

Arts and Cultural Commission

July 27, 2026

Meeting held at Portsmouth Historical Society

Attending: Emma Stratton, co-chair, Ken Goldman, vice-chair, Jeffrey Cooper, secretary, Theresa MacDowell, Hope Puzo, Sarah Illingsworth, Matt Dydo, Eli Kaynor, City Councilor Kate Cook

Absent: Linnea Grim, Genevieve Aichele, Karen Rosania, Margherita Giacobbi, City staff representative Sean Clancy

Meeting called to order at 1:00 PM

Minutes from the July 20 meeting passed unanimously with one abstention

Emma Stratton presentation about Portsmouth Historical Society.

PHS was founded in 1917 as a non-profit responsible for preservation of the John Paul Jones House, which opened to the public in 1920. In 2010 they opened a welcome center at the current location when the Portsmouth Public Library vacated the building. They host rotating exhibits, a gift shop, and daily walking tours of the City. Also housed in this location are Star Island Corporation and archival storage for the Portsmouth Athenaeum. They host 28,000 visitors each year about evenly split between tourists and locals. They have a collection of historic objects numbering 3,500, about 70% of which are on display at this site and at the John Paul Jones House, for which admission is just \$5 for Portsmouth residents. Rest rooms are open to the public, as are the gardens at the JPJ House.

PHS also owns the Beck House with address 43 Austin Street, which they received as a gift with restrictions about 5 years ago; however, deed restrictions make its reuse challenging. The artist live/work feasibility study may consider it for possible reuse in that capacity.

Workgroup reports

Communication and Community Engagement

Threse MacDowell reported on behalf of the workgroup.

1. They have updated the bios and photos on the ACC website
2. Another article about the Commission has been written and sent to Monte Bohanon for approval and forwarding to Seacoast Online and the Portsmouth Herald
3. A 'no cost low cost' events list has also been sent to Monte for approval and publication as a Googledoc. This list focuses on events with regularity, monthly and annual events. It

will be periodically updated. People can be made aware of this list through the City newsletter.

4. They are still planning the video series focusing first on the ACC commissioners. Each commissioner will be given a specific question to comment on, and the clips for each will be about a minute.

Collaboration and Resources

Jeffrey Cooper reported on behalf of this workgroup.

1. The workgroup has scheduled a site visit to Studios on Willow Street in Manchester
2. Andrea Pickett of Portsmouth Housing Authority has joined the workgroup
3. In preparation for the upcoming feasibility study on artist live/work spaces, members of the workgroup have been studying existing projects by ArtSpace Inc.

City Councilor Cook reported that City staff is currently working on the RFP for the feasibility study, and the question of whether or not ArtSpace can be hired directly is still outstanding. Either way, the hiring process should be completed in about a month.

Education and Advocacy

Eli Kaynor reported on the activities of this workgroup. The workgroup is actively reaching out to members of the education community in Portsmouth for interviews and information gathering. They have held a session with Jackie Chisolm, Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction.

E&A has noted the success of the Ona Judge mural for its educational value with regard to Black History. And they have learned that the current political climate creates concern among teachers about what they may teach on this subject.

E&A has also begun preparing for advocacy on the topic of demolition delay in the City of Portsmouth, and updates to the ordinance regarding that.

Fully detailed reports on their meeting are included in the public record.

Burning Issues

‘Seven to Save’

An application is being prepared to NH Preservation Alliance through ‘Seven to Save’ program for addressing preservation and climate mitigation in the historic building at Prescott Park, along the waterfront. Buildings in need of remediating are the Sheafe Building which is on the pier and houses a NH Art Association exhibition each summer, the Shaw Building which houses

the Prescott Park Arts Festival headquarters, the Marine Railroad building which houses the Players Ring, and the stage at Prescott Park.

Note: The above referenced report of the Education and Advocacy workgroup includes discussion on the topic of “Seven to Save.”.

Citywide Demolitions policy

Councilor Cook has brought to the City Council the need for a **Citywide Demolition Delay Ordinance** in light of several planned demolitions of historic houses outside the Historic District. These demolitions have angered residents in the neighborhoods where they are occurring because they replace workforce housing with high end structures that do not fit well with their surroundings. She has proposed **the formation of a Heritage Commission with meaningful enforcement authority**. The City Council has agreed in principle and sent the topic to the Planning Board for recommendations.

Note: The above referenced report of the Education and Advocacy workgroup includes detailed information on the topic of demolitions.

Banner Program

The City Council has approved the banner program as presented by City Manager Karen Conard.

Meeting Adjourned at 2:25 PM

Upcoming meeting

Monday August 17, 1:00 PM at conference Room A

Monday September 14, 1:00 PM at Portsmouth Music and Arts Center