



# **CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

## **Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee**

*Wednesday, October 1, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.*

*Conference Room A, City Hall*

*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 Commissioner Buzz Scherr, Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman, Police Chief Mark Newport, Peter Weeks, Mary Lou McElwain, John O'Leary, and Renee Plummer

**Committee Members Not Present:** City Manager Karen Conard, Cameron Horack

**Members of the Public:** Robert Corash

**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), Richard Marx (JSA), Via Zoom: North Sturtevant (JSA), and Rodney McManus (ADG).

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- I. Roll Call 3:00 PM**  
Roll Call attendance was performed
- II. Approval of August 27, 2025 Minutes**
  - Amendments:

- Peter Weeks noted that on Page 4, Item #3, the square footage should read “10,000-12,000”.
- An update was requested to reflect Buzz as a new member of the committee, replacing Police Commission Chair Kate Coyle.
- *John O’Leary moved to approve the minutes of these amendments; seconded by Peter Weeks. Motion passed unanimously (9-0-2)*

### **III. Police Department Square Footage Reconciliation and Recommendation Overview of Key Differences Between Assessments**

- Richard Martz (JSA):
  - Stated that reconciliation focuses on differences between ADG and Matrix space needs assessments for the Police Department (PD), showing a 7,000-8,000 sq ft discrepancy.
  - Noted that departments such as records, court, auxiliary (approx. 2,100 sq ft) were not included in the Matrix report but are included in JSA’s program.
  - Emphasized the inclusion of critical mechanical spaces not accounted for by Matrix.
  - Identified approx. 4,000 sq ft of shared space between municipal and PD operations.
  - Referenced the Reconciled Space Needs Assessment Summary (Page 3 of JSA Report), noting a total of 47,036 sq ft for the PD (a 7,000 sq ft change), and 66,683 gross sq ft for the municipal side. Measurements are based on CAD files and include approx. 4,000 sq ft of shared space.
- Facilities Manager Joe Almeida:
  - Advised the committee not to fixate on square footage at this stage.
  - Confirmed the figures are accurate and CAD=based; net square footage will be refined as the project advances.
- John O’Leary:
  - Found the JSA report straight forward and referenced a key line in the report: “there are inefficiencies when repurposing building space that may be altered.”
  - Stressed this project is an opportunity to build based on real and future needs, unlike previous retrofits.
- Rick Chellman, Planning Board Chair:
  - Inquired about differences in methodology between Matrix and ADG.
  - Martz explained that Matrix used a mathematical, greenfield (new construction) model not based on drawings, while ADG designed for future flexibility, such as designing larger storage areas that could later serve as office space.
- Mary Lou McElwain:
  - Noted that Page 3 of the JSA report projects space needs through 2044.

### **Fleet and Specialized Space Considerations**

- Peter Weeks:

- Questioned the 7,000 sq ft increase (4x larger than current space) and its justification.
- Martz explained this includes specific needs in the fleet building, designing for long-term flexibility.
- Emphasized the need to distinguish between “wants” and “needs”.
- Police Chief Mark Newport:
  - Clarified that the existing fleet facility lacks proper garage and climate-controlled evidence storage.
  - Explained the operational need for additional vehicle bays and sally port space.
- Councilor Kate Cook:
  - Asked if the fleet expansion includes sally ports and evidence-related bays; also questioned the frequency of sally port and prisoner cell use
  - Suggested exploring dual-use efficiency (e.g., using sally ports as crime scene bays when not in use). Chief Newport clarified this would compromise operational function/security.
- DPW Director Peter Rice:
  - Clarified the 4,700 sq ft does not include fleet maintenance and that the JSA report/proposal is forward-looking.
  - Stated design specifics are not yet set.
- Chair Rick Chellman, Planning Board:
  - Proposed considering vehicle lifts due to limited land area.
- Deputy City Manager Carl Weber:
  - Confirmed the process is focused on identifying long-term needs efficiently.
- Renee Plummer:
  - Requested clarification on the proposed sally port request. Chief Newport confirmed the intent is to house two vehicles. Director Rice voiced his understanding of the operational importance of adding the additional space.
- Rodney McManus (ADG):
  - Reiterated that all the numbers are preliminary and aimed at providing future flexibility.
- Police Commissioner Buzz Scherr:
  - Emphasized the importance of planning for the future and not sacrificing it for current cost savings.

### **Committee Direction and Process**

- John O’Leary:
  - Emphasized the committee’s role in reconciling reports to guide scope and scale decisions.
- Councilor John Tabor & Chair Rick Chellman:
  - Stressed the importance of understanding total space allocations across departments before assessing fit within the existing structure.
- Rodney McManus (ADG):

- Addressed the unique requirements of police operations, such as confidentiality and security, with limited shared space opportunities.
- Councilor Kate Cook:
  - Expressed concerned that the committee may be veering back toward a plan the City Council rejected and emphasized caution moving forward.

### **Technology and AI Considerations**

- Renee Plummer:
  - Asked whether AI could reduce administrative space needs.
- Rodney McManus (ADG):
  - Responded that while AI may improve efficiency, functions like real-time crime centers may increase space needs.
- Councilor John Tabor:
  - Noted IT server space has shrunk due to cloud computing; Martz confirmed the server room is appropriately sized (160 sq ft) and redundancy is still necessary.

### **Cost, Efficiency, and Prioritization**

- Peter Weeks:
  - Asked about the basis for 2044 projections. Rodney (ADG) cited population growth, visitor trends, housing expansion, and modern policing needs as data sources.
- Mary Lou McElwain:
  - Stated that the PD is currently the top space priority, with other departments yet to express urgent needs.
- Deputy City Manager Carl Weber:
  - Discussed shared spaces and efficient layouts as ways to reduce new construction.
- Councilor Kate Cook:
  - Reminded the committee that space needs from city departments have not yet been received.
  - Noted that requesting new space for City Hall is politically sensitive and likely to rank low in priority.
  - Warned the current proposal resembles an unlimited-budget scenario, while no clear budget has been established.
- Commissioner Buzz Scherr & Chair Rick Chellman:
  - Supported accepting current PD square footage as a working preliminary number, subject to revision.
- Facilities Manager Joe Almeida & John O’Leary:
  - Noted that the square footage reflects compromises and should be refined to minimize new construction and prioritize renovations.

## **IV. Update on City Space Needs Assessment Process/Next Steps**

- Richard Martz (JSA):

- Informed the committee that JSA is currently meeting with city departments over the next month to assess municipal space needs.
- Following two rounds of meetings, layout and adjacency planning will begin.
- Facilities Manager Joe Almeida & Director Peter Rice:
  - Noted the importance of treating municipal and school departments as part of one government structure for planning purposes.
- Deputy City Manager Carl Weber:
  - Recommended that the next meeting occur one month later to allow for sufficient data gathering to have a preliminary understanding of opportunities.

**V. Future Meeting Schedule**

Next Meeting: November 5, 2025 at 3:00 PM

- Peter Weeks requested that all meeting materials be distributed to the committee no later than the Friday prior to the meeting.

**VI. New Business**

- No new business was introduced.

**VII. Public Comment**

- Robert Corash (Haven Rd.) requested that printed copies of meeting materials be made available at the City Clerk's Office for public pickup.

**VIII. Adjournment**

*A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by John O'Leary; seconded by Rick Chellman. Motion passed unanimously (9-0-2).*

Meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.