

City of Keene
New Hampshire

PARTNER CITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 11, 2023

5:00 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

John Mitchell, Chair
William Schoefmann, Vice Chair
Mayor George Hansel
Dawn Thomas-Smith
Mari Brunner
Doris McCollester
Gerald Lins, Alternate

Staff Present:

Members Not Present:

Gregg Kleiner
Lena Kridlo
Kürt Blomquist
Councilor Michael Giacomo

1) Call to Order

Chair Mitchell called the meeting to order at 5:07 PM.

2) Roll Call – Appoint Alternates (if needed)

Roll call was conducted.

3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting: March 14, 2023

Ms. Thomas-Smith made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 14, 2023. Mayor Hansel seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) Board Business

A) KSC Music Exchange – Committee agreed it would match \$100 up to \$150 of what we received from the Monadnock Coop (\$100 gift card). Reimburse John for additional amount.

Chair Mitchell reported that there is no need to reimburse him anything, because the gift card from the Coop was more than enough. He will return the gift card, with its remaining balance of about \$25, to Ms. Mattson. He asked Sandra Howard to give an update on how the exchange went.

Ms. Howard stated that she sent a financial report to Ms. Mattson and Chair Mitchell, in case the City is interested in keeping that record. She continued that there were more shared expenses with the visiting group than maybe would typically happen, because they were coming on their own agenda being a tour. They had many in-kind donations from their generous hosts and some area businesses. She thanks the PCC for their \$500 donation. Keene State College (KSC) contributed \$1,280. That is not bad, for 4 days for 34 people. She continued that she also sent Chair Mitchell a slideshow, to recap that the partnership has been going on for 20 years, and keeping track of the choral exchanges. (This time), there were 34 visitors from the St. Nicolai Choir, 11 host homes, and 3 additional host drivers. The choir had performances at four schools and two churches, and thus interfaced with everyone from five-year-olds to 95-year-olds. She shared information about other activities the choir members did in Keene, and showed a list of the sponsors. Ms. Howard expressed her thanks to the PCC members who supported the exchange, especially those who filled in for her when she was unable to attend the greeting.

Ms. McCollester stated that she has a concern to bring up – it was unacceptable that one of the hosts did not show up for an hour, causing the Einbeck guests, who were already tired from traveling, to wait that long to be picked up. Ms. Howard replied that one of the host families came down with Covid the day before the Einbeck guests were arriving, so she had to scramble to find another host who could take in guests on short notice. Ms. McCollester spoke about the need for hosts to be absolutely committed, and to show up at the agreed upon times.

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

Chair Mitchell stated that the 13th is when Jurgen is finalizing all of this. He continued that there will be between 15 and 17 people, four couples, a father and son, and seven individuals. Mr. Schoefmann stated that he can be one of the “on-call hosts” like last time.

Chair Mitchell stated that the Einbeck folks would like a chance to look over some of the PCC’s options. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he emailed those to Chair Mitchell. Chair Mitchell replied yes, he will send that along. Ms. Brunner stated that the first few days of the schedule are filled in, and the next few days are blank until they figure out what the people from Einbeck want to do. Thus, this schedule (the PCC is looking at) might not be the best thing to send them. Discussion continued. Chair Mitchell stated that the Einbeck visitors are unanimously interested in going to Concord to see the capital. Mayor Hansel replied that if they do the Portland trip, Concord would be a good first stop. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, the proposal for that trip is to go through the White Mountains, and Concord is on the way. That makes sense. Chair Mitchell asked how far the planning group has gotten with the details of what that trip might look like.

Mr. Schoefmann shared more information. Chair Mitchell asked if they are looking for chaperones. Mr. Schoefmann replied that they would probably want a contingency from the PCC for that trip. Ms. Brunner stated that that it would be great to have Ms. McCollester or someone with some German-speaking ability. Discussion continued. Ms. Brunner stated that they had started identifying a lead person for each day, as like a coordinator, but they have not gotten as far as identifying the number of people who should go along. Part of that will be dependent on when they have access to the bus, because when they do not have access to that, transportation will be more difficult. Chair Mitchell asked if there are enough people for this particular trip. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes. Mayor Hansel stated that the PCC had talked about which trip to do, and agreed that their preference would be Portland, because they would be able to do Concord, the White Mountains, and so on and so forth, and he thinks it would be a better option than New York. Discussion continued. Ms. Brunner and Mr. Schoefmann shared information about the defensive driving training they will be doing in order to drive the bus/van.

