

PORTSMOUTH POLICE COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MAY 28th, 2024 POLICE COMMISSION MEETING

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

Kate Coyle, Chair
Buzz Scherr, Commissioner
Francesca Fernald, Commissioner

- I. **CALL TO ORDER:** The May 28th, 2024 monthly Police Commission meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers.

The following people were present for the public session: Commissioners Coyle, Scherr and Fernald, Chief Mark Newport, Business Manager Karen Senecal, Executive Assistant Jackie Burnett and members of the police department and the public.

- II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Chair Coyle led the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. **MOTION TO SUSPEND THE AGENDA:**

The Chair asked for a motion to suspend the agenda to move to item #1 and #2, “Award Ceremony” and “Vesting of Rank Ceremony”, under the Chief’s Report.

Action: Commissioner Scherr moved to suspend the rules for the purpose noted above.

Seconded by Commissioner Fernald.

On a Roll Call Vote: The motion passed as follows:

Commissioner Coyle: “Aye”

Commissioner Scherr: “Aye”

Commissioner Fernald: “Aye”

Chief’s Report - #1, Award Ceremony:

Chief Newport hosted an Award/Recognition Ceremony to recognize Ret. Captain John Peracchi and Detective Erik Widerstrom for demonstrating excellence in a high-profile criminal investigation that resulted in a positive outcome for the case, the department, and most importantly for the victim and family involved. Their efforts lead to the resolution of the 41-year-old Laura Kempton cold case. They were both awarded with the first-ever Paul Lindsay Detective Award – Paul Lindsay worked from 1999-2011, assisting the

department by working on two unsolved homicides. He was a former 20-year FBI Agent who freely volunteered his time and shared his experience with members of the Portsmouth Police Department, leaving a positive impact on the Investigation Division as a whole.

Chief's Report - #2, Vesting of Rank Ceremony:

Chief Newport vested the following Auxiliary Unit supervisors with the powers and authority of their new rank:

- Auxiliary Captain Alana Blais
- Auxiliary Lieutenant Jessica Stacy
- Auxiliary Sergeant Christopher Roth

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MEETING MINUTES:

➤ April 16th, 2024

Action: Commissioner Scherr moved to accept the minutes of the above-noted Police Commission meetings.

Seconded by Commissioner Fernald.

On a Roll Call Vote: The motion passed as follows:

Commissioner Coyle:	“Aye.”
Commissioner Scherr:	“Aye.”
Commissioner Fernald:	“Aye.”

V. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

A. POLICE COMMISSION:

1. Social Worker Introduction

- a. Brooke Murphy introduced herself to the Police Commission and explained her credentials. She is working on developing the new Social Worker program at the police department. She has met with community partners to network and get the word out about the PD's new service offerings. Right now, she is utilizing the “Intensive Case Management Model” (when an individual has contact with police department, they are then connected to the Social Work Department where they are offered referrals). The future goal of the Social Worker services is to transition to a “Co-Response Model”, in which the Social Worker would respond to appropriate calls with a police officer. Right now, referrals are coming in from patrol officers, ranking officers and self-reports which come directly from Brooke. Housing, food

acquisition and medical are the most frequent inquiries Brook is managing. Some clients are in contact with Brooke on a daily and weekly basis, depending on their specific needs. The program has room for growth and development and will be steered by the needs identified within our community.

Many calls for support are calls in which the subject is not involved in criminal behavior, but are in need of public assistance resources. Brooke is in contact with her clients via phone calls, email, text and in some cases, walking through the woods with patrol officers to reach someone in need. In general, there is a 60% success rate of people accepting the help from a Social Worker. Currently, based on referrals alone, Brook is experiencing a 70% success rate of people accepting help and further assessment.

Commissioner Scherr asked about Brooke's involvement with the mobile crisis unit. Brooke explained that she is not duplicating services, rather she helps to bridge the gap for those after the mobile crisis unit has identified that the subject is not in need of their specific services (not a harm to them self or others). Brooke has a cell phone and radio assigned to her for direct communication, as needed. The Commission will invite Brook back for a status update in the coming months.

2. Station Design Conference Update

a. Last week, Commissioner Scherr and Chief Newport attended the 2024 Station Design Conference in Glendale, AZ. They found this conference beneficial based on where the Community Policing Facility Working Group is at in the planning process for a new police station. The Conference covered every detail of the planning and building process for a 21st Century Policing Facility. The takeaways:

- Cost: The Northeast is the most expensive area to build a new police facility in terms of cost per square foot. The current proposed square footage for the Portsmouth police building project is lower than that average.
- Peabody, MA Police Department is in the process of building a \$70 million police facility. That is \$28/\$30 million more than Portsmouth PD's proposal.
- Attended a one-on-one session with an architect to discuss Portsmouth PD's current building plans, ideas and needs.

- The building must be built as an ICP Category 4 building. This is to ensure the building can withstand a natural disaster or other catastrophic emergency.
- An architect looked at the department's space needs study and said that Portsmouth PD was really shrinking down to the bare minimum for what is needed for longevity of function. This was valuable feedback, as the message was to be careful not to cut back too much in a way that it would impact the department's ability to grow with the community over the next 50+ years. This was an independent expert analysis by a professional not associated with the current contracted firm working on the Portsmouth Police Facility.
- Reminder to focus on what you're building for tomorrow, not just for today. It's important to do it the right way, not the cheap way.

