

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 20, 2026, MEETING

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

Buzz Scherr, Chair
Francesca Fernald, Commissioner
Gary Dozier, Commissioner

The following people were present for the public session: Commissioners Scherr, Fernald, and Dozier, 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:** 5:31 PM

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

III. **ACCEPTANCE OF THE 9/15/26 MEETING MINUTES:**

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept the minutes from the September 15, 2026, Police Commission meeting.

Seconded: Commissioner Dozier

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0)

IV. **SUSPEND THE AGENDA:**

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to suspend the agenda to move to items #1 *Officer Recognition*, and item #2 *Skydio Presentation* under the Chief's Report.

Seconded: Commissioner Dozier

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

Chief's Report:

#1 – Officer Recognition

Detective Erik Widerstrom received the Paul Lindsay Detective Award for his investigative work on a 2023 fatal incident at the Hanover Parking Garage.

Detective Matthew Fredrickson received a Letter of Commendation for his long-term investigation into sexual assault reports involving multiple victims.

Officer Ian Efstathiou received a Letter of Recognition for his vigilance in identifying a suspect vehicle, which led to the successful apprehension of an armed and dangerous suspect in possession of drugs.

#2 – Skydio Presentation: Drone as First Responder (DFR) Program

Representatives from Skydio presented the “Drones and a Citywide Resource” initiative. Discussions covered automated drone responses, public

transparency dashboards, privacy policies, potential for vehicle pursuit assistance, and training requirements. The following questions and concerns were raised:

Commissioner Scherr inquired about the potential for using drones to track vehicles fleeing accident or crime scenes. Presenters clarified that drone deployment is governed by department policy and the specific nature of the event, serving as a first responder rather than for random surveillance. The Chairman also raised questions regarding privacy and public concerns. Presenters emphasized the implementation of a “transparency dashboard” to allow citizens to view flight logs and mission purposes to maintain trust. He went on to ask how the public or media might access recorded drone footage. It was determined that access would follow established department protocols and state public record statutes, similar to body camera footage.

Commissioner Dozier inquired about potential lifesaving applications for drones in the event of suicide attempts, specifically regarding heat signatures and the ability to drop floatation devices. He also asked about protocols for addressing unauthorized ‘pirate’ drones interfering with operations. Presenters noted that while Skydio does not provide counter-drone technology, their systems can identify other aircraft, and the state is actively exploring mitigation tools. Lastly, Commissioner Dozier asked about the training timeframe required for operations. Presenters indicated FAA ‘Part 107’ certification typically requires 40 hours of study, though the Chief noted the department has existing qualified in-house pilots (current Drone Team members).

Chris Golomb - Islington Street, Portsmouth asked about drone limitations during severe weather, such as snow or heavy rain. Presenters explained that the systems include obstacle avoidance and weather alerts, typically preventing launches during inclement conditions.

Susan Sterry – Broad Street, Portsmouth inquired about the weight of the drones and what kind of damage they might cause if they were to crash. The presenters clarified that the drones weigh 4.5 pounds and are equipped with a safety parachute system. Susan also asked about the transparency dashboard, specifically if the public would be able to view everything the drone captures or how the video evidence is stored, particularly regarding arrests or drug-related stops. The Commission and presenters explained that access to this footage would likely be managed in accordance with department policy and state public record statuses, similar to body camera evidence.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

VI. NEW BUSINESS:
A. POLICE COMMISSION

1. Facilities Update

a. Municipal Building Blue Ribbon Committee Update

i. Plan Approval & Next Steps

The City Council accepted the concept for “Plan C”, moving it into the design phase.

b. Dispatch Remediation Update

Chief Newport confirmed the new dispatch center mold remediation project is complete and operational.

B. CHIEF OF POLICE

1. Officer Recognition – See Section IV

2. Skydio Presentation – See Section IV

3. Geraldine Webber Funding Request: Rifle Suppressors

Request: To approve the expenditure of \$30,000 from the Geraldine Webber Fund for the Portsmouth Police Department to purchase suppressors for newly acquired department rifles.

Purpose: These safety devices reduce muzzle discharge volume to protect officer hearing from permanent damage and improve critical communication and situational awareness during tactical deployments.

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to approve the expenditure of \$30,000 from the Geraldine Webber Fund for the Portsmouth Police Department to purchase rifle suppressors as safety equipment to protect officer hearing and improve tactical communication.

Seconded: Commissioner Dozier.

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

4. Grants

a. FY26 Byrne Discretionary Community Projects Grant

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept the FY26 Discretionary Community Projects grant for the NH Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) COPS and Enhanced Capacity Program as presented in the amount of \$1,000,000 and forward to the City Council for their actions.

Seconded: Commissioner Dozier.

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

b. FY26 COPS Technology and Equipment Program Grant

Motion: Commissioner Fernald moved to accept the terms of the FY26 COPS Technology and Equipment Program grant for the Portsmouth Police Department’s IT and Security needs as presented in the amount of \$1,031,000 and forward to the City Council for their actions.

Seconded: Commissioner Dozier

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

5. Crime Analyst Report

Based on average of 2023-2025 stats (Jan 1 – Sept 30) compared to 2026 YTD

Calls for Service: ↓ -32.9%	Reportable MV Accidents: ↓-19.4%
Arrests: ↓ -25.5%	Motor Vehicle Stops/Offenses: ↓ -40.7%
Reports Taken: ↓ -8.8%	DUI Arrests: ↓-16.8

The full Crime Analyst statistics chart is posted on the Police Department's webpage.

Deputy Chief reported 21,393 calls for service and 511 arrests year-to-date.

6. Monthly Traffic Stats (September 2026)

- Motor Vehicle Stops: 393 [25 more than in August]
- Summonses Issued: 16 [3 more than in August]
- Reportable Motor Vehicle Crashes: 37 [2 more than in August]

7. Financial Report

FY27 is tracking 4% below the cap.

a. **Grant Application Update** No update provided.

b. **Strategic Plan Draft** No update provided.

VII. MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER BUSINESS: None

VIII. **NEXT REGULAR MEETING:** Tuesday, November 17, 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 at 6:37 PM.

Seconded: Commissioner Dozier

Vote: Unanimously approved (3-0).

END OF MEETING

Respectfully Submitted by Jacqueline Burnett, Executive Assistant

Commissioner Francesca Fernald, Recording Clerk of the Commission