

Opinion: Use New Bedford's parking ban ticket money to fund panhandler work projects

In preparation for snow storms the City of New Bedford institutes a **citywide parking ban** so their plow drivers can easily access the streets. New Bedford police issued **593 \$50 parking tickets during yesterday's parking ban totaling \$29,650**. \$100,000 to \$200,000 in total tickets wouldn't be out of the ordinary in a full snow season. Last year, over 2,000 tickets were issued during the first four parking bans bringing the total money raised to \$100,000 in a short time.

With late fees the money could be much higher. The city does offers 39 alternate parking areas and plenty of notice, so there is no excuse. Plus unless you are new to New Bedford, you can anticipate a parking ban for every major storm. The big questions is, what should this money be used for?

There are several pre-planned options that this money will likely fund. First, and most obvious, the money could go back into the fund used to maintain plows buy sand/salt and pay drivers. Winters are unpredictable and it makes sense to put money away for future storms, which also means tax relief for tax payers.

Another idea not really considered by the City is putting this money towards work programs for panhandlers and the homeless.

New Bedford has had a significant, growing panhandler and homeless population for several years now. It seems that every major intersection in New Bedford has a panhandler begging for money. The exact number is not known, but not all panhandlers are homeless. Many live in poverty, have a home and simply panhandle to get by – or feed their alcohol or drug addiction.

A hundred thousand dollars could go a long way to helping the homeless and panhandlers that want help. I'm talking about the folks that want to improve their situation.

Paying a wage could improve the situation of 50 people. \$100,000 could fund 9,090 hours of work at \$11 per hour. That means 50 people could get 181 hours of work. That's 22 hours of work for 8 weeks/two month, or \$1,000 of income per month.

\$2,000 of total income doesn't sound like much, but that's first, last and security for an apartment, or two months of decent living for someone that already has a place to live. \$2,000 could be the boost that gets dozens of people out of their terrible situation.

Work projects could include shoveling, street cleaning, landscaping and other low skilled jobs. The money would go right back into the local economy instead of sitting in a snow day fund. The City could institute a drug screening requirement to ensure the funds aren't being used for drugs.

Parking ban tickets are funds that can't be planned for, so they are not dedicated to critical needs of the city. \$100,000 could significantly reduce homelessness and panhandlers each year. If these work projects succeed, more funds could be dedicated to future work projects and a real impact on the homeless and panhandler count would be seen.