3. Facilities Update

a. Restoration

Chief Newport reported that the existing building still poses the threat of mold due to humidity issues. Commercial dehumidifiers have been installed to help mitigate the issue. The summer months tend to be worse when the pipes begin to sweat and humidity levels rise.

b. Community Policing Facility (CPF) Planning

The Chair reported that the CPF working group met last week for a City Council Work Session in the Council Chambers. The group was able to get the total cost of the project under \$24 million, which is what's allocated in the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The current building plans project an estimated cost of \$838 per square foot. Salem PD is comparable to Portsmouth PD and their new building costs are around \$1,000 per square foot. The City Council will cast a vote on June 3rd on whether to move forward with the City Hall Complex location/plans or evaluate another location. The drawings presented to the City Council merely represent the space needed, very bare bones renderings. The fine-tuning will come down the road when design becomes more of a focal point of the discussion.

4. Community Priorities

Chief Newport discussed the timeline for the Central Square CAD/RMS implementation project. Still on target for switching over in the fall.

B. CHIEF OF POLICE:

1. **Award Ceremony** See section III, above.
2. **Vesting of Rank Ceremony** See section III, above.
3. **Crown Victoria Donation**

The Chair asked for a motion to allow the Portsmouth Police Department to donate an old Crown Victoria police vehicle to The Crown Victoria Museum in Hayward, CA, at no cost to the department. The museum has agreed to incur all costs associated with transporting and refurbishing the vehicle for their use and display.

Action: Commissioner Scherr moved to accept the motion to allow the Portsmouth Police Department to donate an old Crown Victoria police vehicle to The Crown Victoria Museum in Hayward, CA and forward to the City Council for their action.

Seconded by Commissioner Fernald.

On a Roll Call Vote: The motion passed as follows:

Commissioner Coyle:	“Aye.”
Commissioner Scherr:	“Aye.”
Commissioner Fernald:	“Aye.”

4. **Accreditation Update**

The Professional Standards Unit just completed their 2024 compliance file review. 115 standards and corresponding documentation were analyzed. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA)-trained assessor identified four (4) “standards issues” that were addressed immediately – revision to two policies and one annual report helped to resolve those deficiencies.

5. **Crime Analyst Report**

Chief Newport reported the traffic stats from April 2024 in comparison to 2023 (year-to-date): calls for service decreased to 14,150, DWI arrests rose by 47%, reportable motor vehicle accidents decreased by 17.8%, arrests increased by 21.5%, total reports taken increased by 1.4%, motor vehicle stops decreased by 6%, Involuntary Emergency Admissions (IEAs) remain consistent, mental health calls have decreased by 50% and juvenile matters have decreased by 32.2%. Staffing issues may explain the decrease in traffic stops. It is likely that access to the mobile crisis unit and social worker have positively impacted the decrease in police contacts for mental health related calls for service.

6. **Monthly Traffic Stats**

For the month of April 2024: 518 motor vehicle stops, 12 summonses issued and 41 reportable motor vehicle crashes.

7. Financial Report

Business Ops. Manager Karen Senecal briefed the Commission on the current state of the police department's budget. FY 24 – The police department is coming in 4.5% below the cap with plans to return money to the city's designated fund balance. The surplus is a result of retirements and staffing vacancies. The police leadership team is preparing for another City Council Q&A regarding the proposed FY25 budget. The overtime budget for FY24 came in at roughly \$300,000, in which salary savings were used to supplement those costs. Most of the overtime is mandatory to fill open shifts in dispatch and patrol. Chief Newport explained why the department requests 70 officers and doesn't reduce the number based on staffing difficulties. Mandatory overtime allows the department to meet minimum staffing requirements, which fluctuate throughout the year. This minimum staffing requirement doesn't have a relief factor built in, which means officers are working overtime regularly, which negatively impacts their work-life balance and increases their risk of burnout. There are 34-35 officers patrolling the street in any given month. Of the 34-35 officers, approximately 15 officers are required daily. Some officers are out on days off, military leave, injured, FMLA, vacation, training, etc. The number of available officers is dangerously low, which leads to mandatory order-ins to ensure the city is properly manned.

a. Grant Applications Update

Waiting to hear back from Senator Shaheen's office and Senator Pappas's office regarding grant opportunities that may benefit the police department.

b. Strategic Plan Update

Will be finalized once the FY25 budget process is over.

VII. PATROL DIVISION:

- a. This report was included in the commission meeting packet.

VIII. COURT OFFICE REPORT:

- a. This confidential report was included in the meeting packet.

IX. MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER BUSINESS:

X. NEXT REGULAR MEETING:

The next regular commission meeting date is Tuesday, June 18th, 2024, starting at 5:30 pm. Please always check the municipal meetings calendar for any changes to the schedule leading up to the next meeting.

XI. MOTION TO ADJOURN:

Action: Commissioner Scherr moved to adjourn the May 28th, 2024, Police Commission meeting at 6:46 PM.

Seconded by Commissioner Fernald.

On a Voice Vote: The motion passed 3-0.

END OF MEETING

Respectfully Submitted by Jacqueline Burnett, Executive Assistant
Commissioner Buzz Scherr, Recording Clerk of the Commission