

CITY COUNCIL E-MAILS

Received: May 30, 2024 (after 9:00 a.m.) – June 3, 2024 (before 5:00 p.m.)

June 3, 2024 Council Meeting

ADDENDUM

Submitted on Thu, 05/30/2024 - 12:12

First Name

Arlene & John

Last Name

Tommasini

Email

to3c@hotmail.com

Address

162 Mill Pond Way #3

Message

It's becoming almost impossible to find even a single parking space close to the library which is a great public resource. Can't you place some enforceable time limits so the parking isn't a substitute for long term parking.

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Thu, 05/30/2024 - 14:32

First Name

Thomas

Last Name

Nies

Email

tnies@aol.com

Address

419 Richards Avenue

Message

Mr. Mayor, Ms. Assistant Mayor, and Councilors:

Based on the May 20, 2024, work session for the new Police Station, it's clear that the Working Group (WG) made significant progress since December. The total cost has been significantly reduced and they developed a conceptual design for a facility that is adjacent to City Hall and makes use of the existing station. The City is well on its way to a modern facility that will be a vast improvement from the current station. I do believe, however, that the information provided to the public and the Council needs further elaboration before a final decision can be made. Please consider the questions I highlight below. The answers may be obvious to members of the WG, but they were not detailed in the presentation to the Council and explanations are not available on the project page.

I would first like to address a question asked by the WG: are the sightline impacts acceptable? While I may be drawing inaccurate conclusions from the preliminary drawings, my answer is "no." The mass of the building seems to block the scenic views of and from Connors Cottage. That will be replaced with a utilitarian structure and will create a walled-in quadrangle at the top of Hospital Hill. The drawings from the December 2023 presentation (slide 21) preserved most of this view. It's unclear why that approach was not followed by the WG.

I have additional questions about the May 2024 presentation. First, what is the total size of the completed facility? The May presentation (slide 6) summarizes the area total as 49,972 sq. ft. Comparing this number to the Spatial Needs Summary (SNA), it appears that this is only the total area for new construction and renovation and does not include the fleet area or firing range. If my interpretation is accurate, the total area of the Police Station will be 70,874 sq. ft. What is not clear is if the plan is to use the current range and fleet area or if these will be added (or replaced) later.

Second, the May 2024 presentation says that there will be 19,100 sq. ft. of space that is renovated from the existing facility. This includes 15,600 sq. ft. on Level 1 and 3,500 sq. ft. on Level 2. The renovated space seems smaller than the area of the existing facility. As described in a presentation made during the December 2023 work session (slide 21), the existing facility (not including the basement) includes 25,769 sq. ft. on Level 1 and 7,426 sq. ft. on Level 2. There is a 14,095 sq. ft. difference between the existing spaces on Levels 1 and 2 and the area that is proposed to be renovated. Is the plan to release 14,095 sq. ft. to other departments, or was it not part of the summary because it is not being renovated? If the latter, the actual size of the new facility will be over 64,000 sq. ft. (not including the range and fleet area).

As a last comment on the size issue, the April draft SNA (the latest posted on the web page) includes a note that says, "consideration is being given for combining fleet and range in a separate structure." Is this still being considered and, if so, what would it add to the cost?

As a general comment, I suggest that the WG should provide more information on the underlying assumptions they used for the design. These are not available to the public and make it difficult to provide informed comments. What is being assumed for the growth of the city and the resulting need for increased staff (sworn and administrative)? This information would help the public understand the design features. To illustrate this point, consider:

- Section 1.8 of the SNA identifies a 1,500 sq. ft. training/publicly accessible meeting room. Based on similarly size spaces in local hotels, this is large enough to seat 167 people theater style, or 62 at tables in a classroom style. How was this need determined?
- Section 5.15 requires 96 lockers for patrol. Perhaps it is a coincidence, but this is the number of current sworn and auxiliary positions. It increases by 13 to 109 in 2034. What is the reason for the increase? Does the SNA assume a specific population increase that drives a need for more officers? If so, why aren't there additional lockers needed by 2044 – is the WG assuming the population will plateau in 2034? I acknowledge that at about 1,200 sq. ft. this is a relatively small part of the design, but it illustrates my point about the assumptions.
- Section 7.15 identifies 6 dispatch positions, which includes two trainee positions. An additional 2 positions are needed by 2044. How many dispatch positions are typically manned on a shift? Why is there a need for increased positions in 2044?
- I don't debate the need for a crisis team, but what are the assumptions driving the SERT spaces (Section 11.00)? At over 2,000 sq. ft., this might add about \$1.8 million to the cost. Has the City signed an MOA that commits us to providing this space? Do other communities provide a proportional level of support to the regional team?

