

Meeting Minutes and Actions of the Portsmouth City Council
March 16, 2026, 7:00 PM
Municipal Complex, 1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth NH

1. **Call to Order** - Mayor McEachern called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m.

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to close the Non-Public Session and seal the minutes. Seconded by Councilor Cook. On an 8-0 roll call vote, motion passed. Mayor McEachern, Assistant Mayor Kelley, Councilors Cook, Blalock, Bagley, Moreau, Flynn and Hopkins voted Yes. Councilor Tabor Absent.

2. **Roll Call**

Present: Mayor McEachern, Assistant Mayor Kelley, Councilors Cook, Blalock, Bagley, Moreau, Flynn and Hopkins. Councilor Tabor arrived 7:15.

Mayor McEachern acknowledged the students participating in 2026 Student Government Day. Mayor McEachern acknowledged the commitment of local servicemen and women.

3. **Pledge of Allegiance** – Pledge of Allegiance was held

4. **Acceptance of Minutes** – March 2, 2026, City Council meeting

Councilor Hopkins moved to accept and approve the minutes of the March 2, 2026, City Council meeting. Seconded by Councilor Flynn. Motion passed unanimously.

5. **Recognitions and Volunteer Committee Reports**

Proclamation – Women’s History Month

Councilor Blalock voted to suspend the rules and bring forward Item 13. Presentations and Written Communications, Item C. David M. Scanlan, NH Secretary of State. Seconded by Councilor Moreau. Motion passed unanimously.

Mayor McEachern introduced Secretary Scanlan and stated his own personal experience with staggering insurance and billing costs.

Secretary of State provided a brief presentation following which the Mayor and members of the City Council asked questions of the Secretary of State to which the Secretary of State and members of his office provided answers.

Deliberations continued between City Council members, Secretary Scanlan and his legal team.

Mayor McEachern presented the following orders of business for City Council approval.

Councilor Blalock moved to authorize the City Manager to negotiate a payment agreement with SchoolCare in the amount of \$1,570,606, under protest. Seconded by Councilor Cook

On a roll call vote 8-1, motion passed. Councilor Bagley voting opposed.

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to direct the Office of the City Attorney to submit public records requests to SchoolCare, the Office of the Secretary of State, and the National Education Association of New Hampshire, seeking records relevant to the Assessment. Seconded by Councilor Cook

On a unanimous roll call vote, motion passed.

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to direct the City Manager to explore uncommitted funds in the remainder of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget to address as much of the \$1,570.606 assessment as possible without curtailing services, and to report back. Seconded by Councilor Moreau

On a unanimous roll call vote, motion passed.

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to request that the School Board explore uncommitted funds in the remainder of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget to address as much of the \$1,570,606 assessment as possible without curtailing services, and to report back. Seconded by Councilor Blalock.

On a unanimous roll call vote, motion passed.

- 6. Public Comment Session** – There were sixteen speakers. Stephanie Seacord (Sister Cities), Gerald Duffy (Housing Action Plan), Alex Clithero (SchoolCare), Erin Bakkom (SchoolCare), Esther Kennedy (Portsmouth), Marcus Santy (SchoolCare), Lisa Rapaport (SchoolCare), Chris White (Audit), Kline Dickens (Urgent-Matter Pease), Paige Trace (Portsmouth), Nancy Novelline Clayburgh (SchoolCare), David Castellano (SchoolCare), Rick Becksted (SchoolCare & Kelli Barnaby), Roy Helsel (School Board), Petra Huda (Health Stabilization Fund), Peter Hurst (SchoolCare)

Councilor Blalock voted to suspend the rules and bring forward Item 16. Approval of Grants/Donations, Item B. Acceptance of Donation from the Serious Summer League for a new scoreboard at the South Mill Pond Basketball Courts. Seconded by Councilor Moreau. Motion passed unanimously.

7. Approval of Grants/Donations

- B. Acceptance of Donation from the Serious Summer League for a new scoreboard at the South Mill Pond Basketball Courts.

Councilor Blalock moved to approve and accept the donation as presented. Seconded by Councilor Moreau. Motion passed unanimously.

Mayor McEachern called the meeting to recess.

Mayor McEachern called the meeting to order.

Councilor Cook voted to suspend the rules and bring forward Item 16, Approval of Grants/Donations, Item A. Acceptance of Donation from Richard Duddy to donate a Memorial Bench in memory of Richie Duddy. Seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. Motion passed unanimously.

8. Approvals of Grants/Donations

A. Acceptance of Donation from Richard Duddy to donate a Memorial Bench in Memory of Richie Duddy

Councilor Bagley moved to accept a memorial bench from Richard Duddy in memory of Richie Duddy to be installed at the Plains Ballfield. Seconded by Councilor Hopkins. Motion passed unanimously.

