



March 24, 2023

President Linda Morad and Honorable Members
of the New Bedford City Council
133 William Street
New Bedford, MA 02740

Dear President Morad and Members of the City Council:

It was with no small measure of surprise and disappointment that I received word of the City Council's attempt to place three non-binding referenda on the November ballot regarding Mayoral terms, rent control and the Community Preservation Act.

That these matters were considered without public outreach and input is both challenging and reflective of the worst form of lack of transparency and due diligence. That they are technically "non-binding" is not a remedy to the deliberative process and necessary fact-finding with which all public bodies are charged as a primary responsibility. That these matters entered the general public discourse only after your actions clearly shows the inadvisability of having taken those actions in the first place.

Let me be clear. We have challenges of affordability of rents, and indeed challenges of affordability of nearly everything we need to live in these inflationary times. Banking challenges, interest rate hikes and other economic factors adversely affect everyone. Rent control is and has never been an answer to affordable housing, and in communities like New Bedford where we are constantly looking to revitalize through investment and reinvestment, rent control largely creates the opposite of what it intends, by chilling new investment and the construction of both market-rate and affordable workforce housing.

It is incumbent on the city and its elected leadership to find positive ways of both spurring new investment and keeping the city affordable as a place to live. Rent control is not one of those ways. Even the non-binding aspect of the referenda does a tremendous amount of harm. Projects do not happen overnight. Rather they take months and sometimes years to come together and assurances at the end of the day that they will pencil out as modestly profitable. Such a referendum is a recipe for uncertainty in the marketplace. And that uncertainty guarantees that potential investment dollars go elsewhere. In addition, a referendum of this kind only creates the impression of false promises to the public who are financially under pressure. Who would not want lower rent?

The Community Preservation Act has been an essential tool in helping preserve and enhance open space, preserve buildings and making it possible to leverage funds for the purpose of building affordable housing units. To support asking the public to remove it undermines everything you would state as a

purpose behind asking the public to answer a referendum on rent control. Losing this funding source is counter-intuitive on its face and leaves a void that would undermine your best intentions.

As to the four-year term for Mayor, that issue was decided by the voters with resounding support following a signature gathering effort, a full and robust public campaign, press scrutiny and public awareness, and it has only once been a factor in electing our Mayor. I personally, with the full support of our Board of Directors, worked hard on that campaign for many reasons, none of which had anything to do with the current holder of the office. Good government needs good leadership with the stability to see issues through, to address concerns and sometimes controversial issues without always looking over their shoulders toward the next election. Mayors need that certainty to ensure that decisions remain in the best interests of the people they serve. And investors in our city, who commit for the long term, want to know that they will be working with an elected official whose decisions are not about political expediency but rather the present and future health of the community.

I am generally most grateful for the hard work and thankless tasks undertaken by our City Council, but in the case of these three referenda, I believe the Council has strayed in such a way as to prove damaging to our community. As a matter of course, we choose not to address the Council often, but when we do please know that as the second largest Chamber in the Commonwealth we do so because the stakes for New Bedford are so high.

On behalf of the Chamber I respectfully ask that you not take the dangerous step of overriding the Mayor's veto when you meet to consider his action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Kidder". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rick" and last name "Kidder" clearly distinguishable.

Rick Kidder
One SouthCoast Chamber