Mr. Lins spoke in favor of the New York option, and discussion ensued about transportation options for that. Mayor Hansel stated that if the Einbeck visitors say that New York is a must have, they will do that instead of Portland. Chair Mitchell stated that from the discussions, it sounds like the Einbeck visitors have already done Boston and New York. Mayor Hansel replied that the working group will work on filling in the details for the Portland trip. Ms. Brunner stated that the Tuesday plan is fairly detailed, and they definitely want PCC member feedback on that. Ms. McCollester recommended a fishing charter out of Rye, stating that she thinks that would be quite exciting for Einbeck visitors, or a visit to a lobster pound followed by a lobster dinner. Discussion continued.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that the working group got through Saturday, determining a good place for a welcome dinner – Branch & Blade. He continued that Sunday would have several offerings for people to choose, such as a Mt. Monadnock hike, a bike tour of the rail trail, a museum, and so on and so forth. That would take some lifting from hosts and PCC members. For Monday, Mayor Hansel had a concept for activities in the Pioneer Valley and Berkshires, so they put that into a day trip. Ms. Brunner stated that they envision Keene Ice as the drop off/pick up location for most of these. Mr. Schoefmann stated that Monday and Sunday were conceived as times for host family dinners. Tuesday would be the traditional, local, tour activities they have done in the past (businesses and municipal things), starting with a morning reception at the Blastos Room. He listed the other locations on the tour and spoke about the bag lunch plans and afternoon activities and dinner. Wednesday and Thursday are reserved for the trip to Portland or elsewhere; they are waiting on some feedback. Friday would be free time. A farewell dinner will be at Councilor Giacomo's place. Ms. Brunner stated that for Saturday the 30th, they thought the Magical History Tour might be a good early activity to do to orient their visitors to downtown Keene, followed by a downtown lunch and watching a rugby game.

Discussion ensued. Mr. Lins asked about the contra dance possibility, and Ms. McCollester suggested a wine-tasting. Ms. Brunner stated that they still need to fill out Wednesday and Thursday. She continued that Monday will be a long day, so they are not sure if the contra dance

in Nelson would be feasible that night. They will reach out to contra dancers in Keene to see if they could do something a different time, in Keene. Chair Mitchell stated that he is thinking about ways for the hosts to meet the whole group, and ways to ensure hosts do not feel left out. Mr. Schoefmann replied that hosts are invited to the welcome dinner. Ms. Brunner replied and the rugby game. The contra dance could be good for that, too. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, there could be some optional evening activities involving hosts, too, like wine tasting or contra dancing. Chair Mitchell stated that he thinks the working group has created an excellent plan. Ms. Brunner asked if people think Sunday would be a good evening for contra dancing. Mr. Lins replied that Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday would be good, if it will be at the Library.

Chair Mitchell asked what the next steps are for the working group, when a decision is made about the October 4th and 5th visit. Mr. Schoefmann replied that the working group can make sure there are stops/locations/destinations, bring it here to this group, and then make moves to secure whatever they have to. Mayor Hansel stated that if (what the working group has brought to the PCC today) looks good, then the working group can just fill it out completely and return with some rough budget numbers for next time. Discussion continued. Chair Mitchell spoke of the need for hosts to connect with each other. Ms. Brunner spoke of how well it worked when Einbeck hosts used an app to stay in communication with each other, and suggested Keene hosts do something similar. Discussion included the need for a bit of structure/an optional gathering or activity to accompany the free time on Friday.

Chair Mitchell asked if the PCC thinks the hosts should meet before the trip. Mr. Schoefmann replied that that is up to Chair Mitchell. Chair Mitchell replied that he will host all the hosts, if they need a location, but if someone has a better location, that is fine, too. Mr. Schoefmann replied maybe Branch and Blade or the Blastos Room. Let him know, and he can coordinate it. Mayor Hansel asked if the list of hosts is complete yet. Chair Mitchell replied almost. He suggests they all meet 3 or 4 weeks prior.