9. PUBLIC HEARING AND SECOND READING of Ordinance amendment to Chapter 1, ADMINISTRATIVE CODE, Article IV – COMMISSIONS AND AUTHORITIES, Section 1.415, be added to establish a permanent Sister City Committee

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to pass second recording and schedule third and final reading at the April 6, 2026, City Council meeting. Seconded by Councilor Cook. After public hearing, motion passed unanimously.

Mayor McEachern opened the public hearing. After seeing no speakers, Mayor McEachern closed the public hearing.

Councilor Blalock moved to suspend the rules and pass third and final reading as presented. Seconded by Councilor Cook. Motion passed unanimously.

10. PUBLIC HEARING AND SECOND READING of Ordinance amendment to Chapter 10, Zoning Ordinance as follows: rezone parcel described on the City Tax Map 209, Lot 87 from Single Residence B (SRB) to Gateway Neighborhood Mixed Use Center (G2); and Article 4 Zoning Districts and Use Regulations, Section 10.440, Use 3.40 “Museum” to be changed from “S” Special Exception to “P”, Permitted in Gateway Neighborhood Mixed Use Corridor (G1) and G2. The Zoning Maps to be amended are referenced in the City’s Zoning Ordinance at Chapter 10, Article 4, Zoning and District Use Regulations, referenced in the City’s Zoning Ordinance at Chapter 10, Article 4, Zoning and District Use Regulations, Section 10.421, District Location and Boundaries, Section 10.421.10, collectively the “Zoning Maps”

Presentation by Assistant Planning Director Peter Stith.

Councilor Moreau moved to pass second reading and schedule third and final reading at the April 6, 2026 City Council meeting. Second by Councilor Blalock. After public hearing, motion passed unanimously.

Mayor McEachern opened the public hearing. After seeing no speakers, Mayor McEachern closed public hearing.

Councilor Moreau moved to suspend the rules and bring up third and final reading. Second, Councilor Cook. Motion passed unanimously.

Councilor Moreau moved to pass third and final reading as presented. Seconded by Councilor Blalock. Motion passed unanimously.

11. PUBLIC HEARING AND SECOND READING of Ordinance amendment Chapter 10, Zoning Ordinance to change the zoning designation of the following parcels pursuant to Chapter 10, Article 4, Zoning and District Use Regulations, Section 10.421, District Location and Boundaries, Section 10.421.10 of the Zoning Ordinance

Presentation by Assistant Planning Director Peter Stith.

Mayor McEachern opened the public hearing. There were three speakers – Petra Huda, Esther Kennedy, Paige Trace

After seeing no more speakers, Mayor McEachern closed the public hearing.

Councilor Tabor moved to pass second reading and schedule third and final reading at the April 16, 2026, City Council meeting. Seconded by Councilor Hopkins. Motion passed unanimously.

12. PUBLIC HEARING AND ADOPTION of Resolution Pursuant to RSA 72:39-b regarding the elderly exemption on assessed value for qualified taxpayers

Presentation by City Assessor Rosann Maurice-Lentz, CNHA, CMA.

Mayor McEachern opened the public hearing. After seeing no speakers, Mayor McEachern closed public hearing.

Councilor Moreau moved to extend the meeting past 10:30 p.m. Seconded by Councilor Cook. Assistant Mayor Kelley voted opposed. Motion passed 8-1.

Councilor Cook moved to adopt the elderly exemption as presented in Option 4. Seconded by Councilor Blalock. Motion passed unanimously.

13. PUBLIC HEARING AND ADOPTION of Resolution Pursuant to RSA 72:37-b regarding the disabled exemption based on assessed value for qualified taxpayers

Presentation by City Assessor Rosann Maurice-Lentz, CNHA, CMA

Presentation by Scott Scott, Tax Assessor, regarding property tax deferral option

Councilor Cook moved to adopt the disabled exemption as presented in Option 4. Seconded by Councilor Blalock.

Mayor McEachern opened the public hearing, seeing no speakers, Mayor McEachern closed the public hearing.

Motion passed unanimously.

14. PUBLIC HEARING OF Resolution authorizing the issuance of refunding bonds of up to Eight Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$8,500,000) to refinance certain outstanding bonds of the city so as to reduce interest costs, and to pay all costs incidental and related thereto.

Mayor McEachern opened the public hearing. There were two speakers – Petra Huda, Esther Kennedy

After seeing no more speakers, Mayor McEachern closed the public hearing.

