

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 18th, 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 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 2/25/25 MEETING MINUTES:**
Action: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept the minutes of the above-noted Police Commission meeting.
Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.
Voice Vote: Unanimously approved, 3-0.
- IV. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**
Petra Huda, South Street: Inquired about the allocation of grants, federal funds, and charitable donations – specifically, if they go into the general fund or a specific fund within the police department’s budget. Requested a status update on the new staffing needs study, comparing it to the 2011 study, which pointed out excessive supervisors. Asked what changes were made based on the 2011 study’s fundings.
- V. **NEW BUSINESS:**
 - A. **POLICE COMMISSION:**
 1. Facilities Update
 - a. Restoration

The Deputy Chief reported no new updates. The Emergency Communication Center remains the last area needing mold remediation.

b. Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

The Chair reported that a field trip is planned to tour Dover Police Department and Town Hall. Members are reviewing past work by the Community Police Facility Working Group. The staffing needs study will be available by late April/early May.

2. Community Priorities

Body-Worn Cameras: The Deputy Chief updated on the rollout of the body-worn camera (BWC) program, which is being implemented in phases. A policy is under development with an internal committee. Several police departments were consulted about how they manage their BWC program. The department will receive a \$63,000 federal grant per year for the next three years to support the cameras.

CAD/RMS Update: There is a delay due to programming issues with the vendor, and the new system's launch is now expected in November 2025.

Police Social Worker Update: The department's social worker, Brooke, has been an invaluable asset since the program's initiation. Her role focuses solely on connecting individuals to the appropriate resources based on their needs. Brook's services are separate from any investigative or criminal matters. Chair Coyle emphasized that the department's statistics highlight a reduction in mental health-related calls, underscoring the positive impact of this program.

B. CHIEF OF POLICE:

1. Proposed FY26 Budget Adjustments

Deputy Chief Maloney presented the updated FY26 budget request. The department was asked to make reductions to meet a 2.9% budget cap, including CAD/RMS service costs, and delays in hiring three officers and one dispatcher. The Chair acknowledged the department's success in adhering to the City Council's guidelines.

a. Public Hearing on the Proposed Budget

Petra Huda, South Street: Raised concerns about the over-budgeting of dispatch salaries, asking why the dispatch budget keeps increasing despite historical data suggesting it's not needed. Expressed concerns about overspending on overtime in the detective division and questioned the \$146,000 spent under

“Professional Services” (including \$35,000 for computer software/maintenance). Also inquired about travel budget overruns and the increased costs for auto information system, as well as discrepancies in the dispatch salary and overtime budget.

Esther Kennedy, Pickering Ave: Compared Portsmouth’s police budget to Dover’s, noting a significant disparity (a \$3M difference) despite Portsmouth having a smaller population. Asked if the department could charge for specialized services and expressed concern over the potential drying up of grant funding. Encouraged forward-thinking strategies for new revenue streams. Asked the department to consider – what does our new population need?

**2. Crime Analyst Report – comparing to the last 3-year average
February 2025 Stats:**

Calls for Service: ↓ 21.2%

Arrests: ↓ 28.2%

DWI Arrests: ↓ 30.8%

Reports Taken: ↓ 9.5%

Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: 0% change from average

Motor Vehicle Stops: ↓ 29.4%

IEA (Involuntary Emergency Admissions): ↑ 13.8%

Juvenile Matter Calls: ↓ 28.8%

Commissioner Scherr noted that the decrease in motor vehicle stops was largely due to staffing shortages. Mental health-related statistics are rolled into the Involuntary Emergency Admissions (IEA) category. Deputy Chief Maloney explained that pulling accurate mental health statistics is difficult (for example, a call for service may initially be documented as a noise complaint.

However, when officers arrive, it may become clear that the issue is related to mental health. Despite this, the call remains categorized as a noise complaint in the system, making it difficult to accurately extract mental health-related data).

A request was made by the Commission to invite Police Social Worker Brooke to the April 15th Police Commission meeting to provide an update on her work and explain some of the mental health-related statistics.

3. Monthly Traffic Stats (February 2025):

- Motor vehicle stops: 483

- Summonses issued: 18
- Reportable motor vehicle crashes: 34
Deputy Chief Maloney clarified that summonses include various violations, not just speeding, with hands-free violations also accounting for a significant number.

4. Financial Report

The FY25 budget is 65.4% below the cap. The FY26 budget has been submitted to the city manager's office. The grant process and allocation within the police department's budget were explained.

a. Grant Applications Update

- Working on an ICAC Grant
- Reimbursement by the DEA for drug-related investigations.
- Congressional Directed Spending (CDS) funding for equipment and training
- Information Technology Equipment Grant has been paused (not eliminated) but will be discussed further in future state budget meetings.
- Department of Justice grants will continue.

b. Strategic Plan Update

Karen answered several budget-related questions, explaining that the department budgets for authorized positions (10 dispatchers and 70 fulltime officers) and replaces dispatch hours on an hour-for-hour basis, without factoring in shift relief. If there are vacancies or attrition, there will be a surplus. The department is assessing how to manage if grants dry up and will summarize answers to Petra Huda and Esther Kennedy's questions on the business office webpage of the Police Department's website.

VI. PATROL DIVISION:

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

VII. COURT OFFICE REPORT:

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

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER BUSINESS:

- a. **Closing the Public Hearing on the FY26 Budget Proposal**

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to close the public hearing on the FY26 budget proposal. **Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.**
Voice Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

IX. NEXT REGULAR MEETING:
Tuesday, April 15th, 2025, at 5:30 PM.

X. MOTION TO ADJOURN:
Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to adjourn at 6:30 PM.
Seconded by Commissioner Scherr.
Voice Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

END OF MEETING

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