

**MANAGER’S CONFERENCE MINUTES**  
**Portsmouth City Council Meeting on**  
**March 3, 2025 – 6:37 p.m.**

Members present:

Sean Dunne	1 <sup>st</sup> Ward
Charlotte Gordon	2 <sup>nd</sup> Ward
Andy Cole	3 <sup>rd</sup> Ward
Lyvette Mosley	4 <sup>th</sup> Ward
Joey Sandlin	5 <sup>th</sup> Ward
Dennis Packard	6 <sup>th</sup> Ward

Also, present was City Clerk Diana Ratliff, City Manager Sam Sutherland, and Solicitor John Haas. Auditor M. Trent Williams was absent.

Manager Sutherland would like to add the Fire Department Training Grant as CM-25-10.

**1. Request for Support to Updating ORC 3327-Bus Transportation of Students CM-25-09**

Councilman Cole said that it was a good resolution, but he had a couple of thoughts as follows:

- a) In the first “Whereas” he would like to remove “regardless of socioeconomic status” because this resolution wasn’t tied to socioeconomic status’ and was a needs-based document.
- b) In the third “Whereas” it says “choose between safety and participation in school activities” he felt the safety thing was a big contributing factor for this request and it might be nice to add something about safety.
- c) He said it wasn’t in the city’s wheelhouse to be writing grants for what the Department of Education was scheduled to do and he had done some research on this subject, but #3 that asked for grant writing and #5 seeking financial assistance should be removed and not moved forward. He felt that it put the city in charge of writing grants to make this happen. He spoke with the Ohio Department of Education, the Office of Pupil Transportation both in Columbus, however Portsmouth does have a field officer local, Samantha Sheets who was the grant coordinator. He learned about a few of the ORC and OAC statutes that review the requirements and what he had learned was that currently there were no grants at least for the office Pupil Transportation that the DOE workforce knew about, but they did know about some grants that were available back in 2021 and 2022 where there was a transportation collaboration grant that had been worked on, but currently they were not aware of any grants and don’t see any coming forward in the upcoming year. He requested that #3 and #5 be removed.

He said that our area was facing chronic amounts of absenteeism with a minimum of 29% that goes up to 50% and those numbers dictate a child that misses more than 10% of the school year. He said the Ohio numbers had gone from 17% to 27% and all of Ohio had increased and it was a problem. He had researched the 2 miles radius and wasn’t certain of the viability of it because when he looked at the Junior High School area and plotted a 2-mile radius, it would be all of Portsmouth with the exception of Indian Hills which might be

out of range, but other than that, the entire City of Portsmouth was within two miles of the schools.

Councilman Dunne responded to some of the concerns and said there could be more things added if people wanted on the discussion of safety and it wasn't only for attendance of school but also for participation in school activities which happened later in the afternoon or early evening, and weather conditions etc. The socioeconomic status was communicated to him as there were certain people having to choose between working a certain shift and time or take their child to school and of course not everyone was having to make that type of decision between work and transport. He said others have people that could work and assist a family with all the things that were required to transport kids and not everyone had the financial means and if you look at where the high absenteeism was, that would correlate with the pressure put-on working-class people. He would also like to use this as a template for other cities to sign on to and as far as seeking out grants, he would encourage the city to think about not just buses, the overall transport to school in general and within that talk about walkable cities, which would allow kids to cycle or walk to school in very safe ways. He said that not too long-ago Portsmouth was awarded grants for safe routes to school and if programs like that were expanded it could assist in bringing kids to school through a variety of ways. He said that was part of the reasoning for adding that section to the resolution.

Mayor Gordon asked Manager Sutherland if the safe routes to school grants were for crosswalks and Manager Sutherland replied that the big one received for the High School was for an elevated crosswalk, signage, street markings, and curb bump-outs.

Councilman Cole said that there were some things out there that he had learned about such as Access Scioto County public transit was currently providing child pick-up, but it needed to be scheduled ahead of time and the cost was \$.50 each way and must be paid in cash and if you find yourself needing transportation, they have some students that schedule for the whole month ahead of time and they stop at the home. There were a few programs that already had some teeth in the game, and one other was the focus on the two-mile gap from the school system if a child had to walk 1.9 miles to get to their school, could there be a central place that multiple children could meet that would be closer, but this goes back to being the Department of Education's responsibility. He added that they have people that were targeted and software systems to plug in everyone's address and find where the driver should go and it was all in their hands. He said if the city wanted to do anything further, the conversations would need to be with the Department of Education and the local School Board.

VP Mosley said that when the kids miss school, they miss meals and a lot of times it was the only meal that they have throughout the day. They come in the morning and go straight into the lunch room to eat breakfast and they constantly asked "what's for lunch?" She said they make sure to eat lunch before they go home and she would like as many of the kids to make it to school as possible. She said that she's also worked in the attendance office and kids would call off when their parents go to work and they would asked "how many days do I have left that I can miss?"

Councilman Dunne clarified that we're all at different levels of socioeconomic status and they rational behind it was that regardless of where you are in that classification, that you should be able to consistently attend and travel to school in a safe and predictable way which

was the meaning behind it. He said you could be very wealthy or not be wealthy regardless of wealth or income that all kids should be able to get to school which was the meaning behind socioeconomics.

