

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 17th, 2026 MEETING

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

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

The following people were present for the public session: 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:** The meeting was called to order by Chairman Scherr.

II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Led by Deputy Chief Maloney.

Chief Newport led a moment of silence in honor of Barbara Ann Burke, the wife of Retired Chief William Burke, and extended condolences to Chief Burke and his family.

III. **ACCEPTANCE OF THE 2/18/26 MEETING MINUTES:**

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept the minutes of the February 18, 2026 Police Commission meeting.

Seconded: Commissioner Lieberman.

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

IV. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** None.

V. **NEW BUSINESS:**

A. POLICE COMMISSION

1. Homeless Outreach Presentation: Social Worker Brooke Murphy-Corcoran

- a. Police Social Worker (PSW) Murphy-Corcoran presented an overview of her work. She reported that the most common referrals involve elderly individuals and those in need of housing or shelter. Referrals related to substance misuse are currently low.

She explained that her role involves reviewing police logs to identify individuals who may need social services. She assesses barriers such as lack of transportation, limited communication access, and social anxiety, and works to understand the root causes of each individual's situation. She then connects

individuals with appropriate local services and assists with applications, documentation and eligibility requirements.

Additional support includes arranging transportation, helping individuals apply for and navigate DHHA benefits, coordinating with long-term care management services, and providing resources for those ineligible for traditional assistance, including camping and tent resources.

Most individuals require short-term care management, though long-term assistance is provided when needed on a case-by-case basis.

Frequently used community partners include Gather, City Welfare, Community Action Partnership and Crossroads. She emphasized that ongoing coordination with these organizations helps avoid duplication of services and improves outcomes. Additional partnerships include the Portsmouth Housing Authority, Greater Portsmouth Youth Wellness Coalition Advisory Board, Portsmouth Mental Health Alliance, Wellness and Primary Prevention Council, and Seacoast Mental Health. A new initiative provides emergency hotel vouchers through a partnership with The Anchorage Inn. This program is funded through donations from Seacoast Crime Stoppers and is not taxpayer-funded. Eligibility requirements are similar to those used by homeless shelters.

A grant has been secured to fund a second Outreach Social Worker position focused on individuals struggling with substance use. This additional position will allow for more immediate, on-site support. PSW Murphy-Corcoran expressed appreciation to Deputy City Manager Weber and Chairman Scherr for their efforts in securing this funding.

Comments/Q&A:

- Chairman Scherr commended PSW Murphy-Corcoran for her work.
- Q: Estimated number of homeless encampments in Portsmouth?
 - A: Approximately 10-12, with most located on private property and a few on public land.
- Q: Is the increase in housing/shelter needs versus elder care seasonal or long-term?
 - A: Likely seasonal. Many individuals are reluctant to enter shelters due to rules and close living conditions. Housing needs are expected to increase over the next six months.

2. Facilities Update

a. Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee Update

Next meeting: March 18, 2026, 3PM – Conference Room A, City Hall.

The Committee has begun developing options for space allocation for the Police Department and other city departments, including assessing available space and identifying future needs. Cost estimates are not yet available but are anticipated in the near future. The public is encouraged to attend.

b. Dispatch Remediation Update

Chief Newport reported that all dispatch center projects have been identified, and remediation will begin once contractors are scheduled.

B. CHIEF OF POLICE

1. Holiday Safety & Enforcement Reminder – St. Patrick’s Day

Chief Newport shared statistics from St. Patrick’s Day 2025 and encouraged the public to celebrate responsibly. Individuals participating in festivities are urged to arrange safe transportation with a sober driver.

2. Crime Analyst Report

Based on averages from 2023-2025 statistics (Jan 1 – Feb 28):

Calls for Service: ↓ -38.7%	Reportable MV Accidents: ↓ -16.1%
Arrests: ↓ -24.1%	Motor Vehicle Stops/Offenses: ↓ -49.6%
Reports Taken: ↓ -11.8%	

Chairman Scherr inquired about the significant decrease in Calls for Service and Motor Vehicle Offenses.

Deputy Chief Maloney explained that self-initiated Calls for Service are typically included in these figures. Due to current staffing challenges, the numbers reflect a natural decline. Severe winter weather may also have contributed to the decrease in reported offenses. Chief Newport added that reduced enforcement of inspection stickers may also be a factor.

3. Monthly Traffic Stats (February 2026)

- Motor Vehicle Stops: 263 (68 fewer than January)
- Summonses Issued: 3 (12 fewer than January)
- Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: 21 (19 fewer than January)

4. Financial Report

The department is approximately 65% through the fiscal year and is tracking 3.5% below budget. Funding for the Professional Management Association (PMA) contract settlement and officer MOU added \$150,099 to the budget, bringing the total to \$15,610,948.

The FY27 budget process is ongoing, with productive discussions held with City leadership to incorporate requested adjustments.

a. Grant Application Update

- Congressional funding (ICAC and IT Infrastructure for new facility) is pending logistical updates.
- An application for a Portsmouth Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC) has been submitted to Representative Pappas and Senator Shaheen's offices. A RTCC would allow the department to integrate citywide camera systems and voluntary private camera access to support investigations and expedite case resolution.
- The Opioid Abatement Advisory Committee has allocated \$800,000, pending approval from the Executive Council.

b. Strategic Plan Update

Currently in progress.

VI. MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER BUSINESS: None.

VII. NEXT REGULAR MEETING: Tuesday, April 21, 2026. Please refer to the municipal meetings calendar on the City's website for any updates.

VIII. MOTION TO ADJOURN:

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to adjourn at 6:08 PM.

Seconded: 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