



# CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

## Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

*Wednesday, May 14, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.*

*Conference Room A, City Hall*

*1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH*

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### **Meeting Minutes**

[These minutes were amended on 5/30/25 to include a committee-requested correction.  
See Section V.]

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

**Committee Members Not Present:** Police Commission Chair Kate Coyle, Renee Plummer

**Members of the Public:** Robert Corash, Petra Huda, Karen Senecal, Deputy Chief Mike Maloney

**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)

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#### **I. Review and Approval of 2/26/25 & 3/26/25 Meeting Minutes**

Cameron Horack requested that meeting minutes be distributed within 72 hours of each meeting. Peter Weeks noted that his request for a building deficiency report, posted to the Blue Ribbon Committee's webpage, was omitted from the February 26 minutes and asked that it be added. Mr. Weeks also proposed that the committee meet on June 18, 2025, due to a personal conflict with the June 25<sup>th</sup> meeting date.

*John O'Leary moved to approve the amended minutes and confirm the June 18 meeting; seconded by Cameron Horack. Motion passed unanimously (7-0-2).*

## **II. Matrix Consulting Police Department Staffing Analysis Presentation**

Richard Brady (Project Manager), Philip Berry, John Scruggs and Tim Donohoe presented a draft of the staffing needs study via Zoom. Matrix, with 20+ years of experience, conducted interviews with key stakeholders, participated in ride-alongs, and toured the police department facility. The study aims to evaluate current staffing levels and project future needs. The key findings indicated that emergency communications staffing is critically low. Matrix recommended additional staff, including one new Records staff, several additional dispatch personnel (including one supervisor), and one additional officer in Personnel and Training. All other operational functions meet or exceed industry standards. The Matrix team are currently analyzing community growth and facility planning as they develop a draft of their final report.

- a. Richard Brady confirmed for Peter Weeks that current staff vacancies were considered in the analysis.
- b. Mary Lou McElwain asked about the data timeline for the draft report; Mr. Brady confirmed the analysis was based on calendar year 2024 data.
- c. Cameron Horack inquired about the seasonal variation referenced in the presentation, specifically how seasonal demands impact staffing and facility usage. The Matrix team noted patrol needs peak in the summer, often met through overtime, but facilities are not significantly affected.
- d. Councilor Kate Cook asked for a breakdown of police and fire calls within the dispatch center. Philip Berry estimated that approximately 65% of calls were police-related, with the remaining 35% attributed to fire and EMS. Fire calls, he noted, typically involve more units and take longer to resolve. Councilor Cook further inquired about alternative dispatch models. Matrix representatives explained that, while Portsmouth dispatchers currently handle both call-taking and dispatching responsibilities, the recommended model separates these roles. They also noted that co-location of fire and police dispatch operations is generally beneficial, more cost-effective and contributes positively to employee satisfaction/morale.
- e. Mary Lou McElwain asked about the staff survey conducted by the Matrix Group. Matrix confirmed the survey was conducted internally with staff; however, there was a QR code accessible to members of the public to provide external input.

- f. Cameron Horack expressed concern over the 8,400 overtime hours incurred due to dispatch staffing challenges and requested a cost comparison of current overtime use versus regular shift-coverage at full staffing. Karen Senecal offered to provide that information. Matrix clarified that overtime costs referenced are related to police officer and firefighter coverage in the dispatch center, not overtime incurred by dispatch personnel. Matrix recommended additional dispatch positions to reduce reliance on overtime for coverage.
- g. Councilor John Tabor asked about ways to reduce turnover rates in dispatch. Matrix cited facility design, work environment, compensation, work schedules, promotional structure, and wellness programs as key factors in retention.
- h. John O’Leary commented that low public meeting turnout likely reflects satisfaction in the police department. He concluded his remarks by offering praise for the Portsmouth Police Department.

### **III. Update on the Engagement of Architectural Firm**

- a. Peter Weeks asked if the selected architectural firm would attend the next meeting. City Manager Karen Conard said it’s not confirmed. DPW Director Peter Rice reported proposals were received; interviews are scheduled for Friday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>. The top-ranked firm will enter contract negotiations. Each firm has been provided access to the same building information that this committee has reviewed – see committee’s webpage.  
Mr. Weeks suggested meeting with the top three firms; City Manager Conard clarified that the selection process is a management responsibility and not subject to direct committee involvement.
- b. Rick Chellman asked about scope; City Manager Conard stated it will be defined in a subsequent meeting with the firm and the Committee.
- c. Councilor Kate Cook asked about the Matrix final report timeline. The City Manager confirmed the final report will not be available in time for the Committee’s next meeting - Peter Rice estimated four to five weeks.
- d. Mary Lou McElwain voiced concerns over meeting cancellations and delays in scheduling important discussions; suggested earlier start times to allow for substantive discussion. City Manager Conard acknowledged and noted the Committee is gaining momentum in its work to gather essential information. Councilor John Tabor proposed extending the next meeting to 90 minutes, starting no earlier than 3:00 PM.
- e. Continued discussion addressed staffing assumptions, best practices from other communities, and the need for flexible, growth-aware design planning. Councilor Tabor emphasized that future design decisions will be informed by alternative layouts provided by the selected architectural firm. John O’Leary stressed planning for future needs, not just current ones. The final Matrix report is anticipated to provide more insight into future projections and space needs recommendations for more evidence-based project guidance.
- f. Peter Weeks raised the issue of the school department’s potential involvement, and Councilor Cook expressed interest in further discussion of the completed

building tours and disposition of assets within the existing building, including school-related space.

- g. The committee agreed to maintain the next meeting date: May 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### **IV. Public Comment**

- a. There were no public comments offered by in-person or Zoom attendees.

#### **V. Future Meetings & Adjournment**

Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 @ 3:00 PM

June Meeting Added: \*Wednesday, June 18, 2025 @ 4:00 PM – 5:30 PM

*A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by John O'Leary and seconded by Cameron Horack. The motion passed unanimously (7-0-2).*

Meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.