



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

Wednesday, December 10, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.

Conference Room A, City Hall

1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH

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, Cameron Horack, and Renee Plummer

Committee Members Not Present: City Manager Karen Conard

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), Richard Martz (JSA), Sandra Hodge (JSA), via Zoom Rodney McManus (ADG), & North Sturtevant (JSA).

Roll Call 3:02 PM

- I. Review and Approval of November 5, 2025 Minutes**
 - a. Peter Weeks moved to approve the minutes with suggested amendment; seconded by John O'Leary. Motion passed (6-0-4, 1 absent).*

- b. John O’Leary requested an amendment to remove a synopsis of the mayor’s comments made before the meeting was officially called to order. Peter Weeks accepted this amendment as part of the motion.

II. Municipal Space Needs Assessment Progress

Richard Martz (JSA) provided an update on the Municipal Space Needs Assessment.

- a. JSA continued to evaluate needs assuming all departments remain on campus. Potential alternative locations for staff have not been determined and will be informed by ongoing analysis and feedback.
- b. Departmental interviews are ongoing; the assessment remains iterative and subject to refinement.
- c. Preliminary findings suggest potential space savings of approximately 11,500 sq. ft. through improved layouts and storage efficiencies.
- d. Estimated space needs range from approximately 55,000 sq. ft. (lower threshold) to the current footprint with a possible 10,000 sq. ft. addition if all departments remain on site.
- e. Existing storage areas are inadequate due to environmental and infrastructure limitations. Digitization and off-site storage options are being evaluated - Deputy City Manager Carl Weber will assess records retention requirements and associated costs for digitization or off-site storage.
- f. Committee discussion acknowledged statutory paper-record retention requirements and the possibility of legislation change.
- g. Category 4 Requirements: Police Commissioner Buzz Scherr emphasized the necessity of meeting IBC Category 4 standards for police facilities. JSA confirmed Category 4 considerations are part of the planning. While the existing facility is grandfathered, additions may trigger compliance requirements. Facilities Manager Joe Almeida noted Fire Station 2 meets Category 4 standards and that evaluations of upgrades are common practice. JSA will evaluate what is required to achieve Category 4 compliance so costs can be developed. Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman agreed that Category 4 considerations must be resolved prior to advancing recommendations. Peter Weeks clarified it is not within the committee’s charge to consider offsite options for the Police Department. City Councilor John Tabor stated it appears unlikely that police functions would go into the Seybolt building; Richard Martz agreed but said nothing was fully ruled out.

III. Engineering Survey Progress

- a. JSA reported that engineers have completed a full walkthrough and are finalizing their report. Preliminary findings include:
 - The Cottage building does not share utilities with the main complex.
 - Renovation within occupied areas will be challenging.
 - Mechanical systems, particularly HVAC and ventilation, will require major upgrades.
 - The penthouse is only partially functional and contains abandoned space.

- b. All plumbing fixtures will require replacement.
- c. Fire protection systems are generally in good condition.
- d. Electrical systems have received significant upgrades, including a whole-building generator; remaining work focuses on fixtures, switches, and energy efficiency.
- e. Mechanical/HVAC is anticipated to be the most complex and costly component; phasing options are under review to reduce operational disruption. North Sturtevant of JSA explained that one strategy under consideration is improving vertical distribution to allow easier access to mechanical systems. Facilities Manager Joe Almeida added that the Seybolt building's attic provides advantageous access for such work, though managing staff operations and maintaining public tolerance during construction will be challenging. City Councilor Kate Cook asked whether any existing HVAC components could be reused. DPW Director Peter Rice responded that reuse is unlikely, and Joe Almeida described challenges in meeting code requirements during renovation. He discussed the potential use of mini-splits; upgrading from a 2-pipe system (individual heating or cooling) to a 4-pipe system (simultaneous heating and cooling); and incorporating modern fan coil units. Councilor Tabor noted the benefit of achieving energy efficiency with these upgrades.

IV. Review of Prior Questions

- a. Richard Martz responded to Peter Weeks' question, noting that the feasibility of certain additions, including an additional elevator, will depend on the building layout and whether space is incorporated into police facilities.
- b. Space currently occupied by the School Department functions and potential future use will be clarified by staff. Relocation decisions remain under the authority of the City Manager and will factor-in operational needs, public access, and cost implications.
- c. Mary Lou McElwain asked about plans for the next several years to ensure employee health and safety of Police Department staff while building plans are developed. JSA indicated the project will likely proceed in multiple phases, with priority given to police facilities. DPW Director Peter Rice stated that existing facilities will continue to be maintained. Commissioner Scherr raised concerns about the impact of facility conditions and project timelines on police recruitment and retention.
- d. Councilor Cook noted that the City Council recently adopted a CIP budget, with funding anticipated in FY 2028, placing the project approximately 18 months away from initiation. Commissioner Scherr inquired about previously allocated building-related police funding, which Councilor Cook confirmed remains available, and reiterated concern that even a two-year delay presents significant challenges for the Police Department.
- e. Renee Plummer asked about the amount of funding earmarked for the Police Department. It was noted that \$4.2 million was allocated for the design phase. \$38 million would require bonding for the remainder of the project. Deputy

City Manager Weber stated that staff will prepare a summary of funding details. Councilor Tabor noted that a prior plan to construct a police addition faced challenges in gaining public confidence, which led to the current approach and is expected to receive broader community support. Cameron Horack stated there was consensus that the Category 4 facilities study is necessary and may advance prior to the next meeting. Councilor Cook emphasized that the committee is moving as expeditiously as possible while ensuring decisions are fully informed.

V. Next Steps

- a. Further analysis of police points of service (lobby, booking, sally port, etc.)
- b. Continued “big picture” coordination with departments prior to public or committee presentation.
- c. Cost estimates will be developed later in the process once scope is refined.
- d. Initial planning work will continue through February and March to help yield an estimated number.
- e. A question was raised regarding the application process. Councilor Cook stated that the mayor will reappoint the committee, and that any further instructions or guidance will be communicated to committee members.
- f. Cameron Horack expressed concern that public confidence in the project and its timeline is limited, emphasizing that an inaccurate cost estimate could have significant consequences and that it is important to get it right the first time. Peter Weeks added that the plan must be viable and clearly communicated in order to secure funding.
- g. Mary Lou McElwain announced that this would be her final meeting, noting her resignation from the committee. She emphasized the importance of prioritizing the health and safety of the Police Department.

VI. Upcoming Meeting Schedule

- a. February 11, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.
- b. Tentatively March 11, 2026

VII. Public Comment

- a. **Susan Sterry** (Broad St., Portsmouth) commented on the importance of considering safety for the entire municipal complex, not solely the police department.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by John O’Leary; seconded by Cameron Horack. Motion passed (10-0, 1 absent).

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.