



# **CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

## **Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee**

*Wednesday, November 5, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.*

*Conference Room A, City Hall/Zoom*

*1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH*

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### **Meeting Minutes**

**Committee Members Present:** Councilor John Tabor (Co-Chair), Councilor Kate Cook (Co-Chair), Police Chief Mark Newport, Peter Weeks, Cameron Horack, and Renee Plummer

**Committee Members Not Present:** City Manager Karen Conard, Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman, Police Commissioner Buzz Scherr, John O'Leary, and Mary Lou McElwain

**Members of the Public:** Bob Corash, Susan Sterry

**Staff Present:** Deputy City Manager Carl Weber, Deputy Chief Mike Maloney, Department of Public Works Director Peter Rice, Facilities Manager Joe Almeida, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett (minute taker), North Sturtevant (JSA), Richard Martz (JSA), Sandra Hodge (JSA), & Rodney McManus (ADG) via Zoom.

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Mayor McEachern addressed the Committee, emphasizing the goal of maximizing use of the municipal building to reduce costs through strategic space consolidation, creative planning, and service point realignment. He noted that the School Department prefers to be onsite at one of the schools, leaving additional space available for municipal use. The

Mayor stressed the importance of relocating staff from basement areas, exploring how AI may enhance policing and city operations, and confirmed the Committee will be reformed in the new year.

Peter Weeks asked whether a new offsite location was being considered; Mayor McEachern confirmed it was not. He clarified that the intent is to meet Police Department (PD) needs creatively, not to reduce their resources. The Mayor also stated he will work with the Co-Chairs to review committee composition and ensure alignment before presenting recommendations to the City Council and public.

### **Roll Call: 3:08 PM**

#### **I. Review and Approval of October 1, 2025 Minutes**

*Cameron Horack moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Peter Weeks. Motion passed unanimously (6-0-5)*

#### **II. Summary of JSA/City Staff Work to-Date**

- a. North Sturtevant noted JSA's approach aligns with the mayor's goals for this project.
- b. Richard Martz reported ongoing meetings with municipal leadership to build a space needs assessment, and follow-up discussions with PD leadership based on the October 1 meeting.

#### **III. Police Department Square Footage Update**

##### **a. Fleet Building – Collaborative Approach**

- Richard Martz reported revisions to plans, including reduced vehicle bay size saving approximately 2,000 sq. ft. Vehicle evidence storage was relocated to the fleet building to improve efficiency and adjacencies.
- Deputy City Manager Carl Weber noted that using lower-cost-per-square-foot areas for appropriate functions helps control costs.
- Councilor Kate Cook suggested utilizing some ground floor space for vehicle storage, especially if the basement level is being cleared out. Richard agreed with Cook's assessment.
- Councilor John Tabor asked if all fleet service would remain on campus. Martz indicated there will always be a need for onsite space for maintenance, but much of that could occur at DPW. Police Chief Mark Newport clarified that the garage is primarily for storage, with most maintenance occurring offsite.
- Councilor Tabor asked about balancing the fleet space needs with parking. Richard stated that is to be seen. Chief Newport noted that it's too early to determine.
- Peter Weeks requested PD or City Manager approval of changes to ensure feasibility. Carl Weber confirmed that this iterative review process is already occurring.
- Cameron Horack requested the square footage of the back parking lot. Facilities Manager Joe Almeida will provide this data. He pointed out that parking is already very limited at the back of the building.

