



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

Wednesday, May 28, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.

Conference Room A, City Hall

1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH

Meeting Minutes

[These minutes were amended on 6/12/25 to include a committee-requested correction.]

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

Committee Members Not Present: Co-Chair John Tabor, Renee Plummer

Members of the Public: Robert Corash, Deputy Chief Maloney

Staff Present: Police Chief Mark Newport, Department of Public Works Director Peter Rice, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett (minute taker)

I. Review and Approval of 5/14/25 Meeting Minutes

Roll Call: Conducted by Chair Cook.

Peter Weeks requested an amendment to clarify details about the June 11 meeting.

Councilor Cook noted she hopes the committee will have the final Matrix report by the June meeting. DPW Director Peter Rice clarified the report will include

future staffing and space needs recommendations and may not be available by June 11. Discussion confirmed that the draft staffing report (Matrix Study) was shared with the City Council; the final report still pending.

Peter Weeks moved to approve the amended minutes and confirm the June 11 meeting; seconded by Rick Chellman. Motion passed unanimously (7-0-2).

II. Portsmouth Facility Tour Recap

- a. Peter Weeks noted the potential for reconfiguring the existing building space for improved police use. He pointed out that the occupies a significant portion of the building and should be included in the discussion.
- b. John O'Leary agreed that space could be optimized but emphasized financial limitations and the need to balance cost with priorities; needs vs. wants. He stressed that project delays could lead to increased costs as time goes by.
- c. Cameron Horack cited asbestos in floor tiles and called for a long-term vision to ensure safe, healthy, and efficient workspaces. He emphasized leveraging available resources (e.g. Matrix Study and building specifications) to inform initial planning.
- d. Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman agreed, highlighting inefficiencies within the police facility and the broader municipal complex. He stressed the committee's charge to assess the current building's capabilities before considering expansion.
- e. Mary Lou McElwain urged a strong focus on police department's needs, noting that the rest of the building is generally in better condition.
- f. Police Commission Chair Kate Coyle emphasized planning for long-term city growth (50+ years), noting that Dover has nearly outgrown its facility.
- g. Councilor Kate Cook highlighted inadequate lab and evidence space for the police department, as well as challenges with building navigation and the HVAC system. She advocated for a unified, accessible municipal space, similar to Dover's model.
- h. Rick Chellman expressed the importance of a holistic yet cost-conscious planning approach. He cautioned against relying solely on the architect firm's input and emphasized considering future city growth and densification and possible impacts on all municipal resources.
- i. In response to questions from Mary Lou McElwain, Peter Weeks and John O'Leary, Director Rice reported that the architect selection process is underway. Interviews have been conducted (including several local firms), and a contract will be signed in the next few weeks. He emphasized the need for strong public engagement and effective communication. The contract will be phased, and the RFP – currently available online- will also be posted to the Municipal Blue Ribbon Committee's webpage for accessibility. Peter Rice encouraged patience, as the process will take time. Mary Lou McElwain stressed the importance of organizing reports and information efficiently.

III. Dover Facilities Tour Recap

- a. Cameron Horack and John O’Leary said the tour provided useful context but noted differences between the cities (e.g., land availability, proximity to county services). Insights from Dover’s police staff revealed that they would redesign certain features based on current needs, particularly due to a shortage of storage space.
- b. Police Chief Mark Newport found the tour helpful in visualizing a modern police facility. While Dover’s design isn’t a perfect match for Portsmouth, it helped illustrate the needed upgrades. He mentioned that a previously proposed addition to the front of the building would have met the department’s needs but was not approved due to concerns about aesthetics and blocked views of downtown and the Mill Pond from the municipal lot.
- c. Councilor Kate Cook was impressed by Dover’s efficient layout and centralized municipal services. She suggested reevaluating Portsmouth’s City Hall layout, possibly relocating the Council Chambers to open up critical access areas. Peter Weeks also supported relocating key public-facing departments closer to the main entrance.
- d. Mary Lou McElwain questioned whether the current police department site is suitable. Councilor Cook clarified that this is deemed outside of the committee’s scope.
- e. Peter Weeks stated he did not attend the tour intentionally, as he didn’t feel the charge of the committee was to mimic another city’s model but to cater to the needs of Portsmouth residents and municipal staff. He looks forward to the architect’s recommendations.
- f. Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman was unable to attend but expressed a willingness to visit the Dover facilities independently if deemed helpful.
- g. The general sentiment was that while the tour was informative, it should not dictate Portsmouth’s approach. It provided helpful benchmarks for modern standards and recruitment considerations.
- h. Director Peter Rice acknowledged frustration with the pace of the project and reminded the committee that the process will be a “marathon, not a sprint.” He agreed to post this summary to the Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee’s webpage.
- i. Peter Weeks expressed satisfaction with the May 14 minutes.

IV. Public Comment

- a. **Robert Corash** (Haven Rd.) expressed concern about the project’s pace and asked about structural plans for the municipal complex. Director Rice confirmed such plans exist. Mr. Corash also inquired about the next steps of the process and a timeline. Director Rice responded that architect selection is ongoing, and the earliest design meeting is expected in July 2025. The project may take 1.5 years to reach the bid stage, depending on public engagement and

approval. Councilor Cook added that the committee's recommendation to the City Council is anticipated by the end of 2025 for inclusion in the next budget cycle.

V. Future Meetings & Adjournment

Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 11, 2025 @ 3:00 PM

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

Meeting adjourned at 3:58 PM