

City of Keene
New Hampshire

PARTNER CITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 10, 2026

5:00 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Councilor Laura Ruttle-Miller
Eric Weisenberger
John Mitchell, Chair
Gerald Kuhn
Andrew Madison
Derek Blunt
William Schoefmann, Vice Chair
Gerald Lins (arrived at 5:09 PM)

Staff Present:

Meagan McLaughlin, Executive
Administrative Assistant

Members Not Present:

Mari Brunner
Doris McCollester

1) **Call to Order**

Chair Mitchell called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

2) **Roll Call**

Roll call was conducted.

3) **Minutes of the Previous Meeting: January 13, 2026**

Mr. Madison made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 13, 2026. Mr. Weisenberger seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) **Board Business**

A) **Exchanges: Golf, Bicycle, Brewer, Dancer/Musician**

Chair Mitchell stated that two employees at the country club have expressed an interest and are looking into whether they will be able to have the time off and travel to Germany. Discussion ensued.

Chair Mitchell stated that regarding the bicycle exchange idea, he is not sure they have the enthusiasm from folks that they had at one point. He continued that he is at a standstill with this, if anyone else wants to follow up on it. There is interest in Einbeck.

Chair Mitchell asked Mr. Schoefmann for a brewery update. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he would have to reach out to them. He continued that he had been in contact with a brewer in Peterborough who was interested. Mr. Weisenberger spoke about another brewer that had been interested, although he has not reached out to him this year. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he will reach out to his contact in Peterborough and gauge his interest, and they can look to the person Mr. Weisenberger knows as an alternative. Chair Mitchell asked if it would make sense to invite them to a PCC meeting. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, and he could help with that.

Chair Mitchell stated that Ms. Brunner is not here to give an update on a dance exchange. Ms. McLaughlin replied that the PCC had invited Kristen Leach to come to this meeting, and Ms. Lecah emailed to say that NHDI is moving forward with the dance exchange. She continued that they plan on hosting people from Einbeck from October 9-18. Chair Mitchell and others replied that that is great. Chair Mitchell asked Ms. McLaughlin to invite Ms. Leach again for next month, because the PCC also wants to follow up with Rotary, and he thinks Ms. Leach had a good lead on that when they last visited Einbeck.

Chair Mitchell stated that he has a message saying they are very excited, doing an exchange with a slightly older group of dancers this time. This was a dance exchange started by Ms. Leach, with some dancers in the range of 9 to 10 years old, up to about 18. Everything went very well, but the one adjustment they worked on was moving the age up to about 11 or 12 years old. They have a full group coming here from Einbeck and Ms. Leach is ready to take a full group there next season. It is coming along very well.

Councilor Ruttle-Miller stated that she knows a lot of runners in Keene. She continued that there is a big running community in this area. She suggested a person who could potentially collaborate on a running exchange, Karen Jordan, and gave some information about her. Ms. Jordan gave her permission to name her in this meeting. Mr. Blunt stated that he knows some of the Einbeck teachers are active runners, so maybe he and Councilor Ruttle-Miller can connect. Mr. Schoefmann stated that they had touched on the idea of a running exchange, and most of them thought it was a good idea. Discussion continued.

Mr. Lins arrived at 5:09 PM.

Chair Mitchell stated that typically, the way exchanges develop is that people try to get people on one side in communication with interested people on the other side. He continued that if someone has an interest, they can come to a PCC meeting, and talk to him, Mr. Schoefmann, or any other PCC member. It would be relatively easy to get runners in Keene in touch with runners in Einbeck. Discussion continued. Chair Mitchell encouraged Councilor Ruttle-Miller to invite Ms. Jordan to a meeting.

B) Eulenfest Participation – Fundraising During Festival

Mr. Schoefmann stated that they wanted to allocate some time to brainstorming how the PCC could participate in Eulenfest. Chair Mitchell stated that Jürgen Herbst and Wulf Mißling are both aware that the PCC wants to do something. He continued that he and Mr. Schoefmann will have a meeting with them in about a week.

Mr. Madison explained that Eulenfest is a festival that happens every year, and usually, the Keene travelers are there for it. He continued that the last time they went, all of Einbeck's partner cities except for Keene participated in Eulenfest by doing fundraisers for a partner city in Poland that had been impacted by floods. People from Keene were off to the sidelines, thinking about how they really should do something, too.

Discussion ensued about various ideas for Eulenfest participation, particularly something recognizably American that they could make and sell, such as pumpkin soup, pumpkin carving, maple drinks, hamburgers, pumpkin or apple pie, "sizzler" sandwiches like the ones at Keene State College, or tacos.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that they have some good ideas, and he and Chair Mitchell can bring them up to Mr. Herbst and Mr. Mißling and see what they think. He continued that they can report back to the PCC next time.

