

Barros tapped as Walsh's economic development chief

By **Gintautas Dumcius** Feb. 10, 2014



Mayor Walsh announced the appointment of John Barros during a press conference this morning. Photo courtesy Travis Watson

Former mayoral candidate John Barros began his new job this week: chief of economic development under Mayor Marty Walsh. Standing with his wife Tchintcia, Barros was introduced at the South End headquarters of Future Chefs, a nonprofit focused on urban youth.

His name had been floated for jobs in the private sector, the office of lieutenant governor, and as a candidate for the Fifth Suffolk seat left vacant after the ouster of former state Rep. Carlos Henriquez. But, Barros said on Monday, "My true passion has been my work with the city."

Walsh, in explaining the hire, cited Barros's business background with giving him "an understanding of getting through that process, of opening a small business, working with small businesses along the Uphams Corner area." Barros said he plans to focus on areas like Dudley Square, which is experiencing a small building boom, aided by the conversion of the old Ferdinand building into the new Boston Public

Schools headquarters. "We've got to get that [neighborhood] in another gear," he said.

The cabinet post has under its purview consumer affairs and licensing, tourism, small and local business enterprise, and the Boston Residents Jobs Policy, which seeks to ensure that local residents and minorities are hired at local job sites. The job is separate from that of the head of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, a position Walsh hopes to fill by the summer.

Barros, 40, is a former School Committee member who was the first person of Cape Verdean descent to serve on the panel. He has also spent some time on Wall Street working for Chubb Group in Manhattan.

Before jumping into the mayoral race last year, he had served as executive director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, a community-focused nonprofit. "At DSNI, I helped to ensure residents benefited from the jobs and contracts created by construction projects in line with goals of 51 percent minority, 51 percent local, and 15 percent women on construction jobs," he said in answering the Reporter's mayoral questionnaire last year.

Barros also co-founded Restaurante Cesaria, which serves Cape Verdean cuisine in the Bowdoin Geneva area of Dorchester. The family enterprise rarely made money. During the campaign, Barros pointed to the money issues as one way he was able to show business owners he knows how difficult it is to run one. "We have had to figure out how to pay bills, we have had delinquent taxes that we have to get on plans for," he told the Reporter at the time, referring to the \$14,500 the restaurant owes in state and federal taxes.

Chris Douglass, the chef and owner of Tavolo and Ashmont Grill, two Dorchester restaurants, said he was heartened by the hiring and pointed to bureaucratic red tape as one thing Barros could tackle to boost economic development. "I would love to see some effort at 1010 Mass. Ave. that was concierge-like," he said. "So someone coming in would get triaged by someone who knows the ropes," noting that "it can be a mystery for first-time small business owners."

Barros was born in Roxbury and now lives on Virginia Street in Uphams Corner with Tchintcia and their two sons. He has also served as a lay leader at St. Patrick's Church, and was appointed the coordinator of the Cape Verdean Apostolate for the Archdiocese of

Boston.

He is the second former rival to join Walsh's Cabinet. Felix Arroyo, the former city councillor at-large who gave up his seat to run last year, was hired as the administration's health and human services chief in January. Like Barros, Arroyo endorsed Walsh over then-Councillor At-Large John Connolly in final election.

Charlotte Golar Richie, the former Dorchester state representative who also ran for mayor, endorsed Walsh soon afterwards, and has not joined the administration. The three former rivals served together on Walsh's transition team.

Walsh has said that jobs in the administration were not talked about during the election. "It never came up in discussion with anybody, including Charlotte," he told reporters.