



CITYWIDE NEIGHBORHOD COMMITTEE
CITY HALL, PORTSMOUTH, NH
WARD 5 FORUM
OCTOBER 11, 2023

CNC Co-chair Peter Somssich opened the meeting at 6:32 p.m. and welcomed the panel of guests that included Mayor Deaglan McEachern, City Manager Karen Conard, Police Chief Mark Newport, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Gionet, Portsmouth City Councilor John Tabor, School Board Chair Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, DPW Director Peter Rice and guest Portsmouth Police Detective Rochelle Jones, Community Outreach Coordinator. Detective Jones was invited to introduce Mason, the newly trained and acquired comfort dog that is now a functioning member of the police force.

Each panel member spoke briefly about issues pertinent to the city and specifically to Ward 5 before opening the floor to questions.

Mayor McEachern reminded attendees to come out and vote on November 7th.

John Tabor commented on the success of National Night Out, which is coordinated by the Citywide Neighborhood Committee and the first responders in the city. He also mentioned the upcoming Holiday Lights Contest that the CNC conducts in the neighborhoods. Details about that will be forthcoming.

Karen Conard said that she is proud to be here and proud to answer any questions and to learn what is on people's minds.

Peter Rice emphasized the importance of the Click N' Fix program, which allows residents to notify the department of public works issues that need to be tended to, whether that be trash pickups, fallen limbs, flooding problems in streets, missing signage, whatever. You can find that program on the DPW website or by calling the DPW dispatcher at 603-427-1530.

Nancy Novelline Clayburgh mentioned that there are presently 2,500 students in the Portsmouth Schools. 40% of the students are from surrounding towns. They are currently offering language assistance to students who speak 32 different languages, and the system has added 4 ESL teachers to help accomplish this. The Lister Academy students are moving to the Community Campus. The PHS football team is undefeated. The Portsmouth Band alumni joined in the 400th Anniversary Parade and were roundly applauded. The award winning PHS Debate Team starts a new season in mid-October. The Dondero School has been awarded Blue Ribbon status as it has been rated as one of the top 3 schools in New Hampshire.

Chief Newport reported that they are delighted that the department has been awarded a new contract. He said that will be helpful in hiring new recruits. They have hired a new social worker and will have a new computer aided dispatch system within the year.

Assistant Chief Gionet also reported success in obtaining new contracts and will be fully staffed in two weeks for the first time since 2016. The department has been busy with prevention services and inspections. They are hoping for new software that will help with payroll and scheduling. The 3rd ambulance, stationed at Pease, will now be functional and a 4th has been ordered to serve in the place of any other that might break down or be non-functional.

Residents Questions began:

An attendee questioned the need for such a long process to get a permit to replace a roof. Karen Conard said that she can help expedite the process, especially now that the Inspector's Office is fully staffed. That office may be contacted M-8-10 and 5-6 and T, TH, F from 8-10 and you can walk in except on Wednesdays, which is by appointment only.

A person asked what the intended use of the South Meeting House is now that the tenants are moving out by the end of the month. Karen Conard replied that the building needs extensive repairs before anything can be considered. Peter Rice said that new windows and storms need to be in place at least.

A resident is concerned about the use of Clough Field as the site of the new police station. The feeling is that it is too close to a school not to be a danger/concern for the children. John Tabor and Chief Newport both replied that that site is in the middle of the pack of options, not a primary one. They will be looking for feedback before any decision is made. There is still no preference. The Mayor mentioned that there will be a Working Group on Monday, November 13 to discuss the situation with the City Council.

A person asked about the Prescott Park Master Plan and its status. Peter Rice responded that the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee is working on it. Several issues have to be addressed as they move forward: movement of the Shaw warehouse, which will have to have an elevator installed to be fully functional; drainage problems; and walkways.

An attendee asked about the impact of the new neighborhoods on the schools. Ms. Novelline Clayburg responded that they continue keeping an eye on the movement within the city and the needs it might present regarding redistricting, etc. They do not see a need for that presently.

Peter Somssich asked about the need for a second aquatic facility in the city and the need to make improvements at the Spinnaker Point recreation center.

Another attendee asked about the situation with overnight RV parking on the streets. The Mayor and Police Chief both responded that they have begun enforcing parking regulations and will continue to seek other options than people using street parking. Parking principles will be discussed at a meeting on Wednesday, November 15. An attendee mentioned that they might consider different rules for parking at different times of the year.

A person asked Chief Newport about the overview of crime in the city. The Chief responded that many of their calls deal with mental health issues, over-drinking, quality of life crimes. The Mayor feels the new warming shelter at Operation Blessing NH will be a welcomed option during colder weather, and that most of the homeless in our area are those who choose to be homeless.

An attendee complimented the DPW for its work on the rail trail. Peter Rice said that the final coat to the completed trail will be applied next spring, making it fully functional.

A number of the participants congratulated the panel members for their attendance and their work with the city.

With that, the meeting ended.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen M. Boduch