

MEETING MINUTES AND ACTIONS OF THE PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 2, 2026, 7:00 PM
MUNICIPAL COMPLEX, 1 JUNKINS AVENUE, PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Mayor McEachern called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM

1. Non-Public Session

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to close the Non-Public Session and seal the minutes, seconded by Councilor Moreau.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

2. Roll Call

Present: Mayor McEachern, Assistant Mayor Kelley, Councilors Cook, Tabor, Blalock, Bagley, Moreau, Flynn, and Hopkins

Absent: None

3. Invocation

Mayor McEachern took a moment to acknowledge the passing of Heath Wilson, extending condolences to his wife, Kristin, and children Teagan and Roan. Mayor McEachern recognized Heath's extensive involvement in the Portsmouth community.

Mayor McEachern recognized the community's efforts to keep sidewalks clear in the last snowstorm, reminding residents it takes a village to get through major storms like this. He requested patience for DPW crews who are working around the clock to clear snow.

Mayor McEachern spoke on the role of Portsmouth's government protecting the rights of all citizens, reminding it is "liberty and justice for all."

4. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor McEachern led the Pledge of Allegiance

5. Acceptance of Minutes – November 17, 2025; December 8, 2025; December 22, 2025; and January 5, 2026

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to accept and approve the minutes of the November 17, 2025, December 8, 2025, December 22, 2025, and January 5, 2026 City Council meetings, seconded by Councilor Moreau.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

6. Recognitions and Volunteer Committee Reports

- a. Proclamation(s) – Black History Month: Mayor McEachern read the Proclamation declaring February as Black History Month and urging all citizens to champion now more than ever our commitment to racial equity and inclusion and to sustain the open door of diversity throughout our community

7. Public Comment Session – There was one speaker: Gerald Duffy (Housing)

8. Request for Water and Sewer Enterprise Fund Rate Model Study Follow Up Work Session

Councilor Cook moved to schedule a work session on March 2, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. for the purpose of presenting and discussing the findings and recommendations of the Water and Sewer Rate Study, seconded by Councilor Bagley.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

9. Purchase and Sale Agreement for the Greenland Well

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to authorize the City Manager to enter into a Purchase and Sale Agreement in a substantially similar form as provided in the agenda packet to procure approximately 1.07 acres from the Town of Greenland, and take all further action subsequent thereto that may be necessary to close on the subject project if contingencies are met, seconded by Councilor Moreau.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

10. Renewal and Update to the Municipal Alliance for Adaptive Management (MAAM)

Following an overview of MAAM's purpose and recent history from City Manager Conard, Assistant Mayor Kelley asked which communities eligible to join MAAM have not done so. Regulatory Counsel Suzanne Woodland noted Somersworth, Newmarket, Durham, and Newfields are not MAAM members. Regulatory Counsel Woodland noted these communities have been invited to join, and MAAM enjoys support from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and N.H. Department of Environmental Services.

Councilor Cook inquired how Portsmouth's cost allocation was determined against other communities. Regulatory Counsel Woodland replied that allocations are determined by design flows, noting that Portsmouth has two wastewater treatment plants. Determining rates based on usage

versus design will be a conversation down the line, as smaller municipalities upgrade their treatment facilities and infrastructure.

Councilor Tabor expressed that this is an example of communities working together in the region and is gratified to see that Portsmouth is exemplifying best practices.

Councilor Blalock moved to authorize the City Manager to execute the Amendment to Renew and Update the Intermunicipal Agreement for Development of an Adaptive Water Quality Management Plan for Great Bay Estuary in a substantially similar form as contained in the agenda packet, seconded by Councilor Tabor.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

11. Consent Agenda

- a. Letter from Ken La Valley, Out of the Darkness Walk, requesting permission to hold the Out of the Darkness Walk on Saturday, September 19, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.
(Anticipated action – move to refer to the City Manager with Authority to Act)

Councilor Flynn moved to adopt the Consent the Agenda, seconded by Councilor Hopkins.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

12. Email Correspondence

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to accept and place on file, seconded by Councilor Cook.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

13. Letter from Mellissa Walls, Maeve's Mobile Cocktail Hour & The Vagabond's Faire, requesting permission to hold a Night Market at Bohenko Park from 6:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m. seeking suggested date.

Councilor Cook moved to refer to the City Manager with authority to act, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

14. Letter from Mark Alesse regarding adjustments to the parking ordinance

Councilor Hopkins moved to refer to the Parking & Traffic Safety Committee for report back, seconded by Councilor Bagley.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

15. Appointments to be Considered

- Appointment of Sarah Illingworth as an Alternate to the Arts & Cultural Commission
- Appointment of Mary Claire Rodriguez-Abbott to the Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee
- Appointment of Heather Krans to the Public Art Review Committee
- Appointment of Christopher Clement, Sr. to the Trustees of Trust Funds

The City Council considered the appointments outlined below to be voted upon at the February 17, 2026, meeting.

16. Appointments to be Voted

- Reappointment of Jeffrey Cooper to the Arts & Cultural Commission
- Appointment of Demi Dubois to the Arts & Cultural Commission
- Reappointment of Eli Kaynor to the Arts & Cultural Commission
- Appointment of Hope Anderson Puzzo to the Arts & Cultural Commission
- Appointment of Margherita Giacobbi to the Arts & Cultural Commission
- Appointment of Joshua Cyr to the Economic Development Commission
- Appointment of Jason Goodrich as an Alternate to the Economic Development Commission
- Appointment of Amy Dutton to the Cemetery Committee
- Appointment of Jennifer Merriam to the Cemetery Committee
- Appointment of Susan Sterry to the Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to accept as presented, seconded by Councilor Moreau.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

17. Acceptance of Resignation of Ellen Fineberg from the Public Art Review Committee

Councilor Cook moved to accept with regret the resignation of Ellen Fineberg from the Public Art Review Committee and to send a letter thanking Ellen for her service to the City, seconded by Councilor Tabor.

