



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 23, 2025  
City Hall Complex, Conference Room A  
1 Junkins Avenue  
Portsmouth, NH

1. **Welcome and Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 11:30 a.m.

2. **Roll Call:**

Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley; Councilor Katherine Cook; Councilor Vincent Lombardi; and Councilor John Tabor were present.

Staff: Suzanne Woodland, Deputy City Manager / Regulatory Counsel, (DCM); Susan Morrell, City Attorney (CA); Jane Ferrini, Senior Assistant City Attorney (SACA); Portsmouth Police Chief Mark Newport; Daisy Lavoie, IT Manager - Portsmouth Police Department; and Dr. Zach McLaughlin, Superintendent, Portsmouth School Department

Also present: Police Commissioner Buzz Scherr; Esther Kennedy, Portsmouth, NH; Petra Huda, Portsmouth, NH

3. **Review and Approval of the Minutes of the June 2, 2024 meeting:** Councilor Lombardi moved to accept the minutes of the June 2, 2025 meeting. Seconded by Councilor Tabor. All in favor. The motion was approved.

4. **Chapter 1, Section 1 - Administrative Code Updates**

**Updated IT and HR Language:** DCM provided an overview of her memo which outlined the revisions to the Administrative Code per Governance Committee discussions over past few months, along with tracked and clean versions of the revisions. The DCM's memo to the Governance Committee dated March 28, 2025 regarding the City Charter relative to IT and HR was also provided which concluded that the revisions made with respect to the Police Department and the School Department are consistent with the Charter, along with being mindful of the unique environments of various departments. Chief Newport, IT Supervisor Lavoie and Commissioner Scherr, representing the Police Department, and Superintendent McLaughlin of the School Department brought forth opposing views regarding collaboration, oversight, control and authority. Commission Scherr proposed amending the language to state that IT must consult or review technology acquisitions with the department vs. the department must receive prior approval from the IT Department. Chief Newport asked why this issue couldn't be addressed as a Standard Operating Procedure vs. making these changes as the proposed revisions add ambiguity. Chief Newport also stated that the Police Department has already been told that they need to go with a software company that does not meet

their needs or the software will not means the needs of the Police Department. Superintendent McLaughlin provided copies of a memo at the meeting which provided language which would enlist collaboration and coordination with IT and the School Department but would leave the statutory authority of such decisions with the School Board. DCM and CA provided an overview of the Charter and pertinent case law which supported the Governance Committee's consideration of the revisions which were made. Commissioner Scherr referenced RSA 105-C:4 which states that "The commissioners shall make and enforce all rules necessary for the operation of the police force in the manner most beneficial to the public" and believes that giving authority to the CIO is not consistent with the enabling statute. Councilor Cook referred to the vote taken in 2000 when the citizens of Portsmouth voted to amend the Charter and revise the roles of departments, and the work that the Governance Committee has been conducting was to bring the Administrative Code in line with current practice and what the Charter actually requires the City of Portsmouth to abide by.

At this point, Councilor Cook invited public comment on this issue. Esther Kennedy spoke about the formation of the Police Commission and the reason why the City of Portsmouth has elected officials due to corruption. She further stated that there needs to be a separation of power and that having all the technology under one silo would be a mistake. Kennedy also asked if the underlying factor was one of trust. Petra Huda echoed what Kennedy said and also referred to the Charter and that the RSAs gives the City Charter the power, therefore, elected commissioners of fire, police and the school board have authority over the department, not the municipality. She stated she agrees with Kennedy and Commission Scherr, that if it isn't broken, don't fix it. Assistant Mayor Kelley stated that it feels that there is a fear of losing power vs. whether the change will work. She proposed that an option for review could be included in the amendment if a software product isn't appropriate. At this point, DCM stated it was her opinion that the matter should be presented to the City Council for resolution with the current language and it could be amended at the City Council level. Councilor Tabor concurred. Scherr asked what the process would be to bring forward an amended packet to the City Council. Councilor Cook explained the process of bringing an amendment to an ordinance before the City Council. Councilor Cook stated that the concern at this point was that the Committee and Departments have had the same discussion repeatedly over a number of months and at this point, it should be presented for the City Council to decide. Councilor Tabor moved that the Governance Committee recommend to the City Council to approve the changes to Chapter 1 of the Administrative Code as presented in the meeting packet presented at the Governance Committee meeting on June 23, 2025, along with obtaining a legal opinion as to changes with the Charter. Seconded by Councilor Lombardi. The motion passed in the affirmative by a 3-1 vote. Councilor Cook advised that she will arrange to have this matter placed on a City Council meeting in August.

5. **Brief Update Special Event Permitting Process:** Senior Assistant City Attorney Ferrini updated the Committee on the development of a special events permit in OpenGov and that she will provide more information at the next meeting.
6. **Other Business:** None
7. **Public Comment:** See #4
8. **Announcements:** The next Governance Committee meeting will be scheduled for Monday, July 14, 2025 at 11:00 a.m.
9. **Adjournment:** Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Councilor Lombardi. All in favor. Motion was approved. Meeting adjourned at 1:55 p.m.

Meeting Minutes prepared by:  
Barbara Zulkiewicz

Minutes approved: July 14, 2025