



Portsmouth Municipal Building Improvements Project Blue Ribbon Committee Memo for 9/9/2026 Meeting

Date: 9/9/2026

Dear Committee Members,

Please use this memo as a guide to the primary points for our forthcoming conversation on 9/9. Additional supporting information is included on the following pages and is referenced with the appropriate page numbers in the table of contents and sections below.

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Summary of JSA/City Staff Work Since Last Meeting

Since our last meeting on 7/29 the design team has worked with our estimators to prepare a revised estimate. We will review these updated feasibility costs today.

Updated Phasing and Costs

Please refer to page 3 for updated feasibility costs.

The design team has worked to capture in this updated feasibility estimate all scope understood at this time. This revised estimate benefits from greater understandings of not only the proposed layouts and architectural features, but also the proposed building infrastructure, site work, furniture, technology, and security needs.

The design team and City staff recognize the need for cost control compared to the project total of 58.6 million previously shared in the June 17th Blue Ribbon Meeting and at the July 13th work session with the City Council. The updated cost estimating shows a roughly 10% total increase in construction costs for phases 3-7. Responding to this, the team is working to reconfigure phases 8 and 9, the 4th and 3rd floor renovations, as a cost control measure. The values presented reflect a target value for these phases which will allow the project to maintain the overall project cost. As next steps the team will be looking minimize

reconfigurations of the space and maintain existing layout where possible, bringing it from a major renovation to minor renovation cost as well as identify any other potential savings and efficiencies to achieve this target.

Public Outreach and Frequently Asked Questions

Please refer to pages 4-15 for an update on public outreach and frequently asked questions

Next Steps

- October
 - Schedule Blue Ribbon meeting to review financial overview, projected bonding and fiscal impact
 - Prepare final recommendation to the City Council in October/November

CONCEPT C | SUMMARY OF COSTS

	Phase Summary	Year	Prior Construction Cost	Estimated Construction Cost	delta between prior and new	Estimated Cost with Soft Costs	Cumulative Total
Phase 0	Design & Enabling	2027	\$ 10,540,972	\$ 931,691	\$ (654,319.78)	\$ 4,915,614	
PHASE 1	Detectives	2028		\$ 8,954,961		\$ 10,112,564	\$ 15,028,178
PHASE 2	Police Department Floor 1	2028	\$ 3,716,294	\$ 3,343,554	\$ (372,739.69)	\$ 3,817,190	\$ 18,845,368
PHASE 3	Sally Port Addition	2029	\$ 4,389,281	\$ 4,946,878	\$ 557,597.00	\$ 5,546,934	\$ 24,392,302
PHASE 4	Police Department Floor 1 & B	2029	\$ 6,365,687	\$ 6,395,862	\$ 30,175.50	\$ 7,171,680	\$ 31,563,982
PHASE 5	Municipal Additions	2030	\$ 10,167,535	\$ 12,083,700	\$ 1,916,165.00	\$ 13,867,260	\$ 45,431,242
PHASE 6	Council Chambers/Flexible Training	2021	\$ 1,729,149	\$ 2,788,117	\$ 1,058,967.54	\$ 3,253,638	\$ 48,684,880
PHASE 7	PD Admin and Public Health	2031	\$ 2,992,770	\$ 3,595,856	\$ 603,085.76	\$ 4,077,593	\$ 52,762,473
PHASE 8	4th Floor	2032	\$ 5,355,531	\$ 2,922,842	\$ (2,432,689.53)	\$ 3,427,752	\$ 56,190,225
PHASE 9	3rd Floor	2032	\$ 3,604,483	\$ 1,920,361	\$ (1,684,121.88)	\$ 2,418,414	\$ 58,608,638
				Total \$ 47,883,822			
				Prior Total \$ 48,861,702	Total \$ 58,608,638		
				Delta \$ (977,880)	Prior Total \$ 58,634,042		
					Delta \$ (25,404)		

Portsmouth PD & Municipal Complex
Phasing and Costs





City of Portsmouth

Deputy City Manager

MEMORANDUM

TO: Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

FROM: Carl E. Weber, Deputy City Manager 

DATE: September 3, 2026

SUBJECT: Public Engagement Update: Municipal Building Improvements Project

Overview

Since the July 13, 2026 Council work session and Municipal BRC July meeting, City staff and Committee members have engaged residents through three different approaches to date: an in-person booth at the Portsmouth Farmers Market, a direct presentation to Connors Cottage residents, and an ongoing online comment form accessible by QR code. This memo summarizes what has been heard so far, presents the draft FAQ language responding to the two most common concerns, and outlines the next step of placing project materials in the City Hall lobby to gather additional feedback.

