

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 25th, 2025, POLICE COMMISSION MEETING

5:30 p.m. Public Session – Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers

Kate Coyle, Chair
Buzz Scherr, Commissioner
Francesca Fernald, Commissioner

The following people were present for the public session: Commissioners Coyle, Scherr (virtually via Zoom) and Fernald, Business Manager Karen Senecal, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett and members of the police department and the public.

- I. **CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Chair Coyle.
- II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Led collectively by the Commission.
- III. **ACCEPTANCE OF THE 12/17/24 & 2/12/25 MEETING MINUTES:**
 - Action:** Commissioner Fernald moved to accept the minutes of the above-noted Police Commission meetings.
 - Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.**
 - Roll Call Vote:** Unanimously approved, 3-0.
- IV. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** None
- V. **NEW BUSINESS:**
 - A. **POLICE COMMISSION:**
 1. **Appointment of Commission Chair and Clerk**
 - Action:** Commissioner Fernald moved to keep everyone in their current positions: Commission Chair Kate Coyle and Clerk Buzz Scherr.
 - Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.**
 - Roll Call Vote:** Unanimously approved, 3-0.
 2. **Representative on the City Ethics Committee**

Commission Chair Kate Coyle was appointed to the City Ethics Committee following a blind drawing.

3. Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

The Chair mentioned that the group is gathering foundational information about the police facility and the entire city complex. Discussions include reviewing existing information gathered by the Working Group, with a meeting tomorrow to address staff space needs and develop a plan moving forward.

4. Facilities Update

a. Restoration

The Chief reported that duct cleaning for the police facility is imminent, and scheduling efforts are underway.

5. Community Priorities

The community survey has been completed, providing valuable feedback for the Police Department. The results have been posted on the department's website. The Commission encourages ongoing public input to help inform decision-making for the community. The Chief noted that this presents an opportunity for the department to identify areas for improvement.

Regarding the Staffing Study, the Chief provided an update on the anticipated timeline, stating that the process is currently 50% complete. Final results are expected in May, and a report will be presented to the City Council.

VI. SUSPENSION OF RULES/NON-AGENDA ITEM:

The Chair requested a motion to suspend the rules to allow discussion of a non-agenda item.

Action: Commissioner Fernald moved to suspend the rules for the reason stated above.

Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.

Roll Call Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

1. The Chair requested a motion to reopen the public hearing session on the FY26 budget proposal.

Action: Commissioner Fernald moved to suspend the rules for the reason stated above.

Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.

Roll Call Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

2. **Non-agenda item:** Chief Newport presented his recommendations for budget reductions to align with the City Council’s 2.9% budget cap guideline.

B. CHIEF OF POLICE:

1. Grant & Donations

- a. **Grant:** \$11,987 from the US Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance, which supports leadership and wellbeing training for law enforcement officers. for Seacoast Emergency Response Team night vision equipment.

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept and forward to the City Council for their action.

Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.

Roll Call Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

- b. **Donation:** \$500 from Service Credit Union’s Portsmouth Branch to the Auxiliary Police Association, as part of their “Adopt a Nonprofit” Program. The donation recognizes the Auxiliary Police Association for its outstanding work and positive impact on the community.

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept and forward to the City Council for their action.

Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.

Roll Call Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

- c. **Donation:** \$300 from Jason Page for the Portsmouth Police Explorers Post 2609. This will help to support the youth Explorer Program

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept and forward to the City Council for their action.

Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.

Roll Call Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

2. Crime Analyst Report

December 2024 Stats:

Calls for Service: ↓ 11.7%

Arrests: ↑ 7.3%

DWI Arrests: ↑ 32.1%

Reports Taken: ↓ 4%

Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: ↓ 3.6%

Motor Vehicle Stops: ↓ 8.2%

IEA (Involuntary Emergency Admissions): ↑ 21.5%

Mental Health Calls: ↓ 15.2%
Juvenile Matter Calls: ↓ 21.9%

January 2025 Stats:

Calls for Service: ↓ 21.1%
Arrests: ↓ 22.9%
DWI Arrests: ↓ 61.3%
Reports Taken: ↑ 4.6%
Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: ↓ 5.8%
Motor Vehicle Stops: ↓ 30.9%
IEA (Involuntary Emergency Admissions): ↑ 84.6%
Juvenile Matter Calls: ↓ 25%

3. Monthly Traffic Stats

December 2024:

- Motor vehicle stops: 641
- Summonses issued: 20
- Reportable motor vehicle crashes: 37

January 2025:

- Motor vehicle stops: 517
- Summonses issued: 14
- Reportable motor vehicle crashes: 38

The reduction in mental health calls is attributed to the involvement of the state's Mobile Crisis Response Team, 988services, and the Police Department's use of a Social Worker. Other statistical changes are directly linked to staffing shortages.

4. Financial Report

The FY25 budget is 1.5% below the cap, with a slightly larger variance expected due to the pending grant paperwork.

Preparations are underway for the FY26 budget meeting with the City Manager on March 3rd. The final budget discussion will take place at the March 18th Police Commission meeting, with the public having the opportunity to provide input throughout the process.

a. Grant Applications Update

- Requesting a \$1.2M grant for the 2025-2027 NH ICAC state funded grant.
 - Reviewing grant solicitations, including funding to support a second social worker

b. Strategic Plan Update – Business Operations Manager Karen Senecal will resume focus on completing the strategic plan after addressing two major projects.

Commissioner Scherr expressed concerns about the upcoming budget due to the elimination of the profits tax, potential Medicaid cuts, and uncertainties around the state ICAC grant and federal funding based on what is happening in Washington D.C. Karen reported that the Police Department is still receiving Department of Justice grant solicitations, and while federal funding remains uncertain, it has not yet impacted operations. However, not securing these grants could affect statewide efforts to investigate crimes against children.

VII. PATROL DIVISION:

- a. This report was included in the commission meeting packet.

VIII. COURT OFFICE REPORT:

- a. This confidential report was included in the meeting packet.

IX. MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER BUSINESS:

X. NEXT REGULAR MEETING:

Tentatively Tuesday, March 18th, 2025, at 5:30 PM.

XI. MOTION TO ADJOURN:

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to adjourn at 6:01 PM.

Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.

Roll Call Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

END OF MEETING

Respectfully Submitted by Jacqueline Burnett, Executive Assistant
Commissioner Buzz Scherr, Recording Clerk of the Commission