#### **b. Grossing and Efficiency Factors**

- Richard Martz compared the Matrix and ADG reports - both close in findings but approach calculations differently. He identified missing spaces in the Matrix report (Records, Court, Auxiliary, the need for a community room, etc.). Deputy City Manager Weber expressed confidence in the operational validity of the current space needs. Renee Plummer asked who monitors material and fixture costs (e.g., toilets). DPW Director Peter Rice confirmed DPW will hire a resident engineer inspector, and JSA will remain involved and will utilize a professional estimator for cost of construction and materials. North Sturtevant confirmed contingency funds are included for unforeseen issues.
- Community Room and Square Footage Discussion: Councilor Cook questioned the inclusion of the community room in the PD's square footage and expressed concern over a 9,000 sq. ft. discrepancy. Richard explained JSA included several additional functional spaces omitted by Matrix. North recommended focusing on consistent personnel housing rather than small variances. Councilor Cook urged a conservative square footage estimate, citing distrust in ADG's higher figures. Director Rice suggested focusing on programmatic needs to determine realistic space. Cameron Horack proposed targeting a midpoint between both studies.
- Peter Weeks asked whether JSA stands behind ADG figures. North noted both reports are useful benchmarks; JSA will develop a balanced plan.
- Councilor Cook suggested lower estimates to protect the budget. Deputy City Manager Weber confirmed consensus to use the lower number as guidance, reassessing as needed. Chief Newport believed the current 5,000 sq. ft. variance is reasonable and non-critical.
- Cost per Square Foot Discussion: Councilor John Tabor noted earlier cost estimate of \$1,000 per sq. ft. for hardened police space. Shared spaces could reduce costs. Chief Newport explained costs depend on security requirements and use (e.g., Real-Time Crime Center). Director Rice stated that \$38M is a more accurate project cost target, as the publicized \$42.5M figure includes soft costs.

#### **IV. The Future of Policing, AI, and Real-Time Information Centers**

- a. Deputy City Manager Weber shared resources on AI's potential in policing – improving efficiency without reducing personnel.
- b. Richard clarified that current designs include “flex space” for a possible future Real-Time Information Center. Peter Weeks confirmed this space was not part of the previous plans. Cameron asked about PD shifts; Chief Newport stated each shift is 10-hours long (multiple shifts per day).
- c. Councilor Cook suggested shared conference space. Deputy City Manager Weber and Director Rice supported the idea where security allows.
- d. Peter Weeks proposed exploring alternative uses for the Council Chambers.

#### **V. Municipal Square Footage Update**

- a. **Key Adjacencies, future workflows, efficiencies and storage**

- Deputy City Manager Weber and Richard reported ongoing department interviews and assessment of agencies and workflows.
- Key Findings:
  - Main level to remain public-facing; non-public-facing departments can be located elsewhere.
  - Growth is minimal; most departments request more conference space.
  - Emphasis on privacy and dignified service spaces.
  - Widespread need for improved storage; exploring offsite and digital options.
- Councilor Cook noted that digitization costs are less than building space.
- Facilities Manager Almeida reported department heads are open to shared or cubicle workspaces. Deputy City Manager Weber added that open space can be reconfigured more easily.
- North highlighted balancing openness with necessary security. Richard stated that most private office requests stem from confidentiality needs.

## VI. Next Steps

- a. Allow JSA to complete municipal staff interviews and consolidate findings – pushing next meeting out to early December.

## VII. Public Comment

- a. **Susan Sterry** (Broad St., Portsmouth) asked about next steps after interviews and whether employees will have input.
  - North and Richard confirmed that department feedback will continue during design development.
- b. **Bob Corash** (Haven Rd., Portsmouth) asked about PD firing range size discrepancies and dispatch relocation possibilities.
  - Richard explained that Matrix's larger figure assumed a new building, while ADG's number reflected upgrades to the existing range.
  - Chief Newport noted dispatch must remain onsite; Fire Station 2 lacks sufficient space and is required redundant space that exists for temporary emergency use.
  - Renee Plummer asked if the firing range is used daily. Chief Newport confirmed that it isn't, but it remains available as needed. A new firing range is not planned.

## Future Meeting Schedule & Adjournment

Next Meeting: December 10, 2025 at 3:00 PM

- Peter Weeks requested that the committee receive responses to the questions previously submitted. Deputy City Manager Weber confirmed that providing those answers is the goal prior to the next meeting. Councilor Cook encouraged members to send any unresolved questions directly to the Co-Chairs for follow-up.

*A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Peter Weeks; seconded by Cameron Horack. Motion passed unanimously (6-0-5).*

Meeting adjourned at 4:46 p.m.