



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

Wednesday, June 11, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.

Conference Room A, City Hall

1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH

Meeting Minutes

[These minutes were amended on 6/18/25 & 6/25/25 as instructed by the committee.]

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

Committee Members Not Present: City Manager Karen Conard

Members of the Public: Deputy Chief Maloney, PPD Business Operations Manager Karen Senecal

Staff Present: Department of Public Works Director Peter Rice, Facilities Manager Joe Almeida, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett (minute taker)

I. Review and Approval of 5/28/25 Meeting Minutes

Roll Call: Conducted by Councilor Tabor.

Amendments:

- Peter Weeks corrected a typo in Section III, b. to read “Mill Pond”.
- John O’Leary noted the minutes incorrectly listed the Facilities Manager as present. *John O’Leary moved to approve the amended minutes; seconded by Peter Weeks. Motion passed unanimously (10-0-1).*

Discussion – Matrix Staffing Data

Peter Weeks raised a discrepancy in the interpretation of police staffing figures: he referenced 64 currently staffed officers, while Chief Newport cited 70 authorized (budgeted) positions. The Chief said he spoke with the Project Manager from Matrix Consulting Group, who confirmed that the report reflects authorized staffing (70), though it evaluates performance based on current staffing (64). The recommendation is to increase staffing to 71. DPW Director Peter Rice noted further clarification is needed. Councilors Kate Cook and John Tabor, along with members Cameron Horack and John O’Leary, emphasized considering overtime, benefits, and operational demands in staffing analysis. Councilor Cook added that 24/7 operations complicate staffing models. Councilor Tabor concluded the discussion is essential for the committee’s final recommendations.

II. Ranking Priorities for Deliverables for Municipal Building Project Based on Discussion So Far – Group Voting Exercise

Voting Exercise: By ballot, committee members ranked priorities; results summarized below (full details in attached spreadsheet on last page.)

Item	Totals
Meet space and workflow needs of PPD in a modern community policing facility	23
Improved HVAC throughout complex	7
Improve health and safety across the Municipal Complex	7
Re-evaluate space to find inefficient uses (e.g. council chamber anteroom)	7
Get Police out of inadequate lower-level space	6
Remedy inadequate lab and evidence space	5
Key public facing departments share an entrance area	5
Stay within \$42 million for community policing portion of project	4
Meet space needs without expansion of the building footprint if possible	4
Additional meeting space to supplement Conference Room A	1
Minimize moving of staff through phased construction	1

- a. Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman asked about sharing lab space with other agencies. Chief Newport and Police Commission Chair Kate Coyle responded that chain-of-custody requirements make such arrangements unfeasible. The in-house lab is used primarily for processing evidence prior to submission to the state lab.
- b. Peter Weeks cautioned that allocating all votes to a single item may skew the results. Councilor Tabor clarified that this was allowed and noted that while the results are not precise, they offer a clear indication of priorities.
- c. The committee agreed that consolidating several priority items would help optimize workspaces and centralize service – improving efficiency, particularly for community members with mobility challenges.

III. Matrix Space Determinations for Community Policing Facility

Although the finalized Matrix report was not yet available, the committee discussed general space needs and potential reconfigurations across the municipal complex, based on current priorities.

- a. Mary Lou McElwain inquired about the next phase of the project. Director Rice responded that a design firm has not yet been hired, but an announcement is expected soon once the project scope and budget are finalized.
- b. Chief Newport emphasized the importance of determining feasibility and associated costs. Councilor Tabor added that identifying core building requirements early in the process is essential.
- c. Mary Lou McElwain also asked how and when information should be shared with the architects. The Chairs responded that materials such as meeting minutes would help provide context and support productive stakeholder discussions.
- d. Regarding the use of space within the municipal complex, Peter Weeks asked whether areas currently occupied by the School Department could be repurposed. Director Rice clarified that school facilities fall outside the committee's authority but acknowledged the suggestion as valuable. Rick Chellman offered a different perspective, suggesting that, in its advisory role, the committee could recommend alternative locations for the School Department. This led to broader discussion about identifying underutilized spaces and considering more effective uses. Mr. Weeks also raised the possibility of relocating the School Department administrators to Portsmouth High School, depending on the available capacity. Director Rice reiterated that such decisions are beyond the committee's purview.
- e. Budget considerations were a central focus. John O'Leary emphasized the importance of recognizing financial constraints and understanding the cost implications of any recommendations. He noted the high likelihood that an addition will be necessary to satisfy the city's needs. Councilors Cook and Tabor reaffirmed the committee's responsibility to deliver a well-informed recommendation to the Mayor and City Council. Kate Coyle and Rick Chellman emphasized the importance of having approximate budget figures to help prioritize needs. Councilor Cook added that the committee must propose something realistic and implementable, cautioning that an overly ambitious plan could deter City Council support. Peter Weeks reminded the group that a prior \$42 million proposal for the police facility was not approved by the City Council, which led to the formation of this committee. Councilor Tabor noted that it's unclear whether the proposal had sufficient support at that time. Councilor Cook also pointed out that, regardless of specifics, the price tag was high, and the Council felt the proposed addition to the front of the existing police facility – put forward by the prior working group – did not meet expectations.
- f. During cost comparisons, Renee Plummer asked about the cost of the Dover Police Department facility. Councilor Cook responded that the figures included a parking

garage and were based on pre-Covid construction costs, making direct comparisons difficult. Facilities Manager Joe Almeida estimated that current new construction costs could exceed \$1,000 per square foot. Kate Coyle cited the Salem, NH's police department project – approximately 40,000 square feet at an estimated cost of \$38-39 million – as a more relevant benchmark. Facility Manager Joe Almeida added that displacement of employees during construction can significantly drive-up costs, an important factor in budgeting and phasing the project.

- g. Long-term planning was also discussed. Chief Newport and Councilor Tabor emphasized the importance of getting the project right from the start. Councilor Cook noted that even if the focus is on exterior construction, internal renovations within the complex will still be necessary. The committee discussed offering tiered recommendations based on varying budget scenarios. Cameron Horack highlighted the need to build a foundation by aligning departmental space needs with available space and clarify the types of space each department requires. Renee Plummer suggested that AI-driven changes to the workforce might reduce future space requirements – an observation John O'Leary noted had also come up during planning for the library project. Councilor Cook and Mr. Horack agreed that such forward-looking considerations could guide long-term planning and help to position the city as a leader in innovative municipal development.
- h. Kate Coyle asked how the overall project budget would be allocated between the police department and other municipal departments. Councilor Tabor noted that the last time a comprehensive review of the complex took place was in 2016, underscoring the need to revisit the broader financial strategy. Director Rice confirmed that the police facility remains a top priority and will likely be developed in phases. Councilor Cook agreed that the police department represents the most immediate need within the complex and the committee recommendations should allow for flexibility as the project evolves. Director Rice added that removing previous design constraints allows for more creative solutions.
- i. A meeting will be scheduled between the committee and the selected design firm to exchange ideas and information. Facilities Manager Joe Almeida reported that five firms had been interviewed. Director Rice confirmed that all but one are based in New Hampshire, which Renee Plummer appreciated.

IV. Public Comment: There were no public comments offered by attendees.

V. Future Meetings & Adjournment

Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 18, 2025 ~ 4:00 PM – 5:30 PM.

July Schedule: Wednesday, July 9, 2025 & Wednesday, July 23, 2025.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Cameron Horack; seconded by Councilor Tabor. Motion passed unanimously (10-0-1).

Meeting adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

Municipal Building Committee Priorities Exercise

Seven votes each to be assigned as the committee member wishes, including multiple for 1 item

[illegible]