

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MAY 19, 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 Chair Scherr.

II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Led by Commissioner Lieberman.

III. **SUSPEND THE AGENDA**

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to suspend the agenda to proceed with items 1, 2 and 3, Vesting of Rank & Recognition Ceremony and Accreditation Award & Update, under the Chief's Report.

Seconded: Commissioner Lieberman.

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

CHIEF'S REPORT

1. **Vesting of Rank Ceremony**

Lieutenant Thomas Sichko participated in a Vesting of Rank Ceremony.

2. **Recognition Ceremony**

Chief Newport recognized Officers Sarah Kotz, Nick DiGaetano, Christian Peete and Mark Dente for their efforts during a standoff in Raymond involving a suspect who had fired a weapon at civilians and shot and wounded a police officer. Responding in their capacity as members of the drone team, the officers provided critical aerial surveillance of a wooded area where the suspect was concealed. Their efforts ultimately enabled law enforcement personnel to locate the suspect and coordinate a successful arrest.

3. The **Accreditation Award & Update** was not taken up during the suspension and was later considered under its regular place on the agenda.

IV. **ACCEPTANCE OF THE 4/21/26 MEETING MINUTES:**

Motion: Commissioner Lieberman moved to accept the minutes from the April 21, 2026 Police Commission meeting.

Seconded: Commissioner Fernald.
Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

V. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Vicky Haskell – Portsmouth, NH: Expressed concerns regarding Portsmouth police officers’ handling of an interaction with her in July 2025.

George Haskell – Portsmouth, NH: Provided an account of his daughter Vicky’s interaction with the Portsmouth Police Department.

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

A. POLICE COMMISSION

1. Facilities Update

a. Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee Update

Chair Scherr reported that the project architect presented three building configuration options. The committee plans to reassess the use of the Council Chambers space within City Hall. Cost estimates are expected to be analyzed during the summer. Chair Scherr also noted that a small addition has been proposed at the building’s front entrance and is not expected to negatively impact either the Farmer’s Market or the Cottage building.

Next public building meeting: June 17, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. in Conference Room A at City Hall. Public participation is encouraged.

b. Dispatch Remediation Update

Chair Scherr reported that the dispatch room was emptied during the previous week and mold remediation had begun. The remediation work is expected to be completed by the following week, after which efforts to rebuild and restore the dispatch center will proceed as quickly as possible.

B. CHIEF OF POLICE

1. Vesting of Rank Ceremony: Lt. Thomas Sichko – See Section III

2. Recognition Ceremony: Officers Sarah Kotz, Nick DiGaetano, Christian Peete and Mark Dente – See Section III

3. Accreditation Award and Update

Accreditation Manager Kate Young provided an update regarding the Department’s accreditation efforts.

Ms. Young reported that the Department recently completed its remote review for the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) Advanced Accreditation Program. An onsite assessment is scheduled for early 2027. She explained the assessment process and noted that, following the review, Department representatives will appear before an accreditation

panel to discuss compliance and accreditation history. The panel will then determine whether the agency maintains its accreditation status.

Ms. Young also discussed the New Hampshire State Accreditation Program, which was recently reestablished. The Portsmouth Police Department began the accreditation process in May 2024. Although the state program is smaller in scope than CALEA, it addresses state-specific compliance requirements. The Department was awarded State Accreditation in April 2026, becoming the first law enforcement agency in New Hampshire to achieve dual accreditation through both the State and CALEA programs.

Ms. Young credited the Department's success to the support of personnel throughout the organization and the assistance provided by the Northern New England Police Accreditation Coalition (NNEPAC).

She explained that accreditation provides law enforcement agencies with a framework for evaluating policies, procedures, and best practices. The combined accreditation programs encompass more than 500 standards and require the annual organization and review of thousands of documents demonstrating compliance. Accreditation promotes accountability, transparency, operational efficiency, and risk mitigation by ensuring policies and practices remain current and effective.

Ms. Young emphasized that accreditation reflects the Department's commitment to excellence and public trust and noted that her work is made possible through the dedication and professionalism of Department personnel. Chair Scherr commended Ms. Young and Department staff for their accomplishments and stated that the Portsmouth Police Department is among the finest law enforcement agencies in the state, with accreditation serving as validation of that excellence.

~Chair Scherr also invited Lieutenant Seth Tondreault to the podium and recognized the Personnel & Training (P&T) Unit's dedication to recruiting and retaining highly qualified personnel. P&T Operations Administrator Hannah Evans was highlighted for her heavy involvement with the hiring process.

4. Grant & Donation

- a. A grant award in the amount of \$380,178 from the US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), for the NH Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept the US Department of Justice's OJJDP grant in the amount of \$380,178 for the NH Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and forward to the City Council for its action.

Seconded: Commissioner Lieberman.

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

- b. An unsolicited *Common Man Roadside* gift card in the amount of \$30.00 for general use by the Portsmouth Police Department.

Motion: Commissioner Fernald to accept the \$30.00 *Common Man Roadside* gift card for the Portsmouth Police Department and forward to the City Council for its action.

Seconded: Commissioner Lieberman.

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

5. Crime Analyst Report

Based on average of 2023-2025 statistics: January 1 – April 30

Calls for Service: ↓ -33.1%	Reportable MV Accidents: ↓-12.4%
Arrests: ↓ -22.7%	Motor Vehicle Stops/Offenses: ↓ -38.7%
Reports Taken: ↓ -13.8%	DUI Arrests: ↑+3.6

6. Monthly Traffic Stats (April 2026)

- Motor Vehicle Stops: 420 (62 fewer than in March)
- Summonses Issued: 10 (9 fewer than in March)
- Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: 30 (4 more than in March)

It was noted that reduced traffic enforcement activity was impacted by staffing shortages and the lack of enforcement for vehicle inspection sticker violations.

7. Financial Report

The Department is currently tracking approximately 5% below the budget cap. Overtime expenditures and salary savings were discussed, with overtime costs remaining below overall salary savings.

Upcoming 4th quarter expenditures include approximately \$15,000 for ammunition, the cost of Motorola battery replacements, and contractual stipends – all expected to reduce the current budget surplus.

Regarding the FY27 budget, the City Manager recommended reductions, resulting in a budget exceeding FY26 levels by approximately 7%. Final budget approval is anticipated in June.

a. Grant Application Update

The Department is awaiting two grant applications: a Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) and a Congressionally Directed Spending grant to support the creation of a Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC).

The long-term goal is to develop a “smart city” approach that would benefit Police, Fire and Public Works operations. Portions of the RTCC infrastructure would serve multiple City departments. Additional information will be provided as it becomes available.

b. Strategic Plan Update

Departmental and divisional updates continue to be submitted as part of the strategic planning process.

VII. MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER BUSINESS: None.

VIII. NEXT REGULAR MEETING: Tuesday, June 16, 2026. Please check the municipal meetings calendar on the city's website for any important meeting updates.

IX. MOTION TO ADJOURN:

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:28 PM.

Seconded by 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