



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.

Conference Room A, City Hall

1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present: Councilor John Tabor (Co-Chair), Councilor Kate Cook (Co-Chair), Councilor Andrew Bagley, Deputy City Manager Carl Weber, Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman, Police Chief Mark Newport, Police Commissioner Francesca Fernald (seated for Police Commissioner Buzz Scherr), Peter Weeks, Susan Sterry, John O’Leary, Cameron Horack, and Renee Plummer

Committee Members Not Present: Police Commissioner Buzz Scherr

Staff Present: Deputy Chief Mike Maloney, Department of Public Works Director Peter Rice, Facilities Manager Joe Almeida, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett (minute taker), Richard Martz (JSA), Sandra Hodge (JSA), North Sturtevant (JSA), via Zoom: Rodney McManus (ADG), and Mark Moeller (ADG)

Roll Call 3:00 PM

I. Review and Approval of 12/10/2025 Meeting Minutes

Peter Weeks moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Rick Chellman. Motion passed (10-0-2 ~ Police Chief Mark Newport and Renee Plummer were not present for the vote).

Peter Weeks noted that the current meeting was limited to one hour due to a 4:00 PM engagement and requested that future meetings be scheduled for at least two hours to allow sufficient time to accomplish committee business. Councilor Cook clarified that the one-hour limitation applied only to the City Producer's recording schedule and that the meeting itself could extend beyond one hour if necessary. To avoid disrupting the flow of the meeting, it was agreed that Zoom would be utilized for recording purposes.

II. Municipal Space Needs Assessment Update

• Program and Space Allocation Updates:

Richard provided updates regarding departmental relocations and space adjustments:

- Water/Sewer staff will relocate to the Department of Public Works (DPW), freeing up square footage at City Hall for inclusion in the proposed design. Utility payments will continue to be accepted at City Hall.
- The School Board Conference Room will be eliminated; however, a shared training/meeting room will be available for public and municipal use.
- The Portsmouth Room has been removed from the plan.
- Questions were raised about the number of conference rooms. Richard Martz (JSA) explained that enclosed conference rooms are necessary to provide confidential point-of-service space, especially given the introduction of open office seating on upper floors. All conference rooms will remain shared spaces, as currently structured.

Richard referenced the "Reconciled Space Needs Assessment Summary," noting that square footage allocations are preliminary and subject to adjustment during the design process.

III. Conceptual Planning Scheme

Richard presented the conceptual planning scheme and responded to committee questions.

- **Building Entrance and Adjacencies**
 - Susan Sterry requested clarification on which door is considered the primary entrance. Richard confirmed the current entrance will remain the main entrance (not the current doorway at Seybolt).
 - On the municipal side, the design emphasizes point-of-service departments (Clerk/Tax, Health, Welfare) to enhance public access, improve staff security, and increase operational efficiency.
 - On the police side, the layout consolidates lobby, records, courts, patrol, dispatch, booking, and intake into a unified front-facing area to improve adjacencies and functionality.
- **Floor-by-Floor Overview**
 - Basement:**
 - Police shooting range retained.
 - Storage and physical agility/gym space maintained.
 - Level 1:**

- Lobby remains in current location with expanded records/court area.
- Sally Port relocated to the front of the building (single-story expansion into current front parking area), improving adjacencies and maintaining traffic flow.
- Dispatch remains in place.
- Internal reconfiguration of patrol, property/evidence areas.
- Locker rooms relocated to first floor.
- Skylights under consideration for natural lighting in areas with no windows.
- Existing sally port bay to be repurposed as detectives' evidence processing bay.
- Archive, custodial, maintenance, and storage areas included.

Level 2:

- Proposed front addition to unify the three building sections and create a clear public entrance.
- Tax and City Clerk co-located with shared service windows; Assessor located across from them.
- Enlarged lobby to provide flexible space during Council meetings.
- HR remains in current location.
- Shared training room for municipal and public use (approx.. 1,500 SF total, divisible into two 750 SF rooms; capacity ~75 people).
- Health and Welfare located adjacent to Police to support ongoing collaboration.
- 1,000 SF rear addition to accommodate Tax/Clerk space and secure vault storage.

Level 3:

- Building and Planning relocated with addition of a new elevator for accessibility.
- Detectives' wing proposed along the mill pond side of the building (approx. 6,700 SF).

Level 4:

- City Manager and Legal Departments remain.
- School Department renovated to meet program needs (approx. 4,300 gross SF vs. 3,700 required per study), allowing Finance Department to relocate to Level 4 and maintain co-location with School.
- Public access corridor provided to School Department.

IV. Committee Questions and Discussion

• Storage, Water, and Mechanical Issues

Susan Sterry inquired about water issues, asking if waterproofing storage spaces were considered. Richard stated this would be addressed during renovation.

