

Mayor Mitchell proposes Route 18 name change to John F. Kennedy Boulevard

Today, Mayor Jon Mitchell submitted a letter to the New Bedford City Council requesting that they officially change the name of the section of Massachusetts Route 18 from Elm Street to Cove Street from John F. Kennedy Memorial Highway to John F. Kennedy Boulevard.

In a letter addressed to Council President Brian K. Gomes and the City Council, the Mayor points out that the transformation of the southern half of Route 18, both the completed portion between Elm Street and Walnut Street, and the work slated to happen from Walnut to the southern terminus at Cove Street in 2017, meet the traditional definition of the term 'boulevard,' "a broad avenue in a city, usually having areas at the sides or center for trees, grass, or flowers."

In the letter, Mayor Mitchell stated, "As you know, the purpose of the rehabilitation of the stretch of J.F.K. Highway between Elm and Walnut Streets, and the anticipated rehabilitation of the section from Walnut Street to Cove Street, is to improve pedestrian access from our downtown and south end neighborhoods to the waterfront. This is done not only by adding traffic signals and narrowing travel lanes, but also by beautifying the streetscape, by transforming the road from highway to 'boulevard.'"

Mayor Mitchell goes on to say that with the low-cost, high-impact enhancements undertaken by the City, most notably the newly installed median trees and landscaping at key intersections, "we now have in place the elements of a true boulevard...a visually appealing and pedestrian-friendly road that truly connects our waterfront with our downtown."

City Council President Brian K. Gomes agreed. "For over 15 years, the people of New Bedford have imagined and anticipated a better Route 18, one that doesn't cut off the downtown and the neighborhoods from the water, but allows them to move back and forth. They've imagined a boulevard. Now it's here in the downtown, and will soon be the reality in the south end. The name of the road should reflect these changes."

Councilor Dana Rebeiro, who serves Ward 4 which contains the completed portion of the rehabilitation project and much of the Phase II section, added. "I think the new road is aesthetically pleasing and environmentally responsible with the addition of the trees in the median strip. I am appreciative to be a small part of turning the page on the past and embracing a future with a more integrated downtown and waterfront, while more importantly enhancing safety for pedestrians in the neighborhoods I represent south of downtown."

Though Route 18 is a state road, the portion for which the name change is proposed is under City control.