I know the WG gets defensive about comparisons to stations in other communities. It would be helpful, however, if the members were prepared to explain why these differences exist rather than call these questions disingenuous. It is not convincing to reply by referring to the number of events, as it is not obvious how this translates into a need for more space. Using Dover NH as an example, the Administrative/Chief of Police space is smaller even though the department is about the same size. At least some of these differences can be readily explained: Dover's station does not have a business department, and the professional standards staff is in a different office. This type of approach would be a better rebuttal to those who are skeptical of the Portsmouth SNA.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Thomas Nies
Portsmouth, NH

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Thu, 05/30/2024 - 16:56

First Name

Erik

Last Name

Anderson

Email

andy42152@aol.com

Address

38 Georges Terrace

Message

Dear Councilors,

It has been learned that NH DOT has opened the bids for the installation of sound barriers in the I-95 corridor through Portsmouth. NH DOT estimated it to be a 14.2 million dollar project. The lowest bid was 4 million higher than the estimate at 18.2 million. It would be requested that a Portsmouth official contact NH DOT and ask their intentions on this project since the bid cost was 4 million higher than projected. All were planning for this project to begin this summer. Any reply welcome to myself or the public.

Thanks,
Erik Anderson

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Thu, 05/30/2024 - 20:16

First Name

Erika

Last Name

Beer

Email

erika_beer@hotmail.com

Address

64 Mount Vernon Street

Message

Hello. My name is Erika Beer and my husband Cyrus and I have lived on Mount Vernon Street for 12 years. We are direct abutters to City Hall. We love living here and enjoying all that Portsmouth has to offer. We appreciate our police officers who work hard to keep our children, neighbors, and community safe. We are deeply concerned about the cost, size, and location of this police station expansion. We also oppose the 8 foot fence and gate that would abut our house and our neighbor's house. We have never minded having the police station or city hall next door. They are our neighbors and we have not felt unsafe living near the station. Putting a fence behind our house with an automatic gate would completely change the feel of the neighborhood. For years we have watched our kids and neighbors walk up

Mount Vernon Street and cut through to go to the Farmers Market, downtown or to school. We don't want that to change because it directly impacts our quality of life. We also oppose that the farmers market would need to be moved to accommodate this expansion. The farmers market is the bedrock of our community and our neighborhood because of its central location.

We live in one of the safest states in the nation. This expansion is extreme and does not match the need or culture of our community. Please vote no and help your neighbors save their way of life.

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Sat, 06/01/2024 - 07:15

First Name

Robin

Last Name

Lurie-Meyerkopf

Email

talkinrobin5@gmail.com

Address

53 Whidden St

Message

Hello City Councilors

Thank you the work you do. I want to address the new police building issue. I heard from neighbors we are not getting the whole picture. That there will be a fence around the whole area, the farmers market will no longer be able to be in the parking lot and it will be very high, no entry fence. Is this really necessary? As far as the renovation and buildings my sense is 41 million is just too much. There are many other cities and towns in NH that have built whole complexes for less. Are we getting at least 3 bids? Can we as citizens know exactly what we need? Could we do things in phases? I understand much of our issues with police are with visitors not just locals - it's hard to understand why there isn't other monies available for tourist towns such as ours. Why should people who live here have to pay for such an extraordinary police station? I know this has been an issue for many years but many people are struggling to keep up with inflation, taxes, rent etc so seeing this in a police station at this time seems a hardship for the citizens of Portsmouth. Thank you for your time.

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Sun, 06/02/2024 - 18:47

First Name

Mary Lou

Last Name

McElwain

Email

ml259@comcast.net

Address

259 South Street

Message

I won't be at tomorrow's Council meeting until after public comment time so am sending you another email with my strong opposition to the size, scope and most especially the location of the addition to the police station. This is a terrible location for this building with significant effects on the landscape, skyline views, and iconic water and building views that are loved by residents of Portsmouth, the seacoast and tourists alike. As I have said, there isn't another place in the City (even from the top floor or the Foundry Garage) like this spot at the top of the hill. For the past week or so I have contacted or spoken directly with dozens of residents and Farmer's market vendors. I haven't heard one voice in favor of this plan. You probably have heard from some of my contacts. I am asking that the vote for budget and concept of this building be postponed. There should be a public hearing. The rendering was in The Herald and online less than two weeks ago. Please bring this back to the drawing board.