Councilor Cook extended her thanks and appreciation to Ellen Fineberg and noted the Committee misses seeing her. Councilor Cook cited Fineberg as a positive force and hopes one day she'll return to the Committee.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

18. 2026-2027 City Council Goal Categories, Summaries, and Strategic Objectives

Mayor McEachern reviewed the Council's six goal categories, along with their summaries and strategic objectives:

1. Housing
2. Parking and Transportation
3. Governance for the Governed
4. Arts, Culture, and Enrichment of Residential Life
5. Reduce School Food Poverty
6. Preserving Sense of Place

19. **FY27 Budget guidance from the City Council, and request for report back on open positions, retirements, and possible efficiencies from these (with work session at City Manager's discretion)**

Councilor Tabor requested to establish a Work Session at the City Manager's discretion with a report back on open positions, retirements, and possible efficiencies.

Councilor Bagley recognized this would be a particularly challenging budget season due to health insurance and other fixed costs, and that the City may have to look at cutting items out of necessity to ease the tax burden.

Councilor Cook spoke on the effort last year to keep the budget under the Social Security COLA but does not know if it is feasible for the upcoming budget given the increases in healthcare costs. She echoed Councilor Tabor's goal of making "gentle" cuts and foresees future work sessions to work through budget challenges.

Mayor McEachern noted he would not be entirely opposed to a hiring freeze, as it would serve as an opportunity to fully evaluate needs. He added that it is up to City leadership to show that departments are finding any and all ways to effectively streamline operations.

20. **Discussion and direction regarding next steps to improve childcare access and quality in Portsmouth, including the formation of a City led, cross-departmental working group and exploration of employer supported childcare models in partnership with the Chamber and local businesses**

Councilor Hopkins opened the discussion describing the nature of modern childcare, where often times parents rely on sporadic care from friends and family to assist, which is not always consistent—and can be a constraint on whether a parent can make it to work. Councilor Hopkins provided current annual costs for childcare, in this scenario specific to an infant and a toddler, totaling \$32,000 annually, which is 28% of the median New Hampshire family income. She continued to explain issues of access, such as waitlists—even if a family can afford childcare, it cannot always be accessed.

Councilor Hopkins proceeded to discuss HB1433, a bill offering tax cuts for businesses providing or creating childcare.

Councilor Hopkins suggested creating a time bound City-led childcare access and quality led working group with a small steering team and a broader advisory network.

Councilors Bagley, Blalock, and Cook expressed support and interest in childcare solutions, citing personal experience and observations around childcare challenges.

Councilor Hopkins asked that the City look at areas such as zoning, permitting, change of use, public health considerations, and economic development workforce impacts. She requested a snapshot of Portsmouth childcare today, what exists, what ages are served, and where the gaps are. She further requested the investigation of any local barriers, identification of any available quick wins, and bringing back partnership options that include employer supported models and adaptive reuse of commercial space. She also requested an implementation roadmap with realistic costs, potential funding sources with a recommendation in 90 days.

Councilor Moreau moved for the City Manager to act, seconded by Councilor Blalock.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

21. Discussion on cross-committee collaboration and integration: exploring low burden ways to coordinate committee work, share insights, and ensure sustainability considerations are reflected across City actions

Councilor Hopkins began this discussion with her experience meeting with the Sustainability Committee, noting that a significant takeaway from the meeting was how sustainability matters intersect with other committee focuses (i.e. housing, parking and traffic), but oftentimes the City does get to see how these committees can build upon each other's efforts. She noted committees operating in silos risk duplicating efforts or miss opportunities to align goals. Councilor Hopkins proposed some sort of aligned communication among committees, helping residents see all the work that happens behind the scenes.

Councilor Bagley spoke on how he has observed these missed opportunities in the past, citing the case of microtransit options not being reviewed by the Sustainability Committee (who later reviewed microtransit on their own), demonstrating the risk of duplicating efforts.

Mayor McEachern proposed to integrate this concern into the newly developed Council Goals and share this new goal amongst committees. Councilor Cook proposed a report-back system from Councilors if it could be seen as beneficial for another committee. Councilor Tabor acknowledged how some committees operate in tandem, while others are more distant—he noted this could be bridged by establishing quantifiable goals. Councilor Moreau echoed the merit of a report-back system.

After further discussion, **Councilor Tabor moved to send the City Council Goals to the Boards, Commissions, and Committees, including Blue Ribbon Committees on further communication and collaboration amongst them and receive feedback on the goals as one stated purpose and when an action aligns with a Council goal to report that back to the City Council, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley.**

Councilor Blalock aired concerns shared by the Economic Development Committee regarding the Council's goals, noting a lack of involvement with small businesses.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

19. Approval of Donation from Paul Gormley and Kimi Iguchi for the Portsmouth Fire Department - \$1,000

Councilor Flynn moved to approve and accept the donation for the Fire Department as presented, seconded by Councilor Moreau.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

20. Adjournment

At 8:20 PM, Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Councilor Bagley.

On a unanimous vote, motion passed.

Prepared by:
Jefferson H. Lane
Interim Recording Secretary

Submitted to City Council by:

Sally Kellar
City Clerk



Approved by the City Council

Date:



The Portsmouth City Council meeting of February 2, 2026, can be viewed in its entirety on the City of Portsmouth YouTube Channel.