DPW Director Peter Rice clarified that existing water issues are largely condensation-related and are currently managed. A new HVAC system -one of the primary drivers of the project- would significantly improve conditions. Immediate water intrusion issues (e.g., through doors) will be addressed separately.

- **Shared Training Room and Council Chambers**

Peter Weeks asked who would use the shared training room; Richard confirmed municipal and public use. The current Council Chambers will remain intact. The School Board will utilize the new shared meeting space, as their conference room will be eliminated.

All conference rooms will be equipped with AV recording capabilities.

Renee Plummer asked for a scale comparison: Conference Room A is 972 SF; the proposed shared training room is roughly double that size.

- **Skylights**

Councilor Andrew Bagley expressed concern regarding skylight maintenance, potential leads, HVAC complications, security concerns (including drone visibility), and economic constraints. Richard noted mitigation strategies exist and emphasized the psychological and productivity benefit of natural light. Skylights remain under consideration pending value engineering.

Police Commissioner Francesca Fernald noted security films for windows/skylights are available to prevent visibility into sensitive areas.

- **Additions and Square Footage**

Peter Weeks identified what appeared to be multiple additions totaling approximately 12,000 SF. Richard characterized them as two or three integrated additions rather than separate expansions.

Discussion acknowledged that some new construction is included.

- **Budget and Phasing**

Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman asked whether the proposal aligns with the existing estimated budget. Richard stated cost analysis is not yet complete.

North Sturtevant (JSA) emphasized mechanical systems as a primary cost driver and noted some departments require minimal renovation (HR, Chief's Administrative Wing, School Department, City Manager's Wing and Legal), while police reorganization and additions will drive expense.

Rick Chellman stressed fiscal responsibility and requested a clearer understanding of how close the proposal is to the approved budget. North stated that while the full ideal program may not be achievable within current budget constraints, meaningful improvements to staff efficiency and public security are expected.

Richard clarified that three conceptual options are being developed; the current plan represents a comprehensive starting point. Scaled-back options will follow.

Discussion included:

- Impacts of the front addition on existing windows.
- Confirmation of a single public access point to the shared meeting room.
- The importance of secure records storage (supported by Director Rice).
- Operational improvements for Police; the Chief confirmed improved adjacencies and efficiency compared to existing layout.
- The importance of planning for future growth, referencing observations from the Committee's tour of the Dover Police Department last year.

Committee members acknowledged the complexity of phasing. Facilities Manager Joe Almeida noted that additions can serve as “swing space,” allowing staff to relocate temporarily during renovations, which may reduce overall costs.

Councilor Kate Cook requested analysis comparing renovation costs versus new construction, noting renovation can sometimes exceed new construction costs per square foot. Construction is currently reflected in the FY28 CIP budget (beginning mid-2027).

- **Project Priorities and Governance**

Susan Sterry expressed concern that prioritizing police improvements could delay municipal phases and increase long-term costs.

Councilor Cook clarified that the Council determines project priorities, with recommendations from this committee.

Councilor Bagley emphasized the importance of presenting options that are closer to the CIP budget given current economic conditions.

North Sturtevant (JSA) affirmed that realistic, fiscally responsible options will be presented.

- **Existing Building Constraints**

Rick Chellman reiterated the committee’s charge to explore what can be accomplished within the existing building footprint. Richard acknowledged that some additions (notably at the entrance and sally port) are likely necessary but agreed further analysis is warranted.

Cameron Horack emphasized the need to “do more with less” and manage public perception given statewide economic pressures.

- **Additional Discussion Points**

- Restroom and kitchenette locations will be refined during detailed room-by-room planning.
- The Rock Room (basement) space remains under evaluation; ledge conditions make renovation costly.
- Existing spaces not fully renovated may still receive minimal upgrades.
- School Department occupancy (~4,700 SF) prompted discussion of potential relocation; acknowledgement to this decision falling under the City Manger’s purview – ongoing operational review.

V. Review of Prior Questions

All prior questions were addressed. No additional review was required.

VI. Next Steps

Proposal to reschedule the March 11 and May 6 meetings due to scheduling conflicts (see updated schedule below).

VII. Upcoming Meeting Schedule

- Wednesday, March 18, 2026 @ 3pm
- Wednesday, April 29, 2026 @ 3pm
- Wednesday, June 17, 2026 @ 3pm
- Wednesday, July 29, 2026 @ 3pm
- Wednesday, Sept 9, 2026 @ 3pm

(Schedule subject to adjustment as needed)

VIII. Public Comment

None

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Cameron Horack; seconded by John O'Leary. Motion passed unanimously (12-0)

Meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

DRAFT