Councilor Blalock moved to adopt the resolution as presented. Seconded by Councilor Bagley. On a unanimous roll call vote motion passed.

15. PUBLIC HEARING OF Resolution authorizing a supplemental appropriation of \$400,000 from unassigned fund balance for necessary expenditures related to outside counsel

City Attorney Susan Morrell provided a verbal summary of the pending litigation and the grounds continuing engagement of outside counsel.

Councilor Hopkins moved to authorize the Supplemental Appropriation for Outside Counsel Fees of 400,000. Seconded by Councilor Blalock.

Mayor McEachern opened the public hearing. There were three speakers – Petra Huda, Rick Becksted, Esther Kennedy

After seeing no more speakers, Mayor McEachern closed the public comment.

On a unanimous roll call vote motion passed

16. Request Authorization to Expend Funds from the Lower State Street Pocket Park (Jay Smith) Trust

Councilor Cook moved to authorize the expenditure of up to \$26,000 from the Lower State Street Pocket Park (Jay Smith Park) Trust to cover the cost of maintenance improvements to the Park. Seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. Motion passed unanimously.

17. Request to Schedule First Reading of Amendment to Chapter 11, Article II, Section 11.216 (B) Relative to Sewer Use Changes

Councilor Blalock moved to schedule first reading of the amendment to Chapter II, Article II, Section 11.216 (B) relative to the establishment of sewer fees at the April 6, 2026, City Council meeting. Seconded by Councilor Bagley. Motion passed unanimously.

18. Request for Community Power Work Session

Councilor Cook moved to schedule a Community Power Work Session on April 20, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. Seconded by Councilor Flynn. Motion passed unanimously.

19. Access Easements for Water Services for 51 and 53 Chevrolet Avenue

Councilor Moreau moved to authorize the City Manager to accept and approve the Access Easements for Water Services in a form substantially similar to the easement deeds contained in the agenda packet. Seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. Motion passed unanimously.

20. Disposal of Fire Engine

Councilor Blalock moved to authorize this vehicle be put out to bid in accordance with Finance Department Policy. Seconded by Councilor Hopkins. Motion passed unanimously.

21. Consent Agenda (there are no items under this section)

22. Email Correspondence

Councilor Bagley moved to accept and place on file. Seconded by Councilor Cook. Motion passed unanimously.

23. Letter from Robert Graham, designated agent for Banfield Realty, LLC and Green Valley Realty, LLC

Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to accept and place on file. Seconded by Councilor Flynn. Motion passed unanimously.

24. Move to Appoint Acting City Clerk

Councilor Moreau moved to appoint June H. Philbrook as Acting City Clerk (Clerk Pro Tempore) to the City of Portsmouth, effective March 17, 2026, to serve until a permanent City Clerk is hired. This appointment is made in accordance with the City Charter, Section 4.2, NH RSA 48:8, and NH RSA 669: 65 to fill the current vacancy in the office. Seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. Motion passed unanimously.

25. Appointments to be Considered – The City Council considered the appointments outlined below to be voted upon at the April 6, 2026, meeting.

- Reappointment of Jacqueline Cali-Pitts to the Recreation Board
- Appointment of Angus MacDonald to the Portsmouth Housing Committee
- Appointment of Oliver Chag to the Portsmouth Housing Committee

26. City Manager's Informational Items:

- Housing Action Plan Report Back – City Manager Conard stated that the Planning and Sustainability Department is realigning staff responsibilities to address the City Council Goal on housing. The Housing Action Plan will work to identify actions taken to supply low market rate housing in Portsmouth.
- Meeting Minute update – City Manager Conard spoke to the revising of the meeting minutes and implementing the new format of Meeting Minutes and Actions Taken with the March 2, 2026, City Council meeting. City Manager Conard welcomes feedback from City Council members.
- Outdoor Dining – City Manager Conard spoke to the opening of the outdoor dining season.
- Master Plan Open House – City Manager Conard advised City Council members that the Open House will be held on April 22, 2026 at 6:00 p.m., at Community Campus.

- Report Back on Vacancies and Retirements – City Manager Conard provided a list of current vacancies and retirements as was requested by Councilor Tabor at the February 2nd, City Council meeting.

27. Adjournment

At 11:51 p.m. Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Councilor Blalock. Motion passed unanimously.

Prepared by:

June H. Philbrook, CNHDMC

Then Acting City Clerk

Submitted to City Council by:

Approved by the City Council

Katelyn Griggs

Date: May 20, 2026

Acting City Clerk

The Portsmouth City Council meeting of March 16, 2026, can be viewed in its entirety on the City of Portsmouth You Tube Channel.