

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**PARTNER CITY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, May 9, 2023**

**5:00 PM**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

John Mitchell, Chair  
Mayor George Hansel  
Mari Brunner  
Kürt Blomquist  
Doris McCollester  
Gerald Lins, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Helen Mattson, Executive Assistant

**Members Not Present:**

Councilor Michael Giacomo  
Dawn Thomas-Smith  
Gregg Kleiner  
William Schoefmann, Vice Chair

**1) Call to Order**

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

**2) Roll Call – Appoint Alternates (if required)**

Roll call was conducted. Chair Mitchell welcomed guest David Clinton, stating that Mr. Clinton has expressed interest in the committee through a letter. Mr. Clinton introduced himself.

**3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting – April 11, 2023 (there were no minutes recorded)**

Chair Mitchell noted that there are no April meeting minutes.

**4) Board Business**

**A) Activity Planning for upcoming exchange with Einbeck in Keene - September 29 to October 7, 2023**

Chair Mitchell asked Mayor Hansel for an update from the working group. Mayor Hansel stated that the working group has not met since the last PCC meeting, but will meet next week. He

continued that based on the communication Chair Mitchell has had with Jurgen Herbst (in Einbeck), it sounds like the Einbeck travelers' thoughts are aligned with the PCC's in line with what the PCC was thinking. The schedule the working group is creating includes a trip to the Pioneer Valley and to the White Mountains for a possible overnight. They are gathering pricing information. He gave more information.

Chair Mitchell thanked the working group and stated that it seems like the schedule is filling in nicely. He asked if the working group is at/will get to the point where they need to dole out short tasks – for example, pickle ball setup has been taken care of by one person. Mayor Hansel replied yes, and they probably need one more month (to determine that). He continued that when they meet next week, they will start doling tasks out to the working group members and then ask the PCC for help if needed. Each working group member is taking a different chunk of the trip and the research. Next month they will have things firmed up even more and have some asks for the PCC.

Ms. Brunner asked if pickle ball should be a specific day or if it is flexible. Discussion ensued. Chair Mitchell asked if October 1 is best, noting that it could be October 2 or 3. Ms. Brunner replied that there are a few possibilities.

Chair Mitchell stated that he received recent correspondence from Frank Klenke, regarding soccer. He continued that in years past, the soccer exchange was run almost entirely by Wally Secord (from Keene) and his counterpart in Einbeck, other than the finances, and the exchange received generous support from committee members. There is a lot that goes on with the soccer exchange. He has spoken with Frank a few times, and this written correspondence is his thoughts on what he believes the soccer exchange should look like. It lines up well with what the PCC has been looking at. Gina De Santis has experience playing semi-professionally, and coaching, and is interested in being involved. The man who runs the sports arena in Swanzey is also interested. The potential for the exchange is here; it is a matter of who takes the weight of it. He encourages the PCC to read what Frank sent. At some point, they will need someone on the PCC who has more experience with this or is willing to take the lead on it. It sounds like Frank could probably make an exchange work this year, but it is more realistic to wait until 2024.

Chair Mitchell stated that the next correspondence is from Kirsten Hillebrecht from Germany. She emailed him months ago, looking to develop an exchange. He approached the YMCA and the YMCA does not believe they have any of the infrastructure that would allow for an exchange (e.g. the people) and at this point they are not interested. MoCo is interested in learning more but also believes they do not have the infrastructure of people to supervise an exchange. The Lions youth and Rotary youth are tied into the schools, and both organizations thought their youth groups would not be a good fit for this, either. Thus, he leaves it up to the PCC, regarding how they can move on this.

Mr. Blomquist stated that Kirsten met Andy Bohannon (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Director) when she was here and they had a conversation. He continued that in Germany, this is a quasi-governmental function; the multifunctional youth centers are run by the Einbeck government. Einbeck is suggesting everything from basketball to modern dance. He can talk with Mr. Bohannon and see what his thoughts are. He continued that similar to the soccer exchange, this will probably require someone who can take the lead in coordinating the participants, host families, etc., with the PCC supporting with finances. MoCo would probably be interested in being involved in some way, despite their lack of capacity to organize host families and such. The question is who is able to handle the logistics; this all comes down to logistics.

