

**The Board of Fire Commissioners
Portsmouth Fire Department**

Fire Station 2
George Pierce Training Room
July 21, 2026

Portsmouth, NH
1800 hours

I. Call to Order:

Commissioner Hughes called the meeting to order at 1800 hours.

II. Pledge of Allegiance with Attendance:

Commissioner Hughes led the pledge of allegiance.

Present were Commissioners: Richard Gamester (via Teams), Jennifer Matthes and Michael Hughes; Fire Chief William McQuillen, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Gionet, Acting Deputy Fire Chief Chad Putney, Deputy City Atty Trevor McCourt, Administrative Manager Nancy Savini, and Lt Dame.

III. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Motion, to approve the minutes of June 9, 2026 (26-079), was made by Commissioner Hughes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes and passed unanimously.

IV. Public Comment Session: None.

Motion to suspend rules at 1804 hours and go out of order to bring the New Business of Ambulance Contracts (26-089) forward was made by Commissioner Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

Deputy City Atty McCourt discussed the Health Care Agreements and proposed a motion to move to authorize the Fire Chief to negotiate and execute four Standard Ground Ambulance Provider Contracts with Cigna, Anthem, Granite State Health Plan, and Well Sense in substantially the form included in the packet.

Noting that the Ambulance Billing framework changed on January 1, 2026, when SB 245 took effect. The new law bans surprise billing for ambulance services and sets a uniform reimbursement rate of 325% of the Medicare rate for the next two years, through December 31, 2027, after which the state will set a permanent cost-based rate. To qualify for the 325% rate, a department has to enroll with the New Hampshire Insurance Department and sign the standardized contract the State issued for use with every carrier. Assistant Chief Gionet has completed the enrollment; the remaining step is signing the contracts. Over the next two years, the Insurance Department will collect data which it will use to set new, standard billing rates according to the new statutory scheme.

Discussing that signing these contracts increases ambulance revenue by replacing the older, lower reimbursement rates with the State's 325% rate. As one illustration,

the City's billing vendor, Comstar, reviewed 31 Anthem transports from earlier this year and found the city had been paid about \$11,900, where the 325% rate would have produced roughly \$54,900 which is a difference of about \$32,300 on a single carrier over part of one year. That number is an estimate and does not account for patient copays and deductibles, but it shows the recurring revenue at stake across all four payors once the new rates are in place.

Motion, to move to authorize the Fire Chief to negotiate and execute four Standard Ground Ambulance Provider Contracts with Cigna, Anthem, Granite State Health Plan, and Well Sense in substantially the form included in the packet (26-089), was made by Commissioner Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

V. Presentation of Written Communication

Chief McQuillen read a thank you from Ron and Leigh Anne Florence for their gratitude for Chief McQuillen honoring their Nephew Firefighter Preston's request for a dept patch and coin (26-080) and a thank you from Taylor Paquette for her sincerest thank you to the paramedics that treated her son when he passed out and became unresponsive (26-081).

Motion, to accept both Thank Yous (26-080 & 26-081) and place on file, was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes and passed unanimously.

VI. Reports:

A. Fire Chief's Reports:

Commissioner Gamester motioned to discuss Chief's reports (26-082 through 26-085). Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes.

Fire Chief McQuillen reviewed reports with the Commission.

Report (26-082), 2026 Response Report for June 2026. The report shows the department responding to a total of 600 calls for the month: 248 Fire Calls with EMS Services and 140 Fire and Related Service Calls and 352 Ambulance Calls.

Chief spoke briefly about some incidents of interest:

June 1 1449 E1 E4 T2 A1 A3 526 State Street Gas main break, companies operated for 45 minutes.

June 3 0800 Fire Crews and City staff participated in NH HSEM Controlled Field Exercise Drill with Nexterra energy, testing City's Emergency response plans for more than 4 hours.

June 17 0455 hours 53 Pray St Building Fire E1 E4 T2 A1 A2 A3 C1 C2 C3 Pv 1&2 Rye Amb, Kittery Engine, PSNY Ladder, Newington Engine, Dover Engine, Rye Amb, Exeter Amb and Greenland Amb house fire, 2 firefighter injuries. Companies operated for more than 5 hours.

June 24 1131 Hours R7 and A2 mutual aid to Greenland, MVA Ocean Road at 33 with entrapment. Companies operated for 30 minutes.

For June's Safety Message, The Portsmouth Fire Department and National Safety Council would like to remind you:

Summer is synonymous with barbecues, parades and fireworks. The National Safety Council advises everyone to enjoy fireworks at public displays conducted by professionals and not to use any fireworks at home. They may be legal but they are not safe.

Every year, thousands of people are injured badly enough to require medical treatment after fireworks-related incidents, with many of the injuries to children and young adults. While the majority of these incidents are due to amateurs attempting to use professional-grade, homemade or other illegal fireworks or explosives, less powerful devices like small firecrackers and sparklers can also cause significant injuries.