Councilman Sandlin said that he was all for a resolution asking for ways in which the city could improve getting the children to school and was vitally important because the numbers don't lie, and attendance was connected to grade levels in learning. He said in any way the city could adopt a resolution to asked the state and federal agencies to look at this to improve or solve a problem that was created by a loophole of the current legislation and raise awareness. He had concerns with tying the City Manager or grant writers to obligations of such because our staff was busy, and this was the busiest that the city had been in a long time and he wasn't for loading them up with additional issues. He was very hesitant on voting "yes" as written, but would be for removing the requirements for the City Manager and staff to work on this issue.

Solicitor Haas said that it was directed to be sent to everyone including the Ohio General Assembly and if that could be narrowed down to our local members of the General Assembly and include the State Senators and Ohio's U.S. Congressman, it would make it more manageable and cut that needless expense. Councilman Dunne asked that the hard copies be sent to those that the Solicitor mentioned and the rest sent via email.

Mayor Gordon asked Council their final thoughts on the amendments and Councilman Cole said that he thought the socioeconomics wasn't necessary, but with Councilman Dunne's explanation saying it was everybody, if all of Council saw it that way, he was okay with it. He would like to see #3 & #5 removed and stronger language for safety and Councilman Dunne replied that it could be done at the next reading, it should include research to explain the safety aspects.

Solicitor Haas reminded everyone that this was a Resolution and would only receive one reading and whatever we came up with would be on the agenda at the next meeting. VP Mosley stated that she would also like this sent to the principal at the school along with the School Board President. Mayor Gordon said that this would really support the parents too as it was hard to make ends meet and making a statement that the city does support the children and the parents. Councilman Cole said that the Transportation Supervisor was another important person that was involved in this matter as well as the Superintendent.

Mayor Gordon said that as a Resolution they would remove #3 & #5 and modify the final paragraph and who it would be sent to and if it was emailed, they could add in the local school principal and school board. Councilman Packard said that regardless if #3 was stricken from the legislation, the city still does always submit grants for the "safe routes to school grant" and Manager Sutherland said that was correct.

Vice President Mosley motioned to accept alternative #2 to modify with the above request.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 6 ayes – 0 nay, legislation moved forward.**

2. **Portsmouth Fire Department Training Grant**

**CM-25-10**

Manager Sutherland stated that this would be accepting the reimbursement to the Fire Department in the amount of \$4,570.17 and would appropriate it back into their training line.

Vice President Mosley motioned to accept alternative #1.

There were no questions or comments: **VOTE: 6 ayes – 0 nay, legislation moved forward.**

**Discussion Items**

1. Homelessness Task Force

Councilman Packard said that 3 members of Council were present when this was first discussed and the new members have been involved with the ongoing discussions. He said in light of the increased visibility of the unhoused within the city, he tried to get a feel of where Council was now on how the city could address the matter. If Council review the proposed resolution there were some typo corrections, but it stated that there were agencies within the city that were addressing individual issues that revolve around the unhoused issue. There wasn't a coordination effort where those individual agencies know what each other was doing and the feeling he gets from Margaret Selby who had spoken to Council in the past and had volunteered to be a coordinator or facilitator to bring those groups together to form a task force for a plan that could be presented to Council to address the unhoused issue. He felt that a resolution could be a step forward to tackling this massive issue. He said that they've been talking about it for over two-years and it was a very large overall issue. Ms. Selby will come and give the first three phases of the plan: 1. Harm reduction 2. Transitional housing 3. Affordable housing with ongoing social support attached to #2. He would like to see this moved forward, but he understood if Council wanted to hear from Ms. Selby first and then keep it on as a discussion for the next meeting. He said if it were to move up would be fine too because it was a benign resolution and wouldn't be putting the city on the hook for anything other than to say that they would like to see a well thought out multi-disciplinary plan for attacking the issue.

VP Mosley asked if Ms. Selby could speak to Council at the next meeting before moving it up so that Council knows exactly what they're moving up. Councilman Cole said that this was too big to just fix, but the city had to start somewhere and he appreciated each effort that had been made. He asked what the city would be doing to create a task force and he understood the key players that would be coming together and he thought it was a great idea, but would it be a city-driven board that was elected to be on the board? Councilman Packard said it would be community volunteers who were experts in their fields coming together as a task force and devising a plan and presenting the plan to Council. Once the plan was revealed, Council would know more accurately how, where and if the city could help. He believed that they have the data already to form a plan.

Councilman Dunne said that part of it was a fluid approach by sharing information, and it would be an ongoing development of plans with the acknowledgement that we're not the only city that had been trying to address this issue and others have as well, but there wasn't a magic plan or one size fits all plan. He said that we're fortunate to have Maggie

Selby to connect all these different groups and share insights between these different groups and the resolution would encourage that, and not be legally binding. It would be an ongoing development, revision, discussion of ways to address the issue and Maggie had already been bringing together different people to let them know about the renewed interest that's been seen since December. By moving it forward, it would be an acknowledgement of encouragement to continue with the plans and the group would be able to advise the city of ways to address it.

Councilman Packard felt that Councilman Dunne's understanding was congruent with his and it was an ongoing working plan that anyone in the group could come on a monthly basis or from time to time to update Council on their plan and to ask for areas where the city might be able to help. Mr. Dunne understood that it would be a give and take process that could be modified or adjusted based upon developments.

Mayor Gordon asked if Council wanted to keep it as a Discussion item and rework it. Council agreed to keep it as a discussion item.

The meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m. on a motion by Vice President Mosley with all in favor.

Submitted by: Diana Ratliff – City Clerk - For the full audio version of the Manager's Meeting, please go to [www.portsmouthohio.org](http://www.portsmouthohio.org) under City Manager 2025 "Audio".