Thank you. Mary Lou McElwain

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Sun, 06/02/2024 - 20:55

First Name

Ann

Last Name

Birner

Email

ann.birner@gmail.com

Address

77 State St, Unit 303

Message

I write to express my support for the installation and use of solar panels in the City of Portsmouth. Climate change is a global problem and in particular a local problem. Climate-related detrimental changes to our environment, including sea level rise, have begun to surpass even the most dire past predictions. Renewable energy can be one important part of our efforts to attenuate this alarming trend. Please support the installation of solar panels throughout the city, and in particular at St. John's Episcopal Church on Chapel Street. Yes, we have a lovely historic city but the city has evolved and flourished over the centuries by accommodating such innovations as electricity, telephone service, motor vehicles etc. in the name of progress. Now we are fighting not just for progress but for our very future.

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 09:11

First Name

Barbara

Last Name

Jenny

Email

brjenny@comcast.net

Address

94 Pleasant St 2

Message

Regarding the massing renderings and proposal for the police station expansion:

I agree with other residents who have noted the detriment to the open and lovely views of the South Mill Pond, the cherry trees, and the historic and charming Cottage Hospital that the massive expansion as rendered would cause. How lovely it is presently to see the cherry trees and the old building reflected in the pond. The huge addition as rendered is such an unavoidable visual blight in that point of view from lower Junkins and the outer historic downtown district where many residents and tourists walk.

What's more, the siting, closer to the pond—and king tides and storm surge—seems blatantly unwise and in conflict with the City's own reporting, mapping, and sustainability plans re. climate change and resiliency. (Isn't one of the problems with the current station mold?)

Why not make the current station a 'downtown' satellite station like many cities have, and build a larger main station out on Route 1 (or Woodbury Ave ?) where there are many un/der-used lots?

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 09:12

First Name

Brian

Last Name

Gibb

Email

bkgibb@gmail.com

Address

348 Maplewood Ave Apt 2

Message

Councilors: First, I am encouraged that you have taken steps to reduce the budget for this project. That's sound fiscal responsibility and I hope to see more of it. I also know that locations are limited and there are only so many options to realistically consider. That said, the location and size of the proposed design would seem to come with great cost in terms of a unique vista that has been very central for us as a city. I hope that you will take the time to consider this option and its impact with any alternatives. I believe the residents in general believe this warrants your best insight and wisdom. I remain grateful for your service. Best, Brian

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

First Name

Jim

Last Name

Ziesig

Email

jimziesig@gmail.com

Address

31 Sheafe St

Message

To the Portsmouth City Council,

I relocated to Portsmouth in 2004. I did so by myself while my wife completed the sale of our home in North Carolina. The first weekend I was here, I was happy to see the signs for the Farmers' Market and went to see what it had to offer. The fresh fruit, vegetables and people were plentiful, but what I didn't expect was the amazing view. It actually brought tears to my eyes. Not only for that day, but because I knew that we'd get to see this view every time my wife and I went to the market. I could not wait to share it with her.

I know that our police deserve a better station. They provide a great service to our city, and should not be subjected to mold and tight quarters, but I don't believe the station needs to be placed in the proposed location. The lot near South St is a much better location to take away than the waterfront hill.

We have to let developers do what they want, for the most part, on their property without regard for the impact on the citizens views, but let's not do that to ourselves. I view this option as something akin to smoking. We are paying a lot of money to kill a very beautiful part of ourselves. PLEASE do not approve this police station location!

Thank you for your attention,

Jim Ziesig

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 09:30

First Name

Lisa

Last Name

Kromer

Email

Boatright.elizabeth@gmail.com

Address

97 Richards Ave

Message

Hello councilors,

The current proposal to place the new police station between the farmers market lot and South Mill Pond is a poor one and I urge to you to vote against it. Every Saturday morning hundreds of us Portsmouth citizens enjoy strolling up the hill to the farmers market. Dozens upon dozens enjoy sitting on the grassy hill, there visiting with new and old friends while taking in the views over the water. Our kids walk or ride over with us from the playground across the street. All this would be lost if this space were replaced with a building. The farmers market would be walked in on three sides by concrete. Why not locate the new police station at the City Hall Lower Lot where is won't obstruct any views nor take away long held Saturday morning traditions? I was hoping to share a picture of a typical Saturday morning here but there's nowhere to attach one. Thanks for reading.

