

The New Bedford City Council



Michael Silvia in the New Bedford City Council Chambers.

What if I told you that I had a job for you that pays a part-time salary, but you will have to put in full-time, thankless hours? Would you take it? Wait. Before you answer, it doesn't stop there. Your home phone number will be available to 93,000 people, and the angry, upset ones will call you at all hours to complain about their problems. Not only that, but they expect results yesterday. Oh, and since this job pays little you will also have to manage a full-time career, because waitresses (minus the tips) will earn a higher hourly rate than you. Welcome to the world of the New Bedford City Council.

I've recently been exposed to the world of the City Council and I thought I'd share some insight with the rest of you. To put it bluntly, most New Bedford residents know little, if

anything, about one of the most important functions of our city. I hope to change that with this article.

So what is the City Council and what do they do? I'm glad you asked. From the City of New Bedford's official website:

The City Council, under Plan B, is responsible for setting the city budget, appropriating all funds to run the city and is responsible for confirming all mayoral appointments. The Council is primarily responsible to the citizens of New Bedford, and is responsive to the concerns of city residents on those matters which concern said residents. The City Council is responsible for making all laws (ordinances) to govern the City.

A little research yields some basics about the City Council. There are 11 City Council members; six Ward Councilors and five "At-Large" Councilors. One of the city council members serves as the President and has increased powers and pay. The Ward Councilors are elected by their specific wards and the Councilors-At-Large are elected by all residents of New Bedford. As a body, the combined City Council confirms mayoral appointments, approves and/or cuts the mayor's budget, and is the primary legislative body responsible for producing all laws/ordinances for the mayor's approval. In simple terms, they are the "check and balance" to the chief-executive of the city (the mayor). As a recent example of the City Council in action, on April 25th of this year the City Council confirmed David Provencher as the new Police Chief by a vote of 10-0.



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A PITTANCE FOR YOUR TIME

When I first started researching the New Bedford elected offices, I found that three of the city council members ran unopposed, which I think is totally unacceptable. We deserve choice, right? There should be dozens of talented, qualified individuals lining up to become city Council members! This was my thought before I found out that city council members make less than \$15,000 a year (\$14,653 base pay to be exact) and haven't received a pay raise since 1995. The job really does require someone who cares more about the city of New Bedford than making money. I researched the 2010 and 2011 New Bedford City Budgets and there are over 100 city employees that make over \$90,000 a year, with 51 of them making over \$100,000. If income is your primary focus, then you should become a police officer or fireman, because they are at the top of the income pyramid for city employees.

IN NEED OF CITY ASSISTANCE

If you are a resident of New Bedford and need something done with the city, chances are it will be an employee at the city hall or a City Council member that will take action. All City Council members are approachable and accessible through phone. For general issues, I recommend starting with the council member that represents your ward. For example, I live in downtown New Bedford which is Ward 4, which falls under Bruce Duarte's jurisdiction.

For specific issues, you should research the standing and special committees and contact the city council members that are part of the committee that can help with your issue. The public city council meetings are held at the New Bedford City Hall (133 William Street, City Council Chambers – Room 214) on the first Thursday of each month and start at 7 P.M.

In general, Americans have lost interest in their state and federal governments because they are not accessible (unless

the politicians are getting re-elected). This is not the case when it comes to New Bedford municipal government. Each resident has immediate access to their city officials to include the City Council and even the Mayor. When you need assistance, start with the New Bedford City Offices (for simple issues) or the New Bedford City Council (when you need guidance or action). Just remember that while the City Council works for you, it is a part-time, under appreciated job: They don't have personal assistants and likely work full-time jobs. Enjoy some photos of our City Hall and Council Chambers!

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Special thanks to City Council members Jane Gonsalves and Steven Martins for providing me access to the City Council Chambers and insight into the New Bedford City Council. Ready to run for public office in New Bedford? Read my article detailing what it takes to Run for Office in New Bedford.