Farmers Market Booth

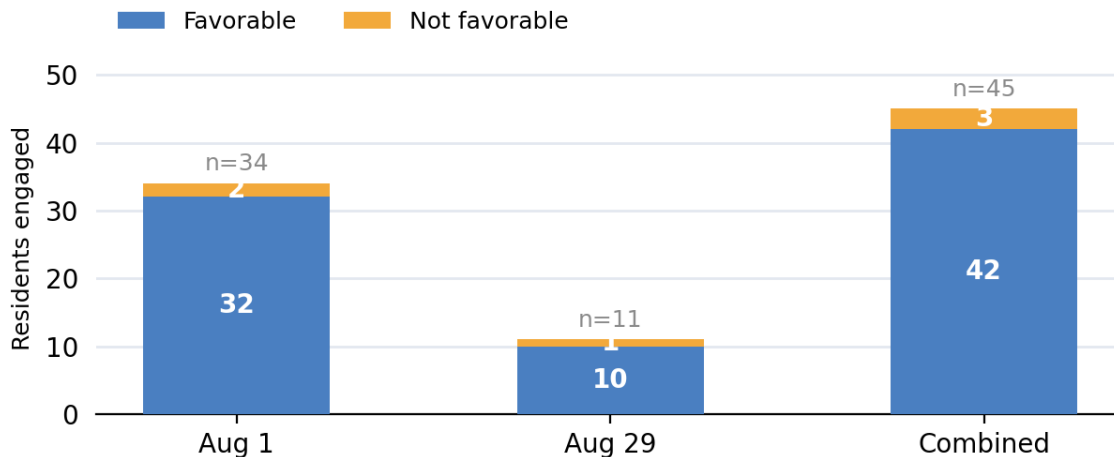
Staff staffed a City booth at the Farmers Market on two dates, using the Concept C presentation boards and handouts to walk residents through the project and collect informal feedback.

August 1: City Staff, joined by Committee member Susan Sterry, engaged 34 residents in informal discussions regarding the project. Based on those conversations, 32 expressed generally favorable views of the concept, while two expressed concerns regarding overall project cost and the sally port location and size. Three of the favorable respondents separately asked that the City consider adding solar panels to the roof as part of the project.

August 29: City Staff engaged 11 residents in informal discussions regarding the project. Ten expressed generally favorable views, while one expressed concern regarding the sally port location. One of the ten favorable attendees, a Historic District Commission (HDC) member, offered a specific design suggestion on the sally port addition (see below).

Combined total: 45 residents engaged across both dates. 42 expressed generally favorable views and 3 expressed unfavorable views during those discussions.

Farmers Market Booth: Resident Sentiment



Connors Cottage Presentation

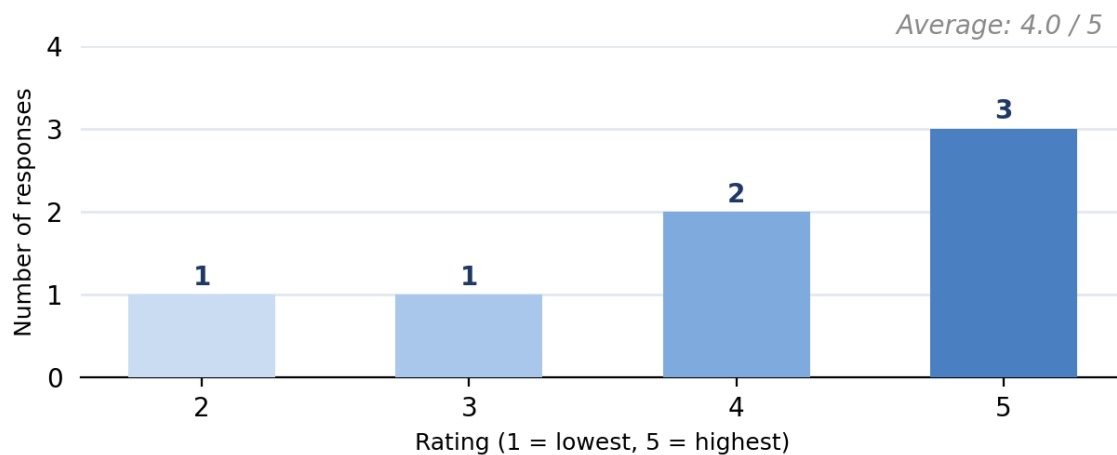
On August 4, staff presented the project directly to Connors Cottage residents. The meeting was positive. Residents said they appreciated being heard regarding their concerns with the original, police-only project, and were pleased that the current design preserves their view rather than obstructing it as earlier concepts might have. No significant objections to the current concept were raised during the discussion.

