

# PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

## MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026 MEETING

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

Buzz Scherr, Chair  
Francesca Fernald, Commissioner  
Jay Lieberman, Commissioner

**Public Session Attendance:** Commissioners Scherr, Fernald, and Lieberman, Chief Mark Newport, Deputy Chief Michael Maloney, Business Ops. Manager Karen Senecal, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett and members of the public.

I. **CALL TO ORDER:** Chair Scherr called the meeting to order.

II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Led by Chief Newport.

III. **ACCEPTANCE OF THE 1/27/26 & 2/11/26 MEETING MINUTES:**

**Motion:** Commissioner Fernald moved to approve the minutes of the 1/27/26 & 2/11/26 Police Commission meetings.

**Second:** Commissioner Lieberman.

**Vote:** Unanimously approved (3-0).

### ***FY27 PROPOSED BUDGET ADJUSTMENT (Pre-Public Comment Discussion)***

The Commission presented an adjusted FY27 budget reflecting a reduction of more than \$20,000 due to revisions in service maintenance agreements.

**Motion:** Commissioner Fernald moved to approve the revised FY27 budget proposal

**Second:** Commissioner Lieberman.

**Vote:** Unanimously approved (3-0).

IV. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** None.

V. **NEW BUSINESS:**

#### **A. POLICE COMMISSION**

##### **1. Public Hearing – Proposed FY27 Police Policy**

###### **a. Brief Overview/Public Comment:**

The proposed FY27 Police Department budget was initially presented on February 11, 2026. **Ms. Petra Huda (Portsmouth, NH)** provided public comment and submitted a handout to Commission review,

identifying several variances and requesting clarification on specific line items.

**Discussion Highlights and Administrative Clarifications:**

- **Cooper Standards Stipend:**

The stipend reflects contractual payments to ranking officers who successfully complete the annual physical fitness test under established Cooper Standards. This line also includes a contractual performance benefit applicable to the Chief of Police.

- **Special Detail Compensation:**

Applies to sworn personnel in specialized assignments (e.g., detectives, School Resource Officers, training officers). These stipends compensate for added responsibilities and scheduling flexibility. Revenue associated with sworn contracts is processed through established City financial procedures.

- **Professional Services (40% increase):**

Increase attributed to implementation of a pilot wellness program providing confidential wellness consultations to department personnel.

- **Painting and Leas Maintenance:**

Anticipated increases in lease agreements (currently under negotiation) are reflected. Printing expenses include business cards, overtime forms, and departmental documents. Separate computer/printer supplies cover toner and related materials.

- **Closing Allowance and Equipment:**

Contractual allowances for sworn and [some] non-sworn personnel. Initial outfitting of a new officer can approach \$4,000 and includes uniforms, ballistic vest carriers, belts, patches, and related equipment. Equipment line items include firearms, protective gear, and replacement of damaged items. Issued equipment is returned upon separation from employment.

- **School Department Transfer (\$49.225):**

Grant-related funding is credited back in accordance with City financial structure. The accounting format reflects established municipal procedure.

- **Salary and Overtime Variances (Administrative & Detective Divisions):**

Variances reflect vacancies, promotions, and mid-year hiring fluctuations. Underspensing in certain years corresponds with unfilled positions.

- **IT Travel/Conference Increase:**

Funding supports specialized training and professional development; prior budgets did not include attendance at certain professional conferences.

- **Dispatch Overtime:**

Overtime expenditures reflect staffing vacancies. The department budgets for 10 dispatchers, one supervisor, and part-time/on-call personnel. Overtime is used to maintain minimum staffing levels. Overtime associated with Fire Department dispatch services is paid through the Police Department budget pursuant to current municipal structure.

- **Fleet Maintenance & Fuel:**

Fuel cost increases are incorporated into projections. Vehicle outfitting includes equipment and ancillary items not always included in initial capital allocations.

- **Patrol Overtime:**

Overtime reflects vacancy coverage and operational need. Unused overtime funds are returned if not expended.

- **Conference and Training Travel:**

Supports specialized certifications and training, including DWI enforcement and Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) qualifications.

- **Police Budget RSA 32-A Compliant**

Ms. Huda thanked the police department for providing the “actuals” and thanked Business Ops. Manager Karen Senecal for remaining compliant with NH RSA 32-A – something not all departments achieved.

