death of George Floyd, New Bedford saw a few weeks of protests in the name of George Floyd, Black Lives Matters, and 15-year old **Malcolm Gracia** who was shot by police after stabbing a police officer in 2012. At the peak of the protests, activists shut down the New Bedford/Fairhaven Bridge, shut down the southbound lane of Route 18 in New Bedford, and even showed up in large numbers to Mayor Jon Mitchell's house. Will the recent social activism translate politically in New Bedford's 2021 election? I doubt it.

In 2017, I wrote the article '**Protesting a Sheriff that ran unopposed**' that detailed the irony of dozens of people showing up to protest Bristol County Sheriff Hodgson's plan to charge inmates \$5 per day and to offer up volunteer inmates to build Trump's wall. The irony was that Sheriff Hodgson just ran unopposed a few months earlier. Unfortunately, I don't see 2021 being any different.

In 2021, there will be at least one open seat on the New Bedford City Council as At-large City Councilor Debora Coelho announced her retirement shortly after getting elected. At-Large City Council in New Bedford is a tough election to win if all five incumbents decide to run for election. Usually, you'll only see new members when a seat is vacated. The last new at-Large City Councilor to get elected was Ian Abreu after David Alves announced he was not running for reelection in 2015. Debora Coelho's retirement will provide a rare opportunity to fill a seat that is easily defended in future

elections. Expect a lot of the politically experienced or those with name recognition to run for the seat, but few if any 2020 social activists.

There will be a low turnout in the 2021 New Bedford elections because there won't be a mayoral election. For the first time in New Bedford's history, Mayor Jon Mitchell was elected to a 4-year term and won't need to seek re-election until 2023. This means you'll only see elections for At-Large/Ward City Councilors, school committee, and assessor. Voters turn up for mayors, not city councilors.

This low turn out could provide a rare opportunity for people with little name recognition to get elected. I challenge the folks marching, protesting and calling for a change in New Bedford to be that change, and run for office in 2021. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." That's not going to happen by holding signs and being active on social media. Now is the time to prepare by getting educated on how New Bedford's government works, engage with your elected officials, show up to government meetings, and start to build your base.

Let's hope some take up my challenge.