Ms. McCollester asked which days/times during the visit the PCC wants her to be present for. Mr. Schoefmann and Ms. Brunner replied any/all, as much as she can. Ms. McCollester replied that she can be available every day. Mr. Lins spoke of the availability of someone who speaks German, which he does and would be happy to help out if needed. Ms. Brunner stated that they can look at what their priority times would be for him, if that helps him, but in general, if he could be “on call” that week, it would be great.

Ms. McCollester asked about Mayor Hansel getting an acknowledgement for Albert Thorman, on a plaque or something, from the Governor. Chair Mitchell replied that they are hoping for one for both Mr. Thorman and Jurgen Herbst, since they are moving toward retiring from the process. Discussion ensued. Mayor Hansel asked them to get him the details of what they are looking for. Mr. Schoefmann suggested inviting the German consulate in Boston up on one of the days, maybe for a dinner, to help the exchange program gain momentum.

Chair Mitchell thanked the working group for the work they are doing, and encouraged them to keep going with the details. He asked what the working group needs from the PCC. Mr. Schoefmann replied that along with the major trip planning, they will be able to identify what they need help chasing down, such as someone to communicate with the Dublin Tap Room, for instance, to set up dinner reservations. He continued that the working group will look and see which tasks they can take care of, and probably come back to the group and ask for volunteers to coordinate certain aspects of the days. Chair Mitchell asked if he thinks the working group will have the trip plotted out by the next PCC meeting, with a ballpark budget. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he thinks so. Chair Mitchell replied that if the working group comes with a list of tasks they need the PCC's help with, too, that would be great.

C) PCC Exchange Survey/Facebook Updates

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he does not think there are any updates. He continued that he does not think anything has been posted yet about the chorale visit. Ms. Thomas-Smith replied that they can post the information Ms. Howard just presented. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, they will figure that out.

Ms. Brunner stated that Deb McLoughlin from the IT Department will usually forward any survey responses the PCC receives, and she has not forwarded anything in a long time. She continued that the survey is still "active," but not getting responses.

D) Update on Student Exchange – MC2 – October 9-22, 2023

Chair Mitchell stated that Derek Blunt is not here today to give an update, but as he recalls, his last report was that everything was going well and MC2 was in the money-collecting stage. He continued that he has spoken a little with Mr. Herbst, and the teachers are comfortable with the trip.

E) Update on other future exchange ideas

Chair Mitchell stated that he visited with Gina De Santis, who is potentially interested in picking up the soccer exchange. He continued that she has had an injury and surgery and is not able to make any progress on this. However, she has spoken with Jim Fernell, and apparently, he has interest in helping her with this as well. He might have a boys' team already who could play. [The German team] would like to come this year, and it is their turn to come first. The challenge is that that would put a lot of pressure on Ms. De Santis and Mr. Fernell, because they would have to send their team shortly after the German team visits here. It might make more sense to move this to the spring of next year. That way, the teams can double up the way they are supposed to, and it goes into a two-year cycle.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he had a conversation with the board of the rugby club, recapping his conversation with people from the rugby club in Germany. He continued that they will

schedule a follow-up, put their heads together, and see what an exchange could look like. Exactly what that is, they do not know yet. A schedule/timeline would be the first step. It probably would not be like the soccer exchange where you have to do it the same year, because hosting and traveling in the same year is difficult.

Ms. Brunner stated that she put feelers out for a dance exchange, and based on the responses she has received, she thinks there is interest but this is not something that will be launching anytime soon. She continued that Jurgen wanted to feel out what interest there is on the Einbeck side of things for a dance exchange. When she was in Einbeck, she heard from her host about people interested in a dance exchange, but did not get to meet any of them to talk about it. The Keene area has an active ballroom dance community. She just met a group of people who are starting tango in the area, and there is an active tango group in Brattleboro, VT. What is missing is a correlating group in Einbeck. She is still putting feelers out and everything is very preliminary. Discussion continued about the different types of dance and what to call the group/exchange.

Mr. Schoefmann asked Chair Mitchell if the idea of pickle ball is being discussed. He continued that the Rec Center just had a pickle ball tournament. Chair Mitchell replied yes, he has talked with Andy Bohannon (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Director) and a few other people, and will continue those conversations. He continued that it seems like this should work. He will talk with some pickle ball players. Discussion continued. Mr. Schoefmann noted that Fred Parsells is into pickle ball and they should talk with him.