C) October Visit

Chair Mitchell stated that they have not received an official invitation from the Einbeck mayor yet, but they will assume Keene will be traveling to Einbeck in October. He asked if there is anything related to the trip that they should talk about today.

Ms. McLaughlin stated that at the last meeting, Chair Mitchell had asked if the Mayor is coming, and he is. Brief discussion ensued about the number of travelers. In response to a question of whether the PCC has enough people to fill all of the spots, or if there will be room to invite others, Chair Mitchell stated that he does not have a good sense right now on how many people want to go. That changes over the months. He continued that there has been a lot of interest. If previous hosts are interested in going to Einbeck, it is probably time to start mentioning that, maybe by the next meeting. That would help the PCC start making a list.

Mr. Lins stated that something to think about is how to address the fact that some travelers, or potential travelers, are interested in going but have limited mobility. He spoke about how travelers with mobility issues, who would not be able to participate in all of the scheduled activities, might want to join together so they could socialize together in alternative ways when they sit out some activities.

Chair Mitchell asked what other travel issues there are to talk about. Discussion ensued about whether people would be buying their plane tickets individually or as a group. Chair Mitchell stated that buying group tickets is not as doable as it once was. He continued that plane ticket prices are as good as they are going to be right now, and might be significantly higher if you wait three or four months. Discussion continued, and Chair Mitchell stressed the importance of travelers arriving on time, because Einbeck hosts have a definite day/time you have to be in town, and they

get frustrated when people show up at very different times, or half a day late. Mr. Schoefmann agreed and spoke about the importance of not making Einbeck hosts need to make multiple trips to the airport to pick people up.

Chair Mitchell stated that PCC members should start thinking about what their interest level is for traveling in October. He continued that maybe at the next meeting, they could start that discussion.

D) Friends Group/Booster Club (not city affiliated)

Chair Mitchell stated that this is something that has been on his mind for a long time, and he knows other members have talked about it, years ago and currently. He continued that a lot of pressure is put on Mr. Schoefmann and Mr. Madison during the exchanges to try and figure out finances and how to pay for things. They put a lot of work into that. He imagines that the formation of some sort of friends group or booster group would ameliorate that to some degree.

Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, the concept is also to have freedom to do more creative fundraisers, if the group was not City-affiliated. He continued that for example, the PCC once did a beer-tasting fundraiser, which the City Attorney's Office did not appreciate. Discussion ensued. Mr. Schoefmann stated that they do not need to get into the weeds today, but the question is whether such a friends or booster group would be a non-profit or need a fiscal agent, and who the fiscal agent would be. PCC members gave suggestions, such as Arts Alive or Hannah Grimes. Mr. Schoefmann stated that there are details to flesh out, outside of the PCC meetings. Discussion ensued about how PCC members can meet separately from PCC meetings to do this, as long as there are fewer than a quorum, so that it does not inadvertently become an official/public meeting.

5) Communications

A) Derek Blunt – MC2 BBS Donation Status

Mr. Weisenberger stated that it is done and taken care of. Ms. McLaughlin stated that it was signed. A PCC member asked what this refers to, and Mr. Schoefmann replied that it is the donation check that has taken six or seven months.

Mr. Blunt stated that MC2 will put the money towards purchasing tickets for the school exchange. He continued that BBS would like MC2 travelers there on June 7, and they – eight students, two teachers - will be there a little less than two weeks. The exact number of days will depend on ticket pricing, which he can now start locking in and purchasing. He hopes that by the next PCC meeting, he will have the exact dates to share with them. They are excited for this exchange.

Mr. Blunt stated that there are a couple of fundraisers coming up for the school exchange, including the "Let it Slide" at Terra Nova Arts, in late February. There will be a couple more before the trip in June. Everything is looking good.

In response to a question, Mr. Blunt explained that Let it Slide is a community-sourced improv comedy event. Discussion continued. PCC members noted that it is Friday, February 27 at 6:00 PM, at Brewbakers on Emerald St.

B) Mail from Dr. Sabine Michalek – Congratulations to Mayor on Re-Election

Ms. McLaughlin reported that the Mayor received a letter congratulating him on his re-election. Chair Mitchell stated that his understanding is that Dr. Sabine Michalek is not running for re-election, and the mayor position is currently being debated. Discussion ensued.

6) **Reports**

A) **Treasurer Report - Eric**

Mr. Weisenberger stated that the PCC's fundraising account currently has \$17,777, and the general appropriation is \$18,805.