Chair Mitchell stated that there is probably housing for everyone. He continued that they just need someone to be in charge. They will not solve this today, but he encourages everyone to continue to think about it. Ms. Brunner asked if it is true that it does not necessarily need to be an organization that takes the lead, and it could just be a person or people who are able and willing. Others replied yes, but such a person/people would need to have connections and people to support them. Mr. Blomquist spoke of the need for some resiliency and structure, which comes with organizations, so the exchange program does not rely entirely on one person. Discussion continued.

Mayor Hansel suggested they talk with Ritu Budakoti, who is a teacher at Keene Middle School and involved with the Keene India Association and civic activities. He continued that he can talk with her; he thinks she has a good number of connections with youth.

**B) PCC Exchange Survey/Facebook Update**

Chair Mitchell asked if anyone had any activity to report. Others replied no.

**C) Update on Student Exchange – MC2 – October 9 to 22, 2023**

Mr. Blunt gave an update on the upcoming student exchange, stating that MC2 students met yesterday, via video conference, with their German counterparts. He continued that they are starting to connect, and have a rough draft of the itinerary for October when Einbeck students come to Keene. MC2 students plan to have a solidified itinerary to present to the PCC at their next meeting, and would like the PCC's thoughts and feedback. Originally, MC2 had planned on going to Einbeck in April 2024, and they are looking to change that to June. Neither side is yet in a rush to lock down the dates. He continued that fundraisers for the exchange, at the Showroom, will be on September 23 and in February. Everything is going well and they are excited.

Chair Mitchell asked how many students they are looking at. Mr. Blunt replied sending eight and receiving eight, with two staff members both ways as well. Discussion ensued. Chair

Mitchell asked if it would be possible for Mr. Blunt to email the itinerary to the PCC by the day before the PCC's next meeting. Mr. Blunt replied yes.

#### **D) Update on other future exchange ideas**

Chair Mitchell asked Ms. Brunner about the idea of a dance exchange, and about the dance community in the Keene area. Ms. Brunner spoke of how the tango community she is a part of is mainly older people/retired people, so it would not be a youth exchange.

Chair Mitchell stated that he is hopeful that there are enough pickle ball players in Keene to connect with the pickle ball players coming from Einbeck, and maybe that could become an exchange. He continued that the PCC may run into this multiple times and need a form for how to fill the exchange coordinator positions, or whatever the title will be – here they have three potential types of exchanges, but they need coordinators to keep them going. Mr. Blomquist replied that logistically, they need organizations to coordinate/facilitate, as opposed to individuals – for example, for insurance purposes. The PCC should perhaps talk about whether the PCC, through the City, takes on more of the responsibility. They were very fortunate to have Wally Secord doing what he did for the soccer exchange, with the framework that he had. Discussion ensued about insurance/liability issues. Mr. Blomquist spoke about how organized groups have the necessary structure and framework, and how it works well to have an organization that can be the sponsor, with an individual within the organization who can manage the day to day. Chair Mitchell replied yes, like when he facilitated the Keene High School exchanges, and was thus covered by the high school.

Chair Mitchell asked if there were any other thoughts on future exchange ideas. Mr. Blomquist summarized that they are getting the school exchanges going again, and the choir groups, and there is the question of sports. He continued that there are two directions there – soccer, with definite interest in Einbeck; and the youth center, which could go in a couple directions and even vary year to year. It is a matter of finding people to start looking at this and looking at the logistics.

Mayor Hansel stated that he floated the idea of doing an industry exchange with the manufacturers, and there is a lot of interest, but they do not have anyone who knows enough about how to do this and have employees work for a period of time overseas. Area manufactures are interested in potentially sending employees to Einbeck for a 6-month period and having Einbeck employees come to Keene, but no one has experience in doing it. Discussion ensued about what this could look like.

