Pawtucket Riverfront Commission
Monday, October 19, 2026
100 Freight Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860

A. Opening/Call to Order/Roll Call:

Chairwoman, Pamela Hughes called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

Commission Member Attendees (4): Chairwoman Pamela Hughes, Miriam Plitt, James Hoyt, Arthur Marcello

Guest Attendee (1): Bob Billington

Absent Commission Members (5): John Barry, Dr. Jacqueline Ash, Lori Urso, Michael Lafond, and Sandra Cano

Members of the Public (1): Toba Weintraub

Staff (3): Jason Pezzullo (Director), Jacob Alderman (Senior Planner), and Nicholas Corbo (Senior Planner)

B. General Public Comment

Toba Weintraub, a member of the public spoke briefly in support of the river's revitalization and desire to see progress.

Commissioner Hughes, speaking in her capacity as a member of the Commission on Arts and Culture, announced an exhibition on theaters at the City Hall Gallery on November 27th. She said that the exhibition was the first of its kind. The exhibition would include possible performances and a ceremony for advocates/donors for their support of the arts. She also announced a concurrent soccer exhibit at the library, sponsored by the Arts Commission. Informational flyers were provided to staff.

C. Approval of Minutes – June 15, 2026

Two sets of previously prepared minutes were distributed at the meeting, dated March 23 and November 21. Members noted that these had not been mailed in advance. The Chair stated that minutes should be sent with the meeting notice at least a week in advance so members can review them. Members also noted that the November minutes had not been reviewed at the

March meeting. Discussion confirmed that the Commission last met in March, held a symposium in April, and met once more in June. No minutes for the June meeting were available, and no recording had been made of a prior meeting.

Because attendance was low and members had not had time to review the documents, the Chair proposed, and members agreed by consensus, to **table the minutes until the next meeting**. No formal motion or roll-call vote was recorded. **The minutes of June 15, 2026 were not approved**.

D. New Business

Chairwoman Hughes provided background on the Tidewater Riverway Initiative, which evolved from the May Tidewater Riverfront Riverway Symposium. She noted the success of the Adirondack chairs placed along the river, with photographs uploaded by the public to the initiative's website. She also reported on a meeting with Paul Byrne, General Manager of the Centerville Bank Stadium, who had provided the stadium room free for the symposium. Mr. Byrne requested three chairs and planned a halftime presentation featuring the "Have a Seat Pawtucket" logo. Mr. Byrne also expressed interest in a dock and dredging near the stadium. The Chair described a two-pronged effort: completing the bikeway on both sides of the river, and dredging the river for navigation, recreation, and safety.

1. Pawtucket Harbor Management Plan

Guest attendee, Bob Billington, explained that the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) aims to have a harbor management plan in every waterfront city. About 19 coastal cities have one, but Pawtucket does not. With the mayor's support, a plan is being developed, drawing on CRMC's guidebook. Rick Goldstein and Michelle Hardy are working on the draft. Bob described the plan as aspirational and environmentally sensitive, addressing water quality and river use. He said the mayor envisioned the plan operating under the Riverfront Commission. The City Council would give final approval after review by the planning board and the Commission. He distributed a three-page outline and stated that a full document was still a work in progress.

Bob noted that flooding, rain, and other environmental occurrences have deposited debris into the Blackstone River. Using funds from the Riverfront Commission symposium, an engineer was hired to prepare illustrations of potential dockage at three locations: Festival Pier, Rhode Island Energy land adjacent to Centreville Bank Stadium, and an area near the Boys and Girls Club. These dockage procedures range from simple to more extensive improvements. The drawings were to be emailed to members. Bob also offered historical context on Pawtucket's maritime and shipbuilding heritage and distinguished between land-use planning, which is the Commission's purview, and "river-use planning."

Commissioner Hoyt raised the Commission's charter, stating that it would need to be reviewed, and likely amended by ordinance through the City Council, before the Commission could oversee a harbor plan. He and other members stressed that review materials, including minutes and the plan, should be distributed at least a week before meetings. Chair Hughes acknowledged

this and said it would be corrected going forward. Another commissioner favored a comprehensive approach, noting that city commissions often work in silos, but agreed the Commission's purpose should be discussed first. Members agreed that any recommendation should come from the Commission and then go to the City Council.

