



# **CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

## **Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee**

*Wednesday, July 23, 2025 at 3:30 p.m.*

*Conference Room A, City Hall*

*1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH*

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### **Meeting Minutes**

**Committee Members Present:** Councilor Kate Cook (Co-Chair), Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman, Police Chief Mark Newport, Mary Lou McElwain, John O'Leary, Renee Plummer

**Committee Members Not Present:** Councilor John Tabor (Co-Chair), City Manager Karen Conard, Police Commission Chair Kate Coyle, Peter Weeks, Cameron Horack

**Members of the Public:** Deputy Chief Maloney, Karen Senecal, Bob Corash, Kline Dickens, Kirsten Hunter

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

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#### **I. Brief Introduction of New Deputy City Manager**

Committee members introduced themselves to Deputy City Manager Carl Weber.

## **II. Approval of June 24, 2025 Minutes**

*John O'Leary moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Rick Chellman. Motion passed unanimously (6-0-5)*

## **III. JSA – Introduction**

### **Experience & Background**

North Sturtevant, a senior architect with over 30 years at JSA, introduced the firm, which has been a leading architecture practice in Portsmouth since 1980. As a former Portsmouth resident, North brings a strong understanding of the city's inner workings and is focused on exploring how police and municipal functions can better coexist. He estimates that it will take about six months to arrive at a design concept that meets everyone's needs.

The project's first phase is already underway, which includes touring the facility and assessing current issues. North emphasized the importance of designing civic buildings that city staff and the public can be proud of, especially for highly visible services like the police department and the city clerk's office.

Richard Martz, JSA's project manager, brings significant experience in police facility design. He will work alongside North and a team of consultants to ensure the project is both holistically designed and financially realistic.

### **Summary of Scope of Work**

Richard explained that JSA is currently engaged in project representation and community engagement as part of phase one. He noted the committee will play a key role in the project moving forward, noting that JSA will attend all future Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee meetings. The committee will act as a curator of the design before it goes to the City Council.

He said the team is reconciling the police staffing study and will conduct a similar evaluation on the municipal side. Public input will be gathered through two engagement sessions—one during the design process—as well as through surveys, comment cards, and FlashVote. JSA will also meet with the City Council to capture their vision.

a. John O'Leary noted that the most valuable input will come from the employees who use the building every day and emphasized their importance in the process.

Richard continued by outlining the second part of the first phase: evaluating existing conditions and establishing a basis for design. This involves understanding the spatial needs of both the police and municipal services. He mentioned that JSA will be meeting with department heads and issuing questionnaires to gather information on staffing and space needs. These discussions will continue throughout the project to ensure the evolving needs are captured.

The preliminary technology and security review is also underway to assess IT and safety requirements. Richard stated that their team is reviewing the existing facility, including referencing the 2014 City Hall Facility Condition Assessment by ISES, to determine what has already been addressed and what major issues remain. The goal is to develop a clear understanding of space needs, followed by the creation of conceptual renderings, massing studies, cost estimates, and a comprehensive master plan to present to the City Council.

Richard presented a preliminary project schedule for the first phase, outlining the key tasks and timelines required to reach a design basis. He noted that once a design is approved, the construction phase will be mapped out accordingly.

JSA's target is to present design options to the City Council by February 2026. North Sturtevant commented that one of the biggest challenges for the project will be phasing – planning how the work is implemented over time.

- b. Facilities Manager Joe Almeida referenced a recent renovation project at the Community Campus as a possible model or reference point.
- c. Rick Chellman asked whether the project would be limited to the existing structure or if additions were possible. North responded that JSA is approaching the project with no preconceived notions. They are acting as stewards of the public funds and will only propose additions if they are necessary to meet the city's needs. Director Peter Rice added that there is an existing exterior stairwell that is unsafe and non-compliant with current codes – an example of items requiring attention. North and Richard agreed to closely review this, and other issues identified in the ISES report.
- d. John O'Leary suggested using visual concepts to help the public better understand the design. North confirmed JSA uses 3D modeling and will create renderings to support public engagement. He emphasized that the facility must feel accessible and welcoming to all.
- e. Mary Lou McElwain expressed surprise at the 55% employee participation rate in the Matrix survey. North clarified that the survey was limited to police employees. Richard noted that in-person meetings and additional surveys with other departments will help gather broader feedback. Police Chief Mark Newport added that most patrol officers spend their time in the field, which likely contributed to the lower participation rate.
- f. North reiterated that it's important to convey to the public that this is a real, active project, not just a long-term, distant concept.
- g. Rick Chellman raised the issue of the site's topography. North responded that JSA will be working with civil engineers to assess both the surface and subsurface conditions across the entire site. While the city already has a solid understanding of certain areas, the broader campus will undergo further evaluation. Some geotechnical work has already been completed at the front of the building to gather data on the ledge profile.

- h. Renee Plummer noted the importance of making spaces like the tax collector's office easy to navigate, noting that paying taxes is rarely an enjoyable experience. She stressed the need for a public-friendly, welcoming design. North agreed, adding that the space should be both inviting and secure, with protections in place for employees in case of disruptive behavior. For that reason alone, it's a win-win to have police and municipal functions co-located. Rick Chellman highlighted the importance of ADA accessibility, and North confirmed it will be a key focus. He noted that the goal is to exceed minimum ADA standards without adding significant costs.
- i. Councilor Kate Cook pointed out that because there is no staffing study for the municipal side yet, the committee cannot fully assess whether changes to staffing behavior are needed. North confirmed that JSA will address this by engaging department leadership directly. Director Rice added that the city's goal is to ensure organizational connectivity and will also discuss this with senior staff. North acknowledged that columns in the existing building make future design challenging, so flexibility for growth and changes – such as file storage – will be factored into the planning.
- j. Councilor Cook asked about financial planning, specifically the need to present phased financial options that align with the city's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). North responded that JSA can provide a high-level breakdown of phased options – for example, focusing on the police department first – along with a few "menu" options. However, he clarified that while they will not provide detailed minutiae, they will present comprehensive phased cost estimates.

#### **IV. Additional Questions/Comments on the Staffing and Facility Analysis**

None of the members had questions or comments to offer.

#### **V. Public Comment**

- a. Kirsten Hunter, Portsmouth resident – Expressed support for the need for a new police facility and emphasized the department's important role, particularly in responding to individuals in crisis. She raised concerns about what appears to be a 70% staffing increase based on the Matrix Study projections. *Chief Newport clarified that the confusion stems from figures discussed in previous meetings. The study referenced 64 patrol officers (the number at the time of the study) and included a staffing projection of 110 total employees by 2035. This figure includes police officers, dispatchers, and administrative staff. The actual recommendation calls for seven additional positions – primarily civilian roles.* Kirsten also urged the committee to consider broader citywide resource constraints, pointing to reduced library funding and calling for a more balanced, community-wide approach to public services.

- b. Kline Dickens, North Hampton – Thanked the design team but expressed concern about prioritizing police resources over other municipal needs. She referenced professional ethics codes regarding human rights and questioning the broader impacts of policing on public safety. Kline encouraged equitable distribution of resources across all city departments and challenged the committee to consider the ethical implications of expanding police facilities.  
*Councilor Cook emphasized that the committee's focus is on providing the best facility planning for all municipal staff, aiming to bring facilities up to modern standards. JSA's responsibility is to design buildings that are safe, functional, and serve the needs of the community.*

## **VI. Future Meetings & Adjournment**

Next meeting: Aug 13 @ 3:00pm.

*A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by John O'Leary; seconded by Rick Chellman. Motion passed unanimously (6-0-5)*

Meeting adjourned at 4:33 p.m.