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 11:31

First Name

Jana

Last Name

Goldstein

Email

janakgoldstein@gmail.com

Address

170 F W Hartford Drive

Message

Hello,

I have written in before, and I feel with tonight's meeting, it is important to again voice my concerns as I am hearing that some on the City Council do not appreciate the need and value of keeping the budget for the modulars at Dondero. It makes me incredibly sad that we live in such a prosperous city that quickly votes to move the schedule up with a resolution authorizing a \$1.084 million bond for additional costs of a skate park while our schools need our urgent help now. I was at Dover High with my daughter for her dance recital and my son for his baseball playoffs this past weekend. I saw the Mayor there too, it is easy to notice the drastic difference in even the structure of the buildings at our local high school in contrast to Dover and other nearby towns in there auditoriums alone. Portsmouth needs to prioritize its children and their schools FIRST.

I have a current 2nd and 4th grader at Dondero Elementary School. My 4th grader is in a class of 24 students. The West End neighborhood brings ESSENTIAL balance to the demographics of Dondero- Please do not try to deny that. When your child is at Dondero you know this. Also, try to understand that these current 4th graders/rising 5th graders deserve to end their year as a cohesive cohort with smaller class sizes. As, mentioned before they used to be in four different sections/classrooms, until this year. With the overcrowding issue at Dondero they moved the current grade 4 into only three sections making class sizes unusually large. I am also an elementary educator in SAU 50 - smaller class size is very important to the quality of education students receive - Portsmouth should be able to provide all students with a quality education.

Please don't cut the proposed budget for 100K to support a modular. Our schools need more funding not less. Our kids need more support from our city, not less. Our educators need more support from our city, not less.

I understand modulars are not a permanent solution, but it gives us time to do right by our students by making decisions in a balanced way that strives to provide an equal quality education for all of our learners.

Thank you! Jana Goldstein

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 12:05

First Name

Donna L

Last Name

Acox

Email

dlacox43@yahoo.com

Address

14 Mount Vernon Street

Message

To All,

As a native, current resident and taxpayer of Portsmouth, I write to express my concern about the proposed design of the police station as presented in the May 23, 2024 edition of the Portsmouth Herald.

First, I would like to express that I am in favor of upgraded facilities for our police force so that they can preform their essential duties and function on behalf of the welfare and public safety of all. That said, it would be my expectation that the upgrades in terms of size and scope, financial cost and increased tax burden be on par with other similar town/city proposals such as Durham, Exeter and Dover. While the May 23 article states the costs were reduced from \$70 million-plus to a price tag of \$41.8 million, this is significantly greater than municipalities within a short distance from Portsmouth. Thus, the needs-based:financial burden ratio needs to be reworked.

Secondly, for an historic city, where restoration and preservation reign, the design of the proposal is, simply put, UGLY, out of character and, its sheer size and scope, EXCESSIVE (thank you, Councilor Kate Cook for addressing this). Additionally, given its (1) close proximity to the South Mill Pond (where the water levels rose to near historic highs in this most recent winter) (2) the potential destruction of the cherry trees (a gift from Nichinan, Japan as a part of the Portsmouth Peace Treaty Living Memorial) and (3) destruction of the beautiful open space and breath-taking skyline, from all compass directions, the proposed project design is concerning. The proposed installation of "a new decorative fencing along the proposed addition" will do nothing but add to the offensiveness of the proposed project. While I appreciate from the article that the design is not the final design, I believe more dialogue and public disclosure are warranted.

Thirdly, I am most curious why the Historic District Commission has been near mute on the subject of a project of this size and scope! (What I had to endure from the HDC to install a 72 square foot shed, in a completely enclosed backyard, was more rigorous than the scrutiny this project seems to be receiving!)

Finally, the timeline from the disclosed project proposal to the city council vote seems lightening-speed, which is as uncharacteristic of Portsmouth as is the design and scope of the project itself!

I would respectfully request that more thought in design, scope and possible location be addressed before a vote can transpire.

Respectfully,

Donna L. Acox

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 12:06

First Name

Jana

Last Name

Goldstein

Email

janakgoldstein@gmail.com

Address

170 F W Hartford Drive

Message

Hello,

I have written in before, and I feel with tonight's meeting, it is important to again voice my concerns as I am hearing that some on the City Council do not appreciate the need and value of keeping the budget for the modulars at Dondero. It makes me incredibly sad that we live in such a prosperous city that quickly votes to move the schedule up with a resolution authorizing a \$1.084 million bond for additional costs of a skate park while our schools need our urgent help now. I was at Dover High with my daughter for her dance recital and my son for his baseball playoffs this past weekend. I saw the Mayor there too, it is easy to notice the drastic difference in even the structure of the buildings at our local high school in contrast to Dover and other nearby towns in there auditoriums alone. Portsmouth needs to prioritize its children and their schools FIRST.