Mr. Blomquist stated that there has always been conversation off and on about the Chamber of Commerce and the Einbeck equivalent and the small business community. The idea is floating out there for how to, for example, have a Hannah Grimes type of relationship. How could they connect start-up businesses in Einbeck with people who do start-up businesses in Keene?

5) **Communications**

Chair Mitchell stated that the PCC received a letter from the local Republican Committee, saying that the women's club would like someone to come speak for 10 minutes about what the PCC is up to. He asked if anyone would like to do that. Discussion ensued. Chair Mitchell stated that he can do it.

6) **Reports**

A) **Treasurer Report**

Ms. Mattson stated that the regular appropriation account has \$12,000, and they probably will be spending every bit of that on the exchange. She continued that the PCC special account has \$18,260.90. She does not foresee any expenses from that account at this point.

Mr. Blomquist stated that if he remembers correctly, they have \$5,000 in the budget request. He continued that that would give them the \$17,000 for when the Einbeck group gets here.

7) **New Business**

A) **Discuss additional guidelines/expectations to be added for people from Keene traveling to Einbeck**

Chair Mitchell stated that the PCC set up an advisory group (working group) regarding creating additional guidelines/expectations for people traveling to Einbeck. He continued that he has not heard from anyone, and he hopes this is in the works. He asked if anyone knows. Ms. Brunner asked if Councilor Giacomo knows he was put in charge of this working group. Chair Mitchell replied probably not. Discussion continued. Mr. Blomquist asked Ms. Mattson to send Councilor Giacomo a copy of the current guidelines so the working group has a starting point.

Chair Mitchell stated that Mr. Herbst had promised the PCC a list of the people who are coming, and their bios, and the other part of his email to him (Chair Mitchell) was an apology for not having those ready yet. He continued that he thinks they will probably have that in a week or so. He will forward it to Ms. Mattson when he gets it, and Ms. Mattson can forward it to the rest of the PCC. Ms. Mattson agreed.

8) **Next Meeting – June 13, 2023**

Chair Mitchell stated that he will not be here for the July meeting. He continued that sometimes they take August off. Ms. Mattson replied that typically the PCC does not meet in July or August, but they have been, because they have an exchange taking place. Mr. Blomquist replied that they could take June off, but they will need the July and August meetings. Chair Mitchell replied that he would rather keep them all on the calendar. Others agreed that that is fine.

Chair Mitchell stated that the PCC had talked about having the hosts meet/connect ahead of time. He continued that as soon as Mr. Herbst gets him the list of people who are coming, he would like to start on this before the next meeting. Unless the PCC disagrees, he will start calling the people on the list, connecting with them, and sorting people out. Others agreed.

9) **More Time**

A) **Fundraising Ideas/Opportunities**

Chair Mitchell asked if any fundraising ideas or opportunities have shown up. Ms. Mattson replied no. Chair Mitchell stated that they are waiting for the Mayor with his direct asks, which will be valuable to support the soccer group or the school group, and he thinks the PCC will need to use their budget money directly for hosting the official visit. Others agreed. Mr. Blomquist replied that the appropriation they get each year is geared toward that.

**B) Pumpkin Fest, potential fund-raising opportunity. Brats and Kraut sales – potential free use of grill and donation for brats and krauts, volunteers.**

Chair Mitchell asked if anyone had news about this. Mr. Blomquist replied that Pumpkin Fest is still working on their plan. Ms. Mattson replied that Councilor Giacomo would have the update.

Ms. Brunner asked if the PCC had decided at the last meeting to not do the Taste of Keene. Ms. Mattson replied that the Taste of Keene decided that. The PCC will not be participating.

Ms. Brunner stated that there is also the Oktoberfest event that Stonewall Farm is doing September 16. Discussion continued. Chair Mitchell stated that hopefully that will be a good, strong fundraiser for the PCC.

10) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 5:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Helen Mattson, Staff Liaison