Online Comment Form

The online comment form, accessible by QR code at the Farmers Market booth and elsewhere, has received seven responses to date. Respondents rated the project overall on a 1-to-5 scale and were asked what they liked, what they would change, and whether they had additional comments.

The average rating is 4.0 out of 5. Reasons given for favorable ratings included the pragmatism and necessity of the project, adaptive reuse of an existing building, energy efficiency and mold control, preservation of the pond view shed, improved accessibility, and appreciation for the Committee's effort to solve City Hall and Police Department needs together rather than separately. Two respondents specifically thanked staff for being present at the Farmers Market.

Online Comment Form: Overall Project Rating (n=7)



Recurring themes across all feedback

Several themes surfaced independently across multiple engagement channels and therefore warrant the Committee's attention as recurring topics of public interest.

Sally Port Location and Size

This was the only issue raised at both Farmers Market dates (Aug. 1 and Aug. 29) and it also appears in the online comment form, where one respondent gave a detailed critique arguing that booking and intake should occur at the rear of the building for security reasons, that the sally port's footprint appears oversized, and that the front of the building should instead be reserved as the public point of service.

This is the most consistent critical feedback received to date, and it reflects a substantive design and operational question rather than a misunderstanding of the project. Staff is not recommending the sally port location be revisited; the placement reflects security and operational best practices, locating the sally port immediately adjacent to booking, intake, and release so individuals in custody are not moved through the facility, applied within the constraints of the existing building, site, and topography.

A new FAQ entry explaining this rationale has been drafted for public posting. Staff recommend that the Committee review the FAQ language below and confirm it is the City's standing answer to this concern going forward.

Draft FAQ: What is a sally port and how was the location determined?

A sally port is a secure, enclosed vehicle bay used to safely transport individuals in custody into and out of the Police Department. The location of a sally port is determined by security and operational needs, not whether it is at the front or back of a building.

Best practice is to locate the sally port immediately adjacent to booking, intake, and release functions so individuals in custody can be processed and released without traveling through the police facility. In Portsmouth's Municipal Building, the selected location provides the safest and most efficient connection between these functions while working within the constraints of the existing building, site layout, and topography.

Energy Efficiency and Renewable Power

Three Farmers Market respondents on August 1 asked that solar panels be considered for the roof. Two online respondents raised related points: one asked how the plan incorporates renewable energy and reduces long-term operating costs, and another cited energy efficiency as a specific reason for their favorable rating.

Staff recommends the Committee consider whether lifecycle operating costs and energy strategies should be addressed more directly in future public materials.

Exterior Material: HDC Member Suggestion

This suggestion is separate from the location concern above and came from an attendee who was generally supportive of the concept overall. On August 29, a Historic District Commission (HDC) member liked the concept but suggested that the sally port and its addition be finished in brick with light accents, to mirror and extend the existing building on that side. The same attendee suggested the front addition could then pick up the lighter color from the older buildings instead. They noted this pairing could also reduce the visual impact of the sally port when viewed from the opposite side of the site.

This feedback has been forwarded to the design team for review.

Project Cost and Reconciling the Old Projects

Cost concerns surfaced at the Farmers Market (cited as one of two objections on August 1) and in the online comment form, where one respondent asked for a clear, apples-to-apples reconciliation between the ~\$52 million to \$53 million figure presented in July and the Concept C phasing total. Two FAQ entries have been drafted to answer this directly, reproduced below for the Committee's review.

