

CITY COUNCIL MEETING

MUNICIPAL COMPLEX
DATE: MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2025

PORTSMOUTH, NH
TIME: 7:00PM

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to close the Non-Public Session and seal the minutes. Seconded by Councilor Moreau and voted.

III. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor McEachern called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

IV. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Mayor McEachern, Assistant Mayor Kelley, Councilors Tabor, Cook, Denton, Blalock, Bagley, Moreau, and Lombardi

V. INVOCATION

Mayor McEachern asked everyone to join in a moment of silent prayer.

VI. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Councilors Denton and Lombardi led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Portsmouth High School Holiday Ensemble Performance

Eric Gagnon led the Portsmouth High School Ensemble by conducting the performance of seven holiday songs. Eric thanked the City for having them perform this evening and allowing them to be a musical ambassador to the City of Portsmouth.

At 7:25 p.m., Mayor McEachern called for a five-minute recess to allow the ensemble to gather their instruments and stands and leave the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers. At 7:28 p.m., Mayor McEachern called the meeting back to order.

VII. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES – NOVEMBER 6, 2025

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to approve and accept the minutes of the November 6, 2025 City Council meeting. Seconded by Councilor Lombardi and voted.

VIII. RECOGNITIONS AND VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. NH Building Officials Association Code Official of the Year – Shanti Wolph

Mayor McEachern, the City Council and City Manager Conard recognized Chief Building Inspector Shanti Wolph for his outstanding work as the NH Building Officials Association Code Official of the Year.

2. Safe Water Advisory Group Report

Andrea Amico, Co-Chair of SWAG highlighted their work over the last year. She spoke regarding quarterly updates provided by SWAG for the City. She asked Mayor McEachern to reinstate SWAG for a two-year term ending on December 31, 2027. She reviewed SWAG's revised mission statement "To review and communicate the latest science on the health and environmental effects of PFAS, to monitor federal and state level legislative changes, and to anticipate policy changes that could impact the City of Portsmouth. To discuss topics relevant to the City's drinking water quantity, water quality, preservation and conservation efforts, and water infrastructure projects. To discuss public health aspects of water quality, support and provide public education about drinking water topics, and take initiative-taking stances to protect and conserve water quality and quantity.

3. Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee 2024-2025 Year-End Report

Councilor Tabor reported on the customers using community power and the money saved by residents using community power. He spoke on solar array being installed at the Jones Avenue landfill and laying the groundwork for what could become a major municipal renewable energy asset.

4. Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Affordable Housing 2024-2025 Report

Assistant Mayor Kelley and Councilor Tabor provided the Affordable Housing Report and said that this is the toughest issue for the City Council, but measurable progress has been made. They reported that the committee set its mission statement created in March 2024 as "Recommended policy changes that would secure permits for at least 500 units. The units would create diverse, affordable housing by the private and public sectors over the next two years, while promoting market conditions to ensure long-term affordability and accessibility for all income levels."

Holiday Lights Contest Winners for 2025

Mayor McEachern announced the results of the contest winners. Kids Choice Winner – 580 FW Hartford Drive; Kids Choice Runner-up – 170 FW Hartford Drive; Creative Winner – 520 FW Hartford Drive; Creative Runner-up – 3 Sanderling Way, Traditional Winner – 752 South Street and for the Traditional Runner-up for the first time ever there was a tie. Traditional Second Choice – 660 Middle Street and 114 Cabot Street.

Outgoing Councilors Josh Denton and Vince Lombardi

Mayor McEachern said as tradition, we present outgoing Councilors with a City chair of their choice. He said that Councilor Lombardi chose the traditional captain's chair that is here in front of the dais, and when it came to choosing a chair for Councilor Denton, we took into account that an actual chair might take up too much room in his home so we commissioned a stool which was made by Portsmouth resident and amazing woodworker Jonathan Bock at the Port City Makerspace. He stated that the seat is black walnut, the legs are a species of mahogany, and on the seat is an inlaid brass engraved plate with the city seal.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION (*This session shall not exceed 45 minutes*) – (*participation may be in person or via Zoom*)

Buzz Scherr, Police Commissioner, spoke regarding the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which addresses the current salary structure which made it difficult to hire lateral hires. He said it is more expensive to hire new officers which we have always had a problem with lateral hires. He said they are struggling with hiring in this environment, and this MOU will make a difference for the department and officers.

