

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE JULY 15th, 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, Chief Mark Newport, Business Manager Karen Senecal, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett and members of 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 6/17/25 MEETING MINUTES:**
Action: Commissioner Scherr moved to accept the minutes of the above-noted Police Commission meeting.
Seconded by Commissioner Fernald.
Vote: Unanimously approved, 3-0.
- IV. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**
 - Sarah Cornell (Thornton St., Portsmouth): Thanked PPD and Chief Newport for not partnering with ICE; urged public disavowal of ICE presence and more transparency in interactions with unidentifiable agents.
 - Kendra Ford (Pine St., Portsmouth) – Supported current stance on ICE; urged PPD to verify identities of ICE agents and prevent impersonation; overed to assist in facilitating further conversation.
 - Peter Furst (Marcy St., Portsmouth) via Kline Dickens: Expressed he and his family’s fear over ICE activity; called for clear policies on ICE interactions, including agent ID and supervision, and overall transparency (unmasked interactions, badge #, confirmation of warrant, etc.).
 - Kline Dickens (North Hampton): Highlighted detainee mistreatment at Strafford County jail; requested Commission oversight and public alerts when ICE is active locally.

- Caroline Skiavoni (Greenland): Spoke on ICE's impact on restaurant workers; urged PPD to notify businesses of ICE activity and protect local workers.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. POLICE COMMISSION:

1. Facilities Update

a. Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee

Chair Coyle reported that the architectural firm, JSA, has been hired by the City. The next meeting of the Blue Ribbon Committee is scheduled for July 23, 2025. Chief Newport noted that a comprehensive plan will be developed based on the recent staffing and space needs study.

b. Community Priorities

Chair Coyle reported that the rollout of body-worn cameras (BWCs) is halfway complete. Commissioner Scherr cited a recent example where BWC footage was used to refute a complaint regarding an officer's conduct, demonstrating their value.

c. Overview of ICE Discussion – City Council meeting on 7/15/25

Chair Coyle reiterated Chief Newport's position that the police department will not participate in 287(g) agreements and will not perform federal immigration enforcement duties. The PD will not detain individuals solely for civil violations but will continue to make lawful arrests and notify relevant agencies if there is an active warrant.

Public concerns were raised about federal ICE activities; however, Chair Coyle emphasized that the PD does not control federal actions and that this does not alter how the Commission or PD operates – both remain committed to treating all individuals with care and compassion.

Commissioner Scherr (Ward 3 State Representative) shared that the NH House passed legislation limiting local law enforcement's ability to interfere with federal ICE operations. He opposed the measure and expressed concern that if the Attorney General determines a community has not cooperated with ICE, that community could lose 25% of its state funding. He described this as a disappointing and restrictive development that significantly constrains local PD discretion. Commissioner Scherr further warned that interfering with ICE operations, such as alerting

businesses about enforcement actions, could risk violating federal law. He emphasized the need to continue discussions at the state and federal levels.

Chair Coyle invited ongoing public dialogue and encouraged residents to contact the Commission via the Police Commission website.

B. CHIEF OF POLICE:

1. Grant & Donation

a. New Hampshire Highway Safety Grant

This grant supports highway safety initiatives and Community Outreach and Betterment (COB) presentations. Funding will focus on educational efforts for age groups at higher risk for serious or fatal crashes (15-40 and 65+).

Action: Commissioner Scherr moved to accept the NH Highway Safety Grant in the amount of \$24,100 from the NH Department of Safety and forward to the City Council for their action.

Seconded by Commissioner Fernald.

Vote: Unanimously approved, 3-0.

b. Bicycle Helmet Donation

This in-kind donation will support the department's E-bike safety initiative.

Action: Commissioner Scherr moved to accept the donation of 21 bicycle helmets from the Brain Injury Association of New Hampshire and forward to the City Council for their action.

Seconded by Commissioner Fernald.

Vote: Unanimously approved, 3-0.

2. Crime Analyst Report

January 1st – June 30th, 2025 Stats: (compared to last 3 years)

Calls for Service: ↓ 7.8%

Arrests: ↓ 0.2%

DWI Arrests: ↓ 4.9%

Reports Taken: ↓ 16%

Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: ↑ 0.6%

Motor Vehicle Stops: ↓ 11.4%

IEA (Involuntary Emergency Admissions): ↓ 3.4%

Juvenile Matter Calls: ↓ 36.6%

Commissioner Scherr inquired about the significant decrease in juvenile-related calls. Chief Newport explained this is due to changes in juvenile laws and the positive impact of the department's Social Worker. Chair Coyle noted that this represents a major shift in handling juvenile matters and commended the Crime Analyst's reporting for helping assess program effectiveness.

3. Monthly Traffic Stats (June 2025):

- Motor vehicle stops: 763 (up 30 from May)
- Summonses issued: 23
- Reportable motor vehicle crashes: 54 (up 10 from May)

Commissioner Scherr questioned the low number of summonses. Chief Newport responded that officers exercise discretion, with decisions often based on the driver's record. The department prioritizes public education over punitive measures, except in cases involving repeat offenders.

4. Financial Report

Karen Senecal reported that the preliminary FY25 budget shows the department operating 3.22% below the cap. FY25 expenses are still being finalized.

a. Grant Applications Update

- The Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) audit is nearly complete, with only minor correction needed.
- A new ICAC grant is expected in the coming months. State funding has reportedly passed; Forensic Shield grant funding will be secured.

Commissioner Scherr asked if there had been any negative impacts on grants due to federal developments. Karen replied that no such issues have been encountered yet.

b. Strategic Plan Update

Karen Senecal provided the Commission with a draft of the Strategic Plan. It will be circulated to division heads for feedback and revisions. The final version is expected by the August meeting.

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:

Reminder: August 5th is National Night Out.

IX. NEXT REGULAR MEETING:

Tuesday, August 19th, 2025, at 5:30 PM.

X. MOTION TO ADJOURN:

Motion: Commissioner Scherr moved to adjourn at 6:13 PM.

Seconded by Commissioner Fernald.

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

END OF MEETING

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