5) Communications

Chair Mitchell stated that he shared his communications already. He asked if anyone had others.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he spoke with Wulf Miesling. He continued that they talked about doing an administrative call with the chairs of the groups. He asked if Chair Mitchell wants to coordinate that, or if he should. Chair Mitchell replied that he can work on that. He continued that maybe it could be a meeting with him, Mr. Schoefmann, Mr. Miesling, and Mr. Herbst first, just to see how it works.

6) Reports

A) Treasurer Report

Chair Mitchell stated that there is no report.

7) New Business

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

Chair Mitchell stated that they should probably include expectations for hosts as well. He asked if this could be a working group. Ms. Brunner replied that she thinks Councilor Giacomo had raised these issues originally, because during the trip to Einbeck, some comments were overheard, and he wanted to talk about expectations for people who go on the trips. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, and there probably should be expectations for hosts, as Ms. McCollester has pointed out. Discussion ensued. Mayor Hansel stated that he agrees that there should be guidelines, and to Ms. McCollester's point, they do not want hosts dropping the ball.

Chair Mitchell stated that (writing these guidelines) is a task for a working group. He asked who can be part of a working group. Discussion ensued and the working group members will be Mr. Lins, Councilor Giacomo, and Ms. McCollester.

- 8) **Next Meeting: May 9, 2023**
- 9) **More Time**
 - A) **Fundraising Ideas and Opportunities**

Ms. Brunner asked about the Orchard Hill pizza night (event that raises money for various groups). Mr. Schoefmann replied that it is very difficult to get into with a long waiting list. Ms. Brunner replied that even so, it would be good to do.

Mayor Hansel stated that the City's budget discussions are coming up in May. He continued that it would be good to have the PCC lobby for its funding, to at least keep it up, so it is not on the chopping block. Mr. Schoefmann asked Mayor Hansel what he thinks would help with that, other than putting together something about the most recent exchanges. Mayor Hansel replied that it would be great to put something together to show the level of activity and how many people's lives are impacted by this partnership, because the arguments in the past have been that this "is for the elite, few people in Keene who can take advantage of this." Creating a one-page summary sheet with all the exchanges and activity that has been going on, and sending that to Councilors, would be helpful. He continued that he will ask Ms. Mattson to put that together. Ms. Brunner stated that the PCC gave Sandra Howard/the chorale exchange \$500, and then Ms. Howard and her group raised much more than that and hosted 48 people. Hosting 48 people for 4 days, with \$500 of City money, is pretty good. Mayor Hansel replied yes, that is key, showing that the seed money (does more than) just sending 10 people from Keene to Einbeck every other year. The seed money supports all of this other activity. He encourages PCC members to testify to that, when the City Council has its budget meeting(s) in May.

Chair Mitchell stated that he met with Ms. De Santis from Stonewall Farm. He continued that Stonewall Farm is doing Oktoberfest [this] September and would like the PCC to sell brats and krauts like they used to do at the Pumpkin Festival. Discussion ensued. Mr. Schoefmann asked Chair Mitchell to get information about how many people were at the event last year, which would give the PCC a starting point to determine how much food they should plan for. Chair Mitchell agreed and stated that he will also get more information about whether Stonewall Farm plans for the PCC to be the only food vendor there.

B) Planning for “Taste of Keene” for next year. Brats and Kraut sales – potential free use of grill and donation for brats and kraut, volunteers

Mr. Schoefmann stated that the email he received about “Taste of Keene” seems to say that the PCC can sell (only) water at the event, but that might not be correct. Discussion ensued. Mayor Hansel stated that the event is in early June. He continued that they probably need a working group to work on this and figure this out, because there is only one more PCC meeting before the event. Ms. Thomas-Smith agreed. Discussion continued. Mr. Schoefmann stated that he needs to find that email again. Ms. Brunner stated that it might not be worth participating if they can only sell water. Ms. Thomas-Smith replied that it is difficult to pull something together at this point, without having enough information. Others agreed that they would be glad to do this event if they were able to sell food. Chair Mitchell stated that if anyone finds clarifying information soon, they can share it with the rest of the group.

C) Pumpkin Fest, potential fund-raising opportunity

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 6:04 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Helen Mattson, Staff Liaison