Draft FAQ: Isn't a comprehensive municipal project more expensive than just a new police station addition?

Not significantly, and that is the key point. A Police Department expansion and renovation alone was estimated at approximately \$42 million, and nearly double that if a new police station were built at a different location. City Hall separately requires HVAC upgrades regardless of any broader project, estimated at \$10 million to \$11 million.

Together, that is roughly \$52 million to \$53 million the City would spend over the next several years, while still leaving many City Hall space, accessibility, and customer service needs unaddressed. By comparison, the proposed comprehensive municipal

project is currently estimated at approximately \$58 million, including contingencies and construction cost escalation. For a relatively modest additional investment, the City would receive a fully modernized Police Department facility, a renovated and more accessible City Hall, a centralized customer service point for residents, a more efficient organization of municipal departments, all necessary HVAC upgrades, and reclaimed lower-level building space.

Draft FAQ: Why are the City Hall HVAC upgrades part of the conversation?

Because they are needed with or without this project. Folding them into a single, coordinated effort avoids paying to disrupt the building twice and allows the City to address the mechanical systems and the space improvements at the same time.

Additional Suggestions Received

- Add an art or visual element at the City Hall public entrance to distinguish it from the Police entrance.
- Consider a patio or seating area that takes advantage of the preserved pond view.
- Publish a concise public "decision sheet" documenting the trade-offs consciously accepted during design, including remaining space reductions, construction and continuity-of-operations risk, resilience requirements, and parking/circulation impacts, alongside anticipated lifecycle operating costs and energy savings.

Taken together, the outreach conducted to date suggests generally favorable sentiment among those who have participated in the engagement process, while also highlighting several areas where additional explanation or refinement of public materials may be beneficial.

Staff recognizes these outreach efforts are not statistically representative of the community as a whole, but they provide useful insight into the concerns and priorities raised by residents who chose to engage with the project.

The Next Step: City Hall Lobby Display

To broaden the reach of engagement beyond the Farmers Market and Connors Cottage, staff plans to place project details, the current plan, and the full FAQ set, including the salary port and cost entries above, on display in the City Hall lobby. This will give residents who visit City Hall for other business a chance to review the project and leave feedback, and will serve as a durable, always-available compliment to the in-person outreach done so far.

Municipal Building Improvements Project

Frequently Asked Questions

*Prepared for the Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee. This is to answer common questions from the Committee, the City Council and the public. Cost and square-footage figures are preliminary and rough order-of-magnitude; they are intended to convey scale and tradeoffs, not final scope or commitments. **Last updated: September 8, 2026.***

About the project

What is the Municipal Building Improvements Project?

It is a plan to improve the City's municipal campus on Junkins Avenue, the buildings that house City Hall operations and the Police Department. The goal is to solve the Police Department's operational needs while also making City Hall more accessible and efficient for residents, within an acceptable funding level.

Where can I learn more about this project?

The Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee's resources are on the City's website at the link below:

[Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee Resources | City of Portsmouth](#)

Didn't this start as a Police Department project? Why is it now bigger?

Yes. The work began as a plan for a standalone Police Department facility. As the design team studied the campus, it became clear that for roughly the same investment the City could address both the Police Department's needs and long-overdue improvements to City Hall, turning a single-purpose project into a more complete municipal solution.

Where is the project located?

On the existing municipal campus at Junkins Avenue, utilizing the current City Hall and Police Department buildings rather than building somewhere new.

Who is working on it?

The project is guided by the Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee, working with City staff and the City's design team (architects JSA, with police-facility consultant ADG and input from an earlier, separate Police Department staffing analysis). The committee reports to the City Council.

The concepts

What are Concepts A, B, and C?

The Concepts are three design approaches the team developed and tested against the City's identified space needs and how departments relate to one another. Each takes a different approach to where additions go and how existing space is reused.

Have you chosen a final design?

No. The field has narrowed from three concepts to two: **Concept A and a refined Concept C**. Concept A remains a viable alternative although the **most recent Concept C is the most fully developed and, at this stage, the preferred alternative**.

Why was Concept B set aside?