Mr. Weisenberger asked if that includes the most recent check, because that did not go through. Ms. McLaughlin replied probably not. She continued that the check was for \$2,100.

7) **New Business**

Councilor Ruttle-Miller asked if the Keene area has any high school or middle school programs that have German classes. Chair Mitchell replied that Keene High School (KHS) started a German class this year. Councilor Ruttle-Miller asked if the PCC ever offers scholarships to students who have excelled in foreign language, or anything like that. Chair Mitchell that they have not. Councilor Ruttle-Miller asked what the PCC uses its money for. Chair Mitchell replied hosting Einbeck exchanges, which happen every other year and can be in the range of \$12,000 to \$14,000. He continued that the PCC also helps sponsor exchanges, like the MC2 school exchange, Ms. Leach's dance exchange, and the chorale exchange. They would normally support the soccer exchange as well, so that will be an expense once that starts up again. How to disperse the funds is up to the PCC, but he would imagine they would be enthusiastic about providing seed money for new exchanges.

Councilor Ruttle-Miller stated that she was thinking of creative fundraising ideas, and she was wondering if there was some sort of cultural event or festival in Einbeck, maybe the PCC could host something like a mini version of it in Keene. She continued that for example, Einbeck has a running event in May. It would be great to somehow do a smaller version of an Einbeck event that brings the culture into Keene in ways beyond just when Einbeck visitors are here.

Mr. Schoefmann replied that the PCC did not participate in the Taste of Keene event last year, but since Pumpkin Fest will be taking place this fall while the PCC is traveling in Einbeck, it might be worth looking into doing Taste of Keene this spring. Chair Mitchell thanked Councilor Ruttle-Miller for her ideas. Mr. Schoefmann stated that selling bratwurst and hot dogs has always been the PCC's template for fundraising. He continued that typically, the fundraising has been used to support exchanges, such as when Chair Mitchell was spearheading the Career Center at KHS and his students participated in fundraising, with the understanding that they were raising money that would go into the City's coffers, but the PCC would tend to support their exchange needs. Now Mr. Blunt has sort of used that template now that MC2 has stepped into the major role in the student exchange. Chair Mitchell added that Mr. Blunt's students show up and help, which helps the PCC be very supportive of them. The soccer students used to support the fundraisers, and KHS students used to as well. Discussion continued about fundraisers.

Chair Mitchell asked if there was any other new business, or if anyone wanted to put any new business on a future agenda. Mr. Schoefmann replied that if they are going to consider participating in the Taste of Keene, they should start thinking about that. He continued that it is the first Saturday in June. Chair Mitchell replied that he could be there. Discussion ensued about Taste of Keene possibilities. A PCC member suggested they consider selling bratwurst and hot dogs, since they cannot do so at Pumpkin Fest. Others replied that they probably will not be allowed to sell food, since Taste of Keene is an event for local restaurants. Mr. Blunt stated that MC2 students would be in Keene during Pumpkin Fest and able to help with a PCC booth. Mr. Schoefmann stated that if nothing else, the PCC could have an informational booth at Taste of Keene.

Councilor Ruttle-Miller asked if they are allowed to do raffles. Mr. Schoefmann replied that they would need a permit from the City. Discussion continued about how Taste of Keene is currently run by the Keene Young Professionals network, but will be moved to a newly formed nonprofit that will run it; and about how the PCC might be able to participate in Taste of Keene, such as selling water or maybe having a beer garden.

8) Next Meeting: March 10, 2026

9) More Time

A) Fundraiser – Cookbook, Taste of Keene, any other opportunities

Chair Mitchell asked if there was anything to talk about regarding the cookbook fundraiser. Mr. Lins replied that they have about 20 recipes, and they will probably need more than that. He continued that he will circulate the list of recipes, so if someone sees that he forgot their recipe, they can reach out and let him know. Several of the recipes have English and German translations, and others will need to be translated – maybe Ms. McColleston or someone else can help. His wife found a German graphic artist who might be interested in helping. The project is ramping up. He asked the PCC how many recipes they think should be in the book, so that people are likely to buy it. Discussion ensued about how the price of the book will depend on how much it costs to produce it, and about the recipes. Mr. Schoefmann stated that they should have photos of the dishes.

Mr. Kuhn stated that Bernadette is ready to help with the project. Chair Mitchell stated that he and Mr. Schoefmann need to talk to Mr. Herbst and Mr. Mißling – maybe they can send the word to everyone at the next meeting, about sending in recipes. He continued that he himself has a couple of recipes he still needs to submit. Discussion continued. Councilor Ruttle-Miller stated that another idea is for the PCC to make an Americanized cookbook to sell at the Eulenfest.

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 5:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Meagan McLaughlin, Staff Liaison