**Ms. Esther Kennedy (Portsmouth, NH)** expressed appreciation for inclusion of a second Police Social Worker. She suggested technology-related expenditures may be more appropriately reflected within broader municipal technology budget lines. Ms. Kennedy requested additional transparency regarding School Resource Officer revenue and inter-municipal service reimbursements. She also stated that the Police Department presented a legally compliant budget under applicable NH statutes.

The Chair expressed appreciation to Business Ops. Manager Karen Senecal for enhanced budget clarity and thanked members of the public for their engagement.

**Motion to Close Public Hearing:** Commissioner Fernald

**Second:** Commissioner Lieberman.

**Vote:** Unanimously approved (3-0).

## 2. Facilities Update

### a. Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee Update

Commissioner Francesca reported that conceptual designs for the municipal complex, including an approximately 12,000-square-foot addition, were presented. Cost estimates are pending. The Chief noted this marks the beginning of an ongoing planning process.

**Next Meeting:** March 18, 2026, at 3:00 PM, Conference Room A, City Hall. Public participation is encouraged.

### b. Dispatch Remediation Plan Update

The Chief reported contractors recently visited the Police Department to finalize cost estimates. The project will start within the coming months.

## 3. Community Priorities

### a. Second Police Social Worker – Goals and Focus Areas

Through the Opioid Abatement Grant, the Department secured full grant funding for a second Police Social Worker position. The position will focus on outreach and direct support services for individuals experiencing opioid dependency. The grant requires approval by the Executive Council prior to hiring.

The Chief noted that two opioid-related deaths were reported locally in the prior year. The Commission recognized the importance of proactive outreach in prevention and recovery efforts.

## B. CHIEF OF POLICE

### 1. Community Recognition

- a. The Chief shared correspondence from a family member of a juvenile involved in a 2025 tragedy, expressing gratitude for the professionalism and compassion demonstrated by officers and dispatch personnel. The Commission acknowledged the exemplary service provided.

### 2. Recruitment & Retention Initiatives

#### a. Lateral vs. Entry-Level Hiring:

Lateral officers are deployed more quickly than entry-level recruits, who require academy attendance – taking close to one year before

independent patrol assignment. Recruitment efforts emphasize attracting qualified lateral candidates.

**b. 30 x 30 Initiative:**

The Department continues efforts toward increasing female representation in law enforcement to 30% by 2030. The Department currently employs eight female officers (approximately 13% of sworn personnel). Progress is being made year-over-year.

**c. Recruitment Incentives:**

Ongoing evaluation of compensation structures and incentives to remain competitive in hiring.

**3. Crime Analyst Report**

Average of previous years: Jan 1 – Jan 31st

Calls for Service: ↓ -37.7%	Reportable MV Accidents: ↑ +7.1%
Arrests: ↓ -26.9%	Motor Vehicle Stops/Offenses: ↓ -46%
Reports Taken: ↓ -14.2%	

Deputy Chief Maloney noted weather and staffing levels influence enforcement activity.

**4. Monthly Traffic Stats (January 2026)**

- Motor Vehicle Stops: 331 (76 more than December)
- Summonses Issued: 15 (4 more than December)
- Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: 40 (12 more than December)

Reductions in traffic stops were attributed to weather conditions, roadway limitations (narrowing due to snow banks), staffing levels, and temporary suspension of enforcement of New Hampshire vehicle inspection requirements pursuant to guidance from the Attorney General’s Office (pending litigation). Vehicle registration requirements remain in effect. The Chief clarified that decreased enforcement activity does not necessarily reflect reduced violations but may reflect staffing capacity.

**5. Financial Report**

The Department is tracking approximately 2.5% below the cap. The revised FY27 budget is now authorized for submission to the City.

**a. Grant Application Update**

No new awards to report; several applications remain under review. Congressional funding opportunities are under consideration (March deadline).

**b. Strategic Plan Update**

In progress; anticipated completion prior to May 2026.

- VI. MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER BUSINESS:** None presented.
- VII. NEXT REGULAR MEETING:** Tuesday, March 17, 2026. Please refer to the City's municipal meeting calendar for updates.
- VIII. MOTION TO ADJOURN:**  
**Motion:** Commissioner Fernald moved to adjourn at 6:23 PM.  
**Second:** Commissioner Lieberman  
**Vote:** Unanimously approved (3-0).

END OF MEETING

*Respectfully Submitted by Jacqueline Burnett, Executive Assistant*  
**Commissioner Francesca Fernald, Recording Clerk of the Commission**