Fireworks Safety Tips: If You Choose to Use Legal Fireworks

If consumer fireworks are legal to buy where you live and you choose to use them, be sure to follow the following safety tips:

- Never allow young children to handle fireworks
- Older children should use them only under close adult supervision
- Never use fireworks while impaired by drugs or alcohol
- Anyone using fireworks or standing nearby should wear protective eyewear
- Never hold lighted fireworks in your hands
- Never light them indoors
- Only use them away from people, houses and flammable material
- Never point or throw fireworks at another person
- Only light one device at a time and maintain a safe distance after lighting
- Never ignite devices in a container
- Do not try to re-light or handle malfunctioning fireworks
- Soak both spent and unused fireworks in water for a few hours before discarding
- Keep a bucket of water nearby to fully extinguish fireworks that don't go off or in case of fire
- Never use illegal fireworks

Better yet, grab a blanket and a patch of lawn, kick back and let the experts handle the fireworks show.

Sparklers Are More Dangerous Than You Think

Every year, young children can be found along parade routes and at festivals with sparklers in hand, but sparklers are a lot more dangerous than most people think.

Sparklers burn at about 2,000 degrees – hot enough to melt some metals. Sparklers can quickly ignite clothing, and children have received severe burns from dropping sparklers on their feet. According to the National Fire Protection Association, sparklers accounted for 29% fireworks injuries for children under age 5 in 2022.

Report (26-083), Fire and EMS Call Summary Reports, shows the department responded to fire calls for the month of June. EMS activity was 299 with the top three responses being for weakness, no apparent illness/pain and Sepsis. There were 11 calls for head/scalp injury, 9 for cardiac, 8 for non-cardiac chest pain and 35 non-transports.

Report (26-084), FY26 Budget, Chief reviewed the budget noting the FY26 dept balance is approximately \$177,000 with \$50K being FEMA funds which was reimbursement for Blue Card OT Training. Report (26-085), Overtime Analysis, provided a breakdown of how overtime was used in the month of June along with a summary of what was charged to OT-Recall for the month. Noting the OT Training line included Rookie School for all new Fire fighters teaching them the fundamentals of fire and rescue.

Motion, to accept Chief's Reports 26-082 through 26-085, was made by Commissioner Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

B. Staff Reports:

Assistant Chief Gionet reported on facilities and operations happening within the department (26-086) which are as follows:

Apparatus / Equipment / Facilities

1. Ambulance Repairs: Ambulance 2 suspension repairs Ambulance 4 Alternator replacement
2. New Ambulance: Contract awaiting Legal review as well as Bond Authorization by Council to proceed. Estimated delivery of January 2027
3. New Command Vehicle: Awaiting a PO to purchase and have the vehicle upfitted.

Personnel

1. Current open positions: 2 current openings with 1 candidate having just cleared physical and background checks, awaiting a start date. Candidate is relocating from Colorado.
2. Interviews: 2 candidates interviewed today, July 21, 2026, and will be moving forward in the process.

Training

1. 3 Officers participated in the Blue Card Train the Trainer program and are now instructors for the program. We now have 6 instructors in-house
2. Planning for the Pease Triennial Disaster Drill in September ongoing
3. Recruit School for Probationary Firefighters: Captain Kenneway led a 5-day recruit school program for our newest firefighters which proved successful. This was focused on firefighting basics and reinforcement of skills learned throughout their probationary period.

Other

1. Wrapping up the ambulance billing contracts with private insurance carriers
2. Completing the Ground Ambulance Data Collection for the NH Insurance Department as part of SB 245.

Deputy Chief Putney reported (26-089) on Fire Prevention activity for the month of June with 45 permits issued and 37 inspections done. Revenue collected for June 2026 was a little under \$15K.

Other Notable Items are as follows:

- The Pray Street fire investigation was led by FPO Wheeler and its cause will remain undermined pending a possible joint scene investigation with insurance companies.
- FPO Wheeler addressed a Carbon Monoxide condition affecting a Gosling Meadows building due to a serious plumbing installation error.
- FPO Scholtz has been diligently perusing compliance with place of assembly permit holders.
- Childcare steering committee will be issuing a guidance document after several meetings and one public 'ask an expert' panel was held.

VII. Old Business:

Revision pertaining to fireworks was made to (26-088) The Portsmouth Fire Department Rules and Regulations for Fire Protection Systems and Permits was discussed.

Motion, to approve and adopt revision (26-088), was made by Commissioner Gamester. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Matthes and passed unanimously.

IX. New Business:

Promotional process for the Dept to give Fire Chief authorization was discussed as well as authorizing the Chief to the mayor's request to apply for a grant with the Coast Guard and FEMA for the new Fire Boat. The Chief will apply for a grant which could possibly fund the purchase of a new boat at 75%. If no grant was issued, but vote from council passed, then the boat will be purchased through CIP.

Motion, to move to authorize Chief with the Fire Dept promotional process also, to direct the Fire Chief to negotiate with the Coast Guard and FEMA in reference Grant requests for a new Fire boat, was made by Commissioner Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

X. Adjournment:

Motion, to adjourn at 1839 hours, was made by Commissioner Matthes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Gamester and passed unanimously.

Jennifer Mosher-Matthes, Clerk

DRAFT