Petra Huda spoke to the MOU and said that based on data presented effective January 1, 2026, this would increase the budget significantly. She said that there are new costs to be added to the budget, and she feels there should be a public hearing on this request because we are dealing with funds. She said that this violates the City Charter.

Roy Helsel asked how the schools feel about school vouchers. He also addressed the danger at Hodgdon Way and Cate Street. He said that the stop signs are not affixed properly for line of sight.

Tyler Garzo provided strong support for the resident parking program. He would like Parrott Avenue metered and said the cost of parking is too low.

X. PUBLIC HEARINGS AND VOTE ON ORDINANCES AND/OR RESOLUTIONS

(There are no items under this section of the agenda this evening)

XI. CITY MANAGER'S ITEMS WHICH REQUIRE ACTION

A. CITY MANAGER CONARD

1. Approval of Police Proposed Memorandum of Agreement

Deputy City Manager Weber said the Memorandum of Agreement will significantly reduce the number of steps in the current salary schedule, which allows employees to advance more rapidly up the existing salary range. He reported that eighteen steps have been compressed to seven steps effective January 1, 2026. He advised the City Council that the market is changing significantly where junior officers are hired and go through the training process and then leave because our steps take more time to get to the high salary contained in the schedule.

Police Chief Newport said we want to continue to help and support our officers. He stated we are falling short on salaries and are not competitive anymore and other departments are pulling officers away from us.

Discussion followed among the Council regarding the increase in cost under the MOA.

Councilor Tabor moved to approve the proposed Memorandum of Agreement with the Portsmouth Police Patrolman's Union. Seconded by Councilor Moreau.

On a unanimous roll call vote 9-0, motion passed.

2. Resident Access Parking Program Policy Approval

City Manager Conard said the Resident Access Parking Program (RAPP) is being brought back to you for consideration and adoption. She stated that this is a policy which the Council has the ability to make adjustments as we go.

Deputy City Manager Weber reviewed the Pilot Program and it's goal to increase parking availability for residents by charging non-residents \$1.00 an hour and providing free parking in designated locations outside the metered Downtown Business District (RAPP Zones) for Portsmouth residents, School, Recreation and Library employees who have registered their license plates through the City's Parking or Tax Office. He stated the Council will receive regular updates on data collected from the program. He further stated that the Recreation Board suggested that a kiosk be installed at the Library. Deputy City Manager Weber said we would also add Chris Rice Skateboard Park lot.

Assistant Mayor Kelley spoke regarding adding the Chris Rice Skateboard Park which is not downtown like the other locations. She said adding the Skateboard Park is the real trial starting point and expressed concern with that location.

Discussion followed among the City Councilors regarding areas and the measure of success with the program. Deputy City Manager Weber explained that a summary of the matrix will be provided.

Mayor McEachern said we need to understand the supply and demand to know the cost of free parking.

Councilor Cook thanked Deputy City Manager Weber for his work on this program but said to include Parrott Avenue or the Masonic Lodge Lot. She said the goal of the program is to allow residents to park on the streets. She suggested looking for satellite lots for people to park.

Mayor McEachern said that this has not gone to the Parking & Traffic Safety Committee for vetting.

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to refer the program to the Parking & Traffic Safety Committee for their next meeting. Seconded by Councilor Moreau and voted.

3. Access Easement for Water Services for Property Located at 921 Islington Street

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to authorize the City Manager to accept and record a Water Service Access Easement Deed in a substantially similar form to the easement deed from PWED 2, LLC contained in the agenda packet. Seconded by Councilor Blalock and voted.

4. Access Easements for Water Services for Property Located at 361 Hanover Street

Councilor Denton moved to authorize the City Manager to accept and record Access Easements for Water Services in a substantially similar form to the easement deeds from 361 Hanover Steam Factory, LLC and form to the Powerhouse Realty Trust contained in the agenda packet. Seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley.

Councilor Moreau advised the Council she would be recusing from the vote.

Motion passed with Councilor Moreau recusing from the vote.

