

Minutes of the
Arts and Cultural Commission
May 18, 2026

Meeting held at NH Theatre Project 959 Islington Street, Portsmouth

Attending: Linnea Grim, co-chair, Emma Stratton, co-chair, Ken Goldman, vice chair, Jeffrey Cooper, secretary, City Councilor Kate Cook, Karen Rosania, Hope Puzzo, Demi Dubois, Sarah Illingsworth, Theresa MacDowell, Genevieve Aichele, Margherita Giacobbi, Sean Clancey, City Staff representative

Absent: Eli Kaynor

Guests: CJ Lewis, NHTP, Allison Craites

Minutes from the April 20 meeting were approved unanimously

CJ Lewis gave an overview of NH Theatre Project

NHTP has been active in Portsmouth for over 40 years, that last 20 at the current address. They take a wholistic approach to theatre, storytelling, teaching and professional development. Three main thrusts are:

1. Mainstage – ticketed shows
2. Theatre for life – improvisation, team building, and human dynamics workshops. For example, they have partnered with Safe Harbor Recovery Center on issues such as staff burnout using theater arts and writing workshops
3. “Elephant in the room” – using theater arts to lead conversations on difficult topics - social, family and mental health issues

To help with funding, they sublet their theatre space to other theater groups. The building is owned by Chinburg Associates, and NHTP has a 2-year lease.

Workgroup reports

Communications and Community Engagement

Theresa MacDowell reported summarizing progress made on the 7 objectives outlined at the April meeting, details of which are in the minutes from that meeting.

A press release has been written and submitted to Monte Bohanon of city staff for final review prior to being sent to media outlets

Collaborations and Resources

This workgroup is looking ahead to the feasibility study on artist live/workspaces and what can be done in advance, including obtaining some ideas on potential locations, and skillsets for additional workgroup members. Sean Clancy has reached out to ArtSpace on their behalf and learned that ArtSpace staff will become available for this project sometime in the Fall of 2027. Conversations with ArtSpace may begin when a contract is signed but in advance of the actual start of the Study.

The question of sole source selection process or RFP is up to the procurement department in City government. At this time, ArtSpace of Minneapolis is the preferred consultant.

Collaborations Workgroup is planning a visit to the Factory on Willow, an artist live/workspace in Manchester, to examine that facility and business model.

Education and Advocacy

This workgroup remains in an exploratory phase, and is planning meetings with school administrators and teachers.

Burning Issues

Portsmouth Archive Center is a collaborative effort between the City of Portsmouth, Portsmouth Historical Society, the Athenaeum, and Strawberry Banke. They are seeking a space with public accessibility to house a special collection.

2026 Master Plan

The Master Plan consultant is processing feedback from the April 22 public input session, which was attended by several members of the Commission. Key components are that the arts should be city wide not just downtown, creating a community feel in outlying neighborhoods, and historic preservation. A draft document is on the City website. One final public session is planned.

Window clings

- They don't stay up, need a better way to fasten to the windows.
- Businesses at first seemed more willing to put them up than they seem to lately.

Local Love

Hope Puzzo described a Chamber of Commerce initiative for shops to be open for a downtown walkabout modeled upon the successful Arts About Town evenings. Planned for the 3rd Thursday of each month. For more information go to <https://www.goportsmouthnh.com/locallove/>

Bohenko Gateway Park

A new sculpture titled “The Nebi”, an indigenous-inspired bronze artwork designed by local artist Anthony Alemany is currently in the fundraising stage.

City Hall Art Exhibit

Four local artists are to be featured at the Portsmouth City Hall. The show is curated by the Public Art Review Committee, and three such shows are planned each year.

Banner program

A report on the banner and signage initiative is expected from the City Manager at the May 18 City Council meeting

A historic **marker commemorating General Lafayette’s visit to Portsmouth** is to be unveiled at the Plains Ballfield May 27 from 1 to 2 PM, sponsored by the Friends of Lafayette

A **percent for arts funded mural at the Middle School** is in the planning stages

Meeting adjourned at 2:20 PM

Upcoming Meetings and Locations:

Monday, June 15, 1:00-2:30 pm, City Hall, Conference Room A

Monday, July 20, 1:00-2:30 pm, Portsmouth Historical Society

Monday, August 17, 1:00-2:30 pm, City Hall, Conference Room A