Chair Hughes explained that the mayor's office considered combining the Harbor Management Plan with the duties of the existing Riverfront Commission; this would be simpler than creating a new harbor management commission. She described this as a temporary arrangement to keep the work moving. Commissioner Hoyt asked about the proposed pedestrian bridge. Bob responded that its air draft was approximately 32 feet at high water. Bob noted the plan would cover navigable water from Main Street to the East Providence line. East Providence and Providence already possess harbor plans and part-time harbor masters. The Chair expressed hope that a draft plan and relevant ordinance language would be available for the November meeting. No action was taken, and the item was informational only.

2. River Surveying Update

Mr. Billington presented a hydrological survey obtained from Rhode Island Energy. The survey covered only a small portion of the river and was about five years old, but showed probable vehicles on the riverbed. Billington informed that he is seeking a cost estimate to scan the river from Main Street to the city line. Bob said a full assessment is the first step, followed by consultation with scientists about which vehicles should be removed and which are better left undisturbed. He noted that the Army Corps of Engineers has a 23-page document on removing a car, and that removal is complex and can disturb surrounding sediment. Chair Hughes added that some vehicles may be buried deep enough in silt that removal would harm the environment more than leaving them in place.

Mr. Billington reported that he had explored a nonpoint source grant but determined the city was not eligible, so no application had been submitted. He said funding would still need to be identified and that the decision on removal rests with the city. He also recalled that in June there was difficulty identifying a specific vehicle after attempted vehicle recovery at Town Landing.

3. Channel Dredging Discussion

Bob said that identifying the riverbed contents and securing funding would strengthen the case for planning the riverfront's future. He suggested the city may wish to consider assuming ownership of the federal channel, since the federal government is not maintaining it. Chair Hughes clarified that this meant abandoning federal ownership, not abandoning the channel. She reported that Centreville Bank Stadium representatives were enthusiastic about a dock and "sailgating,", which means watching events from boats. They envisioned people parking in Providence and arriving to stadium events by shuttle boat. The stadium would likely fund its own dock but not dredging. Chair Hughes described the stadium as a powerful partner.

4. Five Cities Partnership Planning Meetings

Mr. Billingham reported that consultant, Reif Larsen, is working with the city of Pawtucket to bring together the five communities bordering it: Central Falls, Cumberland, East Providence, and Providence. The mayors from each city were scheduled to meet on November 2 at Slater Mill with their city planners, and other attendees. Chair Hughes noted that it took months to find a date that all five mayors could attend. Pawtucket's mayoral successor, Adam Greenman, was invited to the event. Chair Hughes expressed her hope that the Five Cities Partnership would continue through the upcoming administration transition. Members discussed that a united five-city effort could better pursue federal funding.

5. Bikeway Rides and Updates

Mr. Billington stated that the regional bikeway remains incomplete and that cyclists must still use roads in certain portion of Pawtucket. Involved planners have taken bike rides to examine the areas where bikes meet with vehicular traffic. Reif Larsen's report on the second ride was included in members' packets, and his first report is on the website tidewaterriverway.com. Mr. Billington added that the finished Riverway map - with about 60 points of interest - would be posted online the following day. Billington attributed delays in completing the bikeway largely to private land, contamination, and a lack of political will. A commissioner asked about locating the path along the water's edge. Mr. Billington responded that this is possible, citing an elevated boardwalk section in Cumberland, but costs would be significantly higher. He urged that cost not limit the vision at this stage.

Chair Hughes announced that Reif Larsen is planning a public meeting on November 12, tentatively at the Pawtucket's visitor center, but possibly at the Apex. Guest speakers with experience in post-industrial city bikeways will attend. Mr. Larsen is also preparing a map of incomplete segments and the obstacles in each. The Chair clarified that the current mayor had asked her to work with Bob on reviving the Commission, the Symposium, and the five-city partnership. The boundaries between the Tidewater Riverway Initiative and the Commission remain unclear. Chair Hughes said the work will continue regardless of which body ultimately oversees it.

E. Next Scheduled Meeting: Monday, November 16, 2026 39:14

Chair Hughes stated that materials would be mailed ahead of the November meeting, and members agreed that minutes of this meeting should be circulated beforehand, along with the plan outline. Commissioner Hoyt urged that all commissioners be convened to discuss the Commission's charter and role. Chair Hughes noted that the date had been announced about four months earlier, and expressed frustration at absences without notice. Hughes recalled that an ordinance revision made 8 to 10 years ago provides for removal of members who miss more than three consecutive meetings. Chair Hughes agreed to follow up with absent members, and members agreed that those unable to serve should say so.

F. Adjournment 6:40

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Hoyt and seconded by Commissioner Plitt. The motion carried by voice vote. The Chair thanked those in attendance, and the meeting was adjourned.