XII. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Letter from Annie Zampitella, Wentworth-Douglass Hospital and Conventures, Inc., requesting permission to hold the 2026 Seacoast Cancer 5K on Sunday, September 20, 2026 ***(Anticipated action – move to refer to the City Manager with Authority to Act)***
- B. Letter from Maria Stephanou, Alzheimer's Association, requesting permission to hold the 2026 Annual Seacoast Walk to End Alzheimer's on Sunday, October 25, 2026 ***(Anticipated action – move to refer to the City Manager with Authority to Act)***
- C. Letter from Jenna Raizes, Portsmouth Little League, requesting permission to install temporary signage at the Plains, Hislop, and Central Fields for the 2026 baseball season ***(Anticipated action – move to refer to the City Manager with Authority to Act)***
- D. Letter from Jenna Raizes, Portsmouth Little League, requesting permission to install registration-promotion signage at Central and Plains Fields until March 15, 2026 ***(Anticipated action – move to refer to the City Manager with Authority to Act)***

Councilor Lombardi moved to adopt the Consent Agenda. Seconded by Councilor Tabor and voted.

XIII. PRESENTATIONS AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Email Correspondence

Councilor Moreau moved to accept and place on file. Seconded by Councilor Tabor and voted.

- B. Letter from Caleb & Samantha Ginsberg, New Hampshire Soccer Club, LLC requesting permission to Host World Cup Watch Party on Pleasant Street with Street Closure Friday, June 12, 2026

Councilor Lombardi moved to refer to the City Manager with Authority to Act. Seconded by Councilor Cook.

The City Council expressed concerns regarding such a large event requesting to be held downtown.

City Manager Conard said there would need to be a lot of communication, and she would work with the Ginsberg's on the details and a location to hold this kind of event.

Motion passed.

XIV. MAYOR McEACHERN

1. Acceptance of Resignation:
 - Mandela Pruett from the Arts and Cultural Commission

Councilor Blalock moved to accept with regret the resignation of Mandela Pruett from the Arts and Cultural Commission. Seconded by Councilor Cook and voted.

2. Appointments to be Voted:
 - Appointment of Robert P. Sullivan as a Regular Member to the Zoning Board of Adjustment
 - Appointment of Mike Lucas as an Alternate Member to the Zoning Board of Adjustment

Councilor Denton moved the appointments of Robert P. Sullivan as a Regular Member and Mike Lucas as an Alternate Member to the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Seconded by Councilor Tabor and voted.

XV. CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

A. ASSISTANT MAYOR KELLEY

1. End of Term Update of African Burying Ground Memorial Park Stewardship Committee

Assistant Mayor Kelley reported over the last 20 years, the purposes and work of the African Burying Ground Committee have evolved and changed depending on the tasks presented, memorial design, fund raising, construction and reinterment of remains. She asked that the Committee be reestablished with a reconsidered mission and announced that the new name will be the African Burying Grounds Preservation Committee.

B. COUNCILOR COOK

1. Report Back from Governance Committee

Councilor Cook moved to sunset the Governance Committee. Seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley.

Councilor Cook said the Governance Committee has done a great deal of work over the last four years. She thanked Assistant Mayor Kelley, Councilors Tabor, and Lombardi for serving on the Committee and their dedication. She spoke to the many ordinance changes and the policies adopted.

Motion passed.

C. COUNCILOR BAGLEY

1. Parking & Traffic Safety Committee Action Sheet and Minutes of December 4, 2025

Councilor Bagley moved to approve and accept the action sheet and minutes of the December 4, 2025, Parking & Traffic Safety Committee meeting. Seconded by Councilor Moreau and voted.

XVI. APPROVAL OF GRANTS/DONATIONS

(There are no items under this section of the agenda this evening)

XVII. CITY MANAGER'S INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

1. Update on Tax Bill Status

City Manager Conard announced that the tax rate was set by the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration at \$11.51. She reported that tax bills will be mailed on December 24, 2025, with payments accepted starting Monday, December 29, 2025. She stated that the new tax rate is six cents lower than the estimated rate in the FY26 adopted budget due to greater than expected property growth. She advised the City Council that \$200 million in property development this year has strengthened the City's tax base.

XVIII. MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS INCLUDING BUSINESS REMAINING UNFINISHED AT PREVIOUS MEETING

XIX. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:25 p.m., Councilor Lombardi moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Councilor Denton and voted.



KELLI L. BARNABY, MMC/CNHMC
CITY CLERK