Concept B proposed a second story built over the police sally port that impacted the viewscape and created a less-than-ideal use of space for victim/witness access and the Prosecution office. Upon further study, Concept B was determined to no longer be the right fit functionally or structurally and was set aside.

Why does Concept C look like the best option?

Two main reasons: **it has the smallest addition of the three Concepts, and it has the strongest adjacencies**. Concept C has related departments and public services located next to one another, in the way people actually use them. Its new additions total about 9,410 square feet (compared with roughly 10,334 for Concept A and 9,585 for Concept B), and it also captures usable lower-level space beneath the additions.

Do these Concepts impact the view from City Hall?

Concept A and Concept C have a one-story sally port addition in front of the existing Police Station that uses up space now occupied by parking and police and visitor vehicles. These concepts both have minimal impact on the view, which is why they are still viable concepts and provide almost no impact to the view from Connors Cottage. Concept B was set aside because it called for a second story above the sally port which would have impacted with the view.

Was there a Work Session on 7/13/2026 with the City Council?

Yes, and the discussion included all three concepts.

A link to the presentation and the meeting recording appears below.

[Microsoft PowerPoint - Council Work Session 07-13-26](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KO0lJaPpmk>

Cost and funding

How much will this project cost?

Detailed, phase-by-phase estimates are being prepared over the summer; the figures presented are preliminary.

The current total project is estimated at \$58.6 Million (based on the rough pricing and contingencies, soft costs, and inflation escalation) **and this project delivers a fully functioning Police Station, a renovated and more accessible City Hall with a point of services for residents, a smarter reconfiguration of departments, all of the needed HVAC work, and reclaimed lower-level space.**

Isn't a comprehensive municipal project more expensive than just a new police station addition?

Not significantly, and that's the key point. The estimated cost of a Police Department expansion and renovation alone was approximately **\$42 million**, and nearly double that amount if a new police station were constructed at a different location. In addition, City Hall requires substantial HVAC (heating and cooling) upgrades regardless of any broader project, with those improvements estimated at **\$10–\$11 million**. Together, that is roughly \$52 million to \$53 million the City would spend over the next several years, while still leaving many City Hall space, accessibility, and customer service needs unaddressed.

By comparison, the proposed comprehensive municipal project is currently estimated at **approximately \$58.6 million** (including contingencies and construction cost escalation).

For a relatively modest additional investment, the City would receive:

- A fully modernized Police Department facility;
- A renovated, more accessible City Hall;
- A centralized customer service point for residents;
- A more efficient and functional organization of municipal departments;
- All necessary HVAC upgrades; and
- Reclaimed and improved lower-level building space.

Why are the City Hall HVAC upgrades part of the conversation?

Because they are needed with or without this project. Folding them into a single, coordinated effort avoids paying to disrupt the building twice and allows the City to address the mechanical systems and the space improvements at the same time.

What does “capturing the basement at 50 cents on the dollar” mean?

When an addition is built, excavating and finishing the space beneath it costs roughly half what conventional new construction costs — because the work is already underway above. Building that lower level now captures usable space for future needs at a discount, rather than paying full price for a separate project later.

Is the funding already in place?

The project has an established funding framework in the City's [Capital Improvement Plan](#). The current work is about confirming the right scope and refining the cost estimate to provide the most accurate update to the existing framework for the upcoming CIP process.

Are the numbers final?

No. They are rough, order-of-magnitude figures meant to convey scale and tradeoffs. Refined, phase-by-phase estimating comes forward in August/September 2026.

The Police Department

Why does the Police Department need more space?

The current facility no longer meets the Department's operational needs, and the program is sized to serve the department through 2044. The plan provides properly designed space for core functions that the current building layout cannot support well.

What will the new police facility include?

A secure operational core: sally port, booking and intake, evidence, and dispatch, along with detective and investigative space sized for future needs. The new entrance includes a clear, private path for victims and witnesses off the main lobby, separate from the secure areas.

What is a sally port and how was the location determined?

A sally port is a secure, enclosed vehicle bay used to safely transport individuals in custody into and out of the Police Department. The location of a sally port is determined by security and operational needs, not whether it is at the front or back of a building. Best practice is to locate the sally port immediately adjacent to booking, intake, and release functions so individuals in custody can be processed and released without traveling through the police facility. In Portsmouth's Municipal Building, the selected location provides the safest and most efficient connection between these functions while working within the constraints of the existing building, site layout, and topography.

