

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE APRIL 21, 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; 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 Chair Scherr.
- II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Led by Commissioner Fernald.
- III. **ACCEPTANCE OF THE 3/17/26 MEETING MINUTES:**
Motion: Commissioner Lieberman moved to accept the minutes of the March 17, 2026 Police Commission meeting.
Seconded: Commissioner Fernald.
Vote: Motion passed unanimously (3-0).
- IV. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** No public comment was offered.
- V. **NEW BUSINESS:**
 - A. **POLICE COMMISSION**
 1. **Presentation by Welfare Director Jodi Carnes on Welfare’s Perspective on Homelessness in Portsmouth.**

Director Carnes reported 158 “unhoused” clients year-to-date in FY26, noting that some individuals decline or leave shelter, reflecting the complexity of homelessness beyond placement. She emphasized the Welfare Department’s role in case management and coordination with the Police Department’s social worker, the Seacoast Collaborative, Gather, and other community partners.

Carnes highlighted the limited availability of affordable housing, citing only four apartment buildings with rents at or below \$1,900 (studios to three-bedroom units). She noted that housing instability is often tied to family dynamics and that housing retention remains a significant challenge. Senior housing options are limited, with long waitlists and primary availability at Margeson and Feaster.

Client demographics include individuals facing co-occurring substance use and mental health challenges, domestic abuse situations, elderly residents, and those in the 30–40

age range. Carnes also noted the distribution of approximately 3,000 COAST bus passes annually to support access to essential services. She maintains a working relationship with Cross Roads House and has access to four beds.

Commission discussion addressed family housing challenges, demographics, and encampments. Deputy Chief Maloney acknowledged Carnes' collaboration with the Police Department, including a recent case involving prevention of financial exploitation of an elderly resident. Chair Scherr emphasized the importance of wrap-around services.

2. Facilities Update

a. Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee Update

The next public meeting is scheduled for April 29, 2026, at 3:00 PM in Conference Room A at City Hall. Public input is strongly encouraged.

b. Dispatch Remediation Update

Deputy Chief Maloney reported that dispatch operations were temporarily relocated from Police Headquarters to Fire Station 2 on Lafayette Road. Remediation work is scheduled to begin in early May, followed by restoration and upgrades to the Emergency Communications Center, including new consoles, removing of the raised floor, HVAC improvements, and installation of a new kitchen. Completion is anticipated in late August or early September.

Chair Scherr also noted that Chief Newport is attending a Drone as First Responder Conference and provided context on the operational benefits of incorporating this into the existing drone program.

B. CHIEF OF POLICE

1. Acknowledgement of National Dispatcher & Animal Control Officer Appreciation Week (April 12-18)

Deputy Chief Maloney expressed appreciation for the essential contributions of dispatchers and the department's Animal Control Officer. Chair Scherr highlighted that dispatchers serve as the first point of contact for most calls, significantly influencing public perception and satisfaction with police services.

2. Crime Analyst Report (Jan 1 – Mar 31, based on 2023-2025 averages)

Calls for Service: ↓ -35.2%	Reportable MV Accidents: ↓ -15.6%
Arrests: ↓ -23.6%	Motor Vehicle Stops/Offenses: ↓ -40.4%
Reports Taken: ↓ -14%	

Deputy Chief Maloney attributes the overall decline in activity to current staffing shortages.

3. Monthly Traffic Stats (March 2026)

- Motor Vehicle Stops: 482 (219 more than February)
- Summonses Issued: 19 (16 more than February)
- Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: 26 (5 more than February)

4. Financial Report

The department is 73% through the fiscal year and currently operating at 69% of budget, which is 3.8% below the cap.

The proposed FY27 budget is \$16,452,953, representing a 9% increase from the previous fiscal year. Adjustments made in collaboration with the City Manager included reallocating \$210,400 to the city's non-operating budget, reducing "other operating" expenses by \$12,571, which include IT training costs and contributions toward the City's cybersecurity position (the Police Department funds 20% of this role).

These changes reduced the proposed budget to \$16,225,957, a 7.73% increase. The primary drivers of the increase from FY26 are the Local 11 MOU and rising health insurance costs (approximately \$203,000).

Chair Scherr noted that the City Council opted not to absorb additional costs related to the Local 11 MOU, significantly impacting the department's budget. Upcoming contract negotiations are anticipated in FY28.

a. Grant Application Update

- Awaiting federal funding decisions related to ICAC and IT programs.
- Submitted a JAG grant application for \$13,827 to support rifle inventory upgrades and standardization; additional funding may be requested from the Geraldine Webber fund, which requires Commission approval and is restricted to police equipment.
- NH Highway Safety grant process is underway.
- Exploring additional grant opportunities for a new police facility or upgrades.

b. Strategic Plan Update

The strategic plan remains in development.

VI. MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER BUSINESS: No additional business was discussed.

VII. NEXT REGULAR MEETING: Tuesday, May 19, 2026, at 5:30 PM. Please refer to the city's municipal meetings calendar for any updates.

VIII. MOTION TO ADJOURN:

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:04 PM.

Seconded: Commissioner Lieberman.

Vote: Motion passed unanimously (3-0).

END OF MEETING

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