

City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire



Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

Wednesday, February 26, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.

Conference Room A, City Hall

1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH

Meeting Minutes

[These minutes were amended on 5/16/25 to include a committee-requested addition. See Section V., paragraph 2).]

Present: City Councilor John Tabor (Co-Chair), City Councilor Kate Cook (Co-Chair), Police Commission Chair Kate Coyle, Cameron Horack, Mary Lou McElwain, John O'Leary, Peter G. Weeks, Rick Chellman

Absent: Renee Plummer

Members of the Public: Robert Corash, Susan Sterry, Pat Bagley, Dick Bagley, Karen Senecal, Tory Brooks

Staff Present: City Manager Karen Conard, Police Chief Mark Newport, Department of Public Works Director Peter Rice, Facilities Manager Joe Almeida, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett (minute taker)

Co-Chair John Tabor reminded committee members to direct all questions to the Chairs. He also encouraged them to review online resources and reach out to the Chairs if information is missing.

I. Review and Approval of 2/12/2025 Meeting Minutes

John O’Leary moved to accept and approve the minutes of the February 12, 2025, Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee meeting. Seconded by Peter G. Weeks and voted. Motion passed, 8-0.

II. Presentation and Questions on the Green Buildings Policy

Torey Brooks presented the city’s Green Buildings Policy, sharing her experience in balancing sustainability with the development of public buildings and infrastructure. The policy, available on the city’s website, covers retrofits, additions, and new construction projects. She focused on the economic aspects of municipal building projects, particularly large-scale ones, and highlighted how upgrades to systems like HVAC, windows and facades can lead to long-term cost savings.

Concerns were raised about the upfront costs of sustainable construction, with an emphasis on understanding project expectations, materials costs, and their lifespan. The scale of a project impacts the analysis of overall costs, including design and planning. A request was made for Torey Brooks to review the project’s preliminary and final design plans, once developed, to ensure all aspects are thoroughly considered. A question was raised about the cost savings from the Portsmouth Library’s green certification after 10+ years, with an upcoming plan for the building and lessons learned from previous projects informing future decisions. Tax credits and grants were discussed, with a recommendation to consider rebate programs before construction to maximize savings. It was noted that the city’s financial department plans ahead for potential financial needs related to these projects.

III. City Staff Space Needs

There is a need to define future municipal space needs, as no clear baseline exists. \$443,305.29 has been spent on the police department feasibility and site selection study, with a remaining balance of \$900,000 (scheduled to be authorized in FY26). A design firm will be contracted soon, with the staffing study nearly completed, but the full alignment between the police department and municipal building will be finalized once the designer is onboard by the end of April.

The square footage of the municipal building will be provided, and while no new space is expected, there is a focus on creating more efficient, shared spaces, to reduce underutilized areas. Concerns about the police department Space Needs Study were raised, and the Matrix Staffing Needs Study will be available by April 2025. A breakdown of spending was requested to avoid duplication of efforts, as funds have gone to ADG and LaValle Brensinger. The Community Police Facility Working Group’s review of site selection also ensured that adjacencies were considered in the plans.

IV. Considerations for Police Building Workflow and Layout from IACP

Co-Chair Tabor shared insights from his training at the IACP Police Building Conference, which highlighted advanced floor plans and layouts that optimize adjacencies for efficient police services. A discussion was held about the potential relocation of municipal services to improve overall serviceability within the city hall complex. Some elements of the conference presentation were seen as not directly applicable to the police department's needs but were valuable in demonstrating best practices for space organization.

The importance of placing key functions closer to one another in the layout was emphasized, and the possibility of securing grants for specialized units like New Hampshire's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task force – of which the Portsmouth Police Department is the state hub – was discussed. It was noted that grants are specific and depend on availability. The funding of special units like the Seacoast Emergency Response Team (SERT) was also discussed, with questions about how taxpayers are supporting these services compared to other communities. It was suggested that shared resources, like NH ICAC and SERT, could be funded by the communities benefiting from them. The idea of mutual aid agreements and reimbursement for shared resources was also mentioned.

V. Work Plan

Future committee meetings will focus on several key areas: a review of the 2016 space needs study, followed by the release of the Matrix Staffing Needs Study in April. A design firm will be contracted by late April or May. The committee will also examine the city's municipal building deficiencies. Additionally, a tour of various law enforcement facilities, including Rockingham County Sheriff's Department, Dover PD, Salem PD, and Middletown, MA PD (currently under construction with building plans available online), will be organized. Councilor Cook also expressed interest in touring municipal buildings, ideally a retrofit.

Peter Weeks requested an outline of the city's municipal building deficiencies. Director of Public Works Peter Rice verbally provided a list, including issues with plumbing, electrical systems, HVAC, interior finishes, and windows. He also noted several recently completed projects, such as roof replacement, façade improvements, installation of an emergency generator, and repointing and sealing of brickwork (separate from the façade work). [amended post-meeting]

VI. Public Comment

Bob Corash (Haven Rd.) thanked the committee for the informative tour of Portsmouth's city hall complex and raised concerns about the 2015 report that highlighted \$11M in needed infrastructure repairs for the entire municipal complex. He asked about the

remaining work for the building, particularly regarding leaking pipes and other existing challenges.

Sue Sterry (Broad St.) requested clarity on the specific stages of the process, the committee's expectations, and what to expect moving forward.

Dick Bagley (Pleasant Street) with experience in the building processes as a former member of a police commission in another town, expressed concern that the committee's focus was placing politics over cost and what is best for the community and the police department.

VII. Adjournment

Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Co-Chair Kate Cook motioned to adjourn at 4:47 p.m. Seconded by Cameron Horack.

Motion passed 8-0.