Will the Police Department stay operational and secure during construction?

Yes. The work is phased specifically so the Police Department remains secure and on-site throughout construction. Police functions must stay in an appropriate, secure facility at all times.

Does the plan account for the future of policing, like real-time information or AI tools?

The design keeps the Department positioned for the future - for example, locating space so that tools like a real-time information center could be added as they mature. Decisions about adopting specific technologies rest with Police Department leadership; the building is simply designed to allow for those options.

City Hall and services for residents

How will this improve service for residents?

Creating a clear “point of service” at the main entrance, adding a new public elevator, improving accessibility, and grouping related services so residents can more easily access the services they need will all allow for a more efficient, user-friendly experience

What is a “point of service”?

It is a consolidated, public-facing area where residents interact with City staff. The plan brings the most frequently used services such as Tax, Clerk, and Assessing together right off the new accessible main entrance, with Health, Welfare, and Social Work close by. A new elevator in the point of service area will provide easy access to the Planning & Sustainability and Inspections Departments.

Will City Hall be more accessible?

Yes. Improving public access and accessibility including a new entrance with ramp, an elevator serving the public, and a consolidated, easier-to-navigate entrance, is a central goal of the plan.

Construction, phasing, and disruption

How will the work be phased?

In a sequence that keeps the buildings operating. The campus will not be vacated; instead, work proceeds in phases with the Police Department staying secure and on-site throughout.

What is the “move once” approach?

The phasing goal would be for a department to only relocate a single time — into its permanent home — rather than being shuffled multiple times. Moving once minimizes disruption, avoids paying for temporary space more than necessary, and helps control cost.

Will City Hall stay open during construction?

Yes. Services will continue to operate through the phased approach, with staff shifted as needed so the public can still be served. The City is currently looking at all options to ensure the public can access services during each of the phases of the project.

Will parking be affected?

There may be some short-term disruption during construction, as with any project of this kind.

What about the Farmer's Market?

The Farmer's Market may need to be relocated to the Lower City Hall Parking Lot or another location during the construction of the first phases (1-6) but might return to the Upper Lot once the project enters the latter phases.

How is the City planning to protect the historic cherry trees around South Mill Pond during the Municipal Building Complex construction?

As the City moves forward with plans for the Municipal Building Complex, the City is working with staff, the Trees & Public Greenery Committee, the Sister City Committee and a citizen CIP project request to protect the landscape and improve access to the cherry trees once construction is complete.

Status of City Departments including the School Department

Is the School Department moving?

Possibly. The plan contemplates relocating most of the School Department central administrative functions to Portsmouth High School, which would free up space on the campus and support the phased “move once” approach. This is not yet decided — the School Board is expected to act by September 30, 2026.

Will any Departments leave the campus?

Under the current direction, all departments ultimately remain on the campus except Water & Sewer Billing and most of the School Department. Some departments may relocate during the construction and return when their section of the building is complete.

Process, timeline, and getting involved

What is the Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee?

A committee established by the City Council to study the project, weigh options, and make recommendations to the City Council. Its work has included reviewing the space needs and adjacencies, surveying the condition of the existing building, asking questions that have helped develop and test concepts, and providing input on the phased plan approach.

What are the next steps?

Over the summer, the team will refine the layouts and prepare detailed, phase-by-phase cost estimates (reviewed with the committee on July 29 and September 9). Planned public outreach will also occur. In the Fall of 2026, the refined project will be returned to the City Council with recommendations from the Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee.

When will a final decision be made?

No decision is being made now, and the work will continue to refine the project and direction. In the Fall of 2026, once the cost estimating and public input are complete, a recommendation will be made to the Council.

How can the public weigh in?

Public input is an important part of the process. The Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee will include time for public feedback at their meetings in Conference Room A at City Hall (see website calendar for details).

The project was displayed at the City's booth at the Farmers' Market on August 1, and August 29, 2026, to gather input in addition to an online poll.

The project concept, FAQs, and details of the project will be on display in the Lobby of City Hall with the QR code linked to a survey to gather additional feedback.