I have a current 2nd and 4th grader at Dondero Elementary School. My 4th grader is in a class of 24 students. The West End neighborhood brings ESSENTIAL balance to the demographics of Dondero- Please do not try to deny that. When your child is at Dondero you know this. Also, try to understand that these current 4th graders/rising 5th graders deserve to end their year as a cohesive cohort with smaller class sizes. As, mentioned before they used to be in four different sections/classrooms, until this year. With the overcrowding issue at Dondero they moved the current grade 4 into only three sections making class sizes unusually large. I am also an elementary educator in SAU 50 - smaller class size is very important to the quality of education students receive - Portsmouth should be able to provide all students with a quality education.

Please don't cut the proposed budget for 100K to support a modular. Our schools need more funding not less. Our kids need more support from our city, not less. Our educators need more support from our city, not less.

I understand modulars are not a permanent solution, but it gives us time to do right by our students by making decisions in a balanced way that strives to provide an equal quality education for all of our learners.

Thank you! Jana Goldstein

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 13:23

First Name

Cathy

Last Name

Baker

Email

catherinejbaker@yahoo.com

Address

127 Gates St

Message

The design and location for the new police station are absolutely atrocious. Please go back to the drawing board on this. Rushing a decision on something that will be with the city for decades, if not a century, is foolish.

Do you want the legacy of this council to be that eyesore? All to save a little money? I suggest you all put your names on it, and see how you feel about it if it were named after you, and tied to the citizen's memories of your tenure.

We lack greenspace in the city as it is, and that beautiful grassy area with the historically important cherry trees is an attribute that makes the current city hall newer addition 'work.' It will no longer work with that police station design, or even the massing right next to the water costing greenspace, views, space and light.

Re open the location decision, if the city hall parking lot is not a viable alternative, what about the Sherberne School location? Tons of parking right near the highway. The city owns lots of properties, consider them all.

Thank you,
Cathy Baker

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 16:21

First Name

Richard

Last Name

Smith

Email

richard@cuzinrichard.com

Address

93 High St #1

Message

Terrible design ! Noes not compliment surroundings

Please hire a new designer with good taste

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 16:23

First Name

Rebecca

Last Name

Harris

Email

rharris1313@icloud.com

Address

275 Miller Avenue

Message

I'm in agreement with other residents who have concerns about the proposed Police Department building.

It blocks important sight lines from the city below and from the city complex to the mill pond, middle school, bridges and the church tower. Residents enjoy views from the farmers' market making it a charming place to visit.

The proposed entrance and exit do not allow easy traffic flow. This is unnecessary since there will be the same number of people doing business at City Hall & the Police Department.

Other larger locales have built new police facilities for less than \$42.2 million. How many people work for the Police Department? If there are two or three shifts there would not be the entire force present in the building.

Please consider other plans. Couldn't this expansion be done at the rear of the present building?

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes

Submitted on Mon, 06/03/2024 - 16:53

First Name

Peter

Last Name

Carey

Email

afjago6@gmail.com

Address

39 Mount Vernon Street

Message

We are opposed in the strongest terms to the proposed police station plan. To be clear, we acknowledge our police department's critical need for new, state-of-the-art facilities. However, it would be absolutely irresponsible for the City Council to vote on the

proposed siting of the building based on a plan described as preliminary and made public less than two weeks ago and before a thorough needs assessment has been completed.

City Councilors Kate Cook and Andrew Bagley have, from the start, been raising all the right issues and asking all the right questions. They want to know—as we do—what exactly the police department absolutely needs to perform its missions now and in the foreseeable future. They question—as we do—the square footage and cost of the project, both of which far exceed the size and cost of police facilities in other seacoast communities, particularly those with comparable or even bigger police forces and similar or even bigger populations. Portsmouth taxpayers need and deserve answers to these questions before the City Council makes any siting decisions.

Police Chief Mark Newport has reportedly said that his department has gone through the building plan with a fine-toothed comb. We're not convinced that he has. After all, this comes from the Chief who, in explaining away his department's initial \$70 million plus building proposal that included an indoor running track, referred to the proposal as a "wish list." This kind of "wish list" thinking totally offends us as taxpayers, and it's one of the reasons that we see such wasteful spending at all levels of government. This whole discussion needs to center on needs and requirements—not wishes. This isn't a negotiation.

Needs must drive the size and scale of the project. The preliminary plan is—in one word—atrocious. We share the views of Mary Lou McElwain and all our other neighbors, as well as so many of our Portsmouth friends, that the proposed police building annex—as currently configured—is ugly and way too massive for the site, obliterates sight lines and views, impinges on South Mill Pond and its surrounding green space, and is totally out of character with our historic South End. The architects bombed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Pete Carey and Mary-Jo Monusky

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes