

City of Keene
New Hampshire

PARTNER CITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

5:00 PM

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

Members Present:

John Mitchell, Chair
Gerald Kuhn
Doris McColleston
Gerald Lins
Eric Weisenberger
Derek Blunt, Alternate

Staff Present:

Nicole Howe, Executive Assistant

Members Not Present:

Councilor Andrew Madison
Mari Brunner
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. Mr. Blunt introduced three MC2 students, Cedric, Camille, and Dylan.

3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting – February 11, 2025

Mr. Kuhn made a motion to accept the meeting minutes of February 11, 2025. Mr. Lins seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Mitchell stated that Ms. Howe reminded him that the PCC needs to choose this year's PCC Chair and Vice Chair.

Mr. Blunt nominated John Mitchell for Chair. Mr. Kuhn seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Blunt nominated Will Schoefmann as Vice Chair. Mr. Lins seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) Board Business

A) Next Exchange – Review Itinerary Research Assigned at Last Meeting

Chair Mitchell stated that he has some quick updates - Jürgen Herbst told him four police officers are coming, including the chief and the assistant chief, but there does not seem to be any interest from the fire department or public works department. He continued that Sandra Howard from Keene State College (KSC), who runs the chorale exchange, has invited the PCC and Einbeck exchange members to participate in the chorale dinner on the day of Pumpkin Fest, October 18. She requests that the PCC/exchange members pay their way for the cost of the meals.

Ms. Howe stated that she has confirmation for the visit to the Statehouse, 9:45 AM on October 17. She continued that the Mayor was thinking the group could have lunch there at the cafeteria, which the PCC would need to order ahead. The Mayor has some contact with the NH Supreme Court and State Library, too, to see if the group could visit those on the same day. Regarding the manufacturing tours, the Mayor has received the okay from at least one, possibly two, and is working on more, for October 20. Chair Mitchell asked if he is all set for the Thursday morning. Ms. Howe replied yes.

Chair Mitchell asked for an update from Mr. Weisenberger. Mr. Weisenberger spoke about the plans for the welcome dinner at The Show Room on Thursday night, possibly preceded by a tour of the historic theater. He continued that he is still working on the logistics. Mr. Schoefmann has offered to help him with it. He is working on figuring out the cost. Mr. Weisenberger spoke about The Show Room details, such as the elements of the space, and potential caterers. He offered to reach out to a caterer, if the PCC is interested, for them to hold the date. Ms. Howe spoke of a caterer she could reach out to as well.

Chair Mitchell asked Mr. Blunt about the day in Concord. Mr. Blunt stated that he looked at the Tanger outlets, which he threw out as an idea since it was closer to Concord than the Merrimack outlets, but it turns out the Merrimack shopping outlets would only be an extra ten minutes away, and from there it is the same distance back to Keene as it is from the Tanger outlets. He explained why he thinks Merrimack outlets would be the better shopping location. Discussion ensued about giving people an hour in downtown Concord before the Statehouse visit. Chair Mitchell asked if they should plan on dinner somewhere near Merrimack or on the way back, and discussion ensued about the schedule and timing. The group determined that they could be back in Keene around 6:00 PM for dinner.

Chair Mitchell asked how people see October 18 working, with Pumpkin Fest. Discussion ensued about what Pumpkin Fest has, the schedule, and about whether to stay at Pumpkin Fest in the evening to see all the pumpkins lit up, or to leave Pumpkin Fest to attend the Choral Exchange dinner at 6:00 PM on the KSC campus. The PCC discussed which option they thought the group would prefer, and whether it would be possible to let people individually choose.

Chair Mitchell noted that the PCC's idea had been to determine the October 18 plan and schedule so they could invite the German Consulate from Boston. He continued that it does not sound like the PCC can make a firm decision today, but for now they can say that the morning of October 18 is family time and resting from the previous day's travel, and then Pumpkin Fest any time after 2:00 PM. The group could meet up at the PCC's tent around 5:30 PM and go as a group to the chorale dinner.

Chair Mitchell stated that October 19 is completely a family day. He continued that everyone is invited to a chorale concert at the Redfern. There are other optional events on that day. Monday, October 20 is the city tour day. The PCC will need to determine what to do for lunch and dinner. Discussion ensued about options. Chair Mitchell stated that they will need vehicles, because October 20 is a travel day.

Chair Mitchell asked Mr. Kuhn for an update on October 21's plan. Mr. Kuhn spoke about a tour of Bensonwood in (the Walpole area), followed by the American Precision Museum and the Saint-Gaudens Historical Site, which is like a sculpture park. Going to the Fort at No. 4 is a possibility, then back to Keene to the Blastos Room. Discussion ensued. Mr. Kuhn spoke about the possibility of bringing people to see Bensonwood in Keene on Monday, too, so they could see both locations and the interesting contrast.

Chair Mitchell stated that October 22 is the boat ride in Sunapee that Councilor Madison (is planning). Discussion ensued about other possible activities for that day. Chair Mitchell stated that maybe it could be a transportation day if they offer hosts the ability to participate, at their own expense. In response to a question about the timing, Ms. Howe replied that the PCC had talked about having the boat ride be a cocktail/sunset thing. Chair Mitchell noted that the PCC will have to think about a meal. He continued that since Monday and Tuesday are so busy, it would be good to keep Wednesday low-key. Discussion continued about when there will be time to just walk around Keene and shop in Keene. Chair Mitchell stated that something for the PCC to work on during the next month or two is figuring out Wednesday morning before the boat ride, regarding activities or rest time, and what to do about a meal. There is also Thursday to figure out.

Mr. Kuhn suggested asking the Historical Society to do a presentation on the history of Keene. Ms. Howe suggested the Wall Dogs mural walk. Mr. Kuhn asked about taking people to the Holocaust Center. Discussion continued. Chair Mitchell stated that they have a good chunk of Thursday to fill, and Wednesday morning is still open. Mr. Kuhn stated that when he talked with people in Einbeck, they expressed interest in visiting the Cohen Center in Keene.

Chair Mitchell stated that the PCC needs to start a budget soon. He asked the PCC to help go through the list of meals, to see where they are at. Discussion ensued about meals, snacks, and transportation.

Chair Mitchell stated that they need to start thinking about who will be in charge of the money, and thinking about funding. He continued that they do not need to pick someone today, as there are other PCC members not present today. The PCC is well ahead of where they were the last time they hosted, in terms of the framework of what they are going to do. The next big piece is figuring out how they will do it with the money. He hopes they can have some ideas for the next meeting, regarding funding; the calendar, especially the Wednesday and Thursday; and transportation and busses.

Mr. Lins asked what the PCC is thinking about the meal at his house. Discussion ensued. Chair Mitchell stated that he thinks Mr. Lins will have a lot of help from people, and they could plan to have a few grills. They do not need to hire anyone to cook or rent tables and chairs; they have people who could help with that. Mr. Lins spoke about the open barn they could use if it rains. Discussion continued about the space and logistics.

Mr. Weisenberger asked if Chair Mitchell is asking PCC members to start contacting vendors and so on to see how much all of these activities will cost and put together a budget. Chair Mitchell replied that he thinks the first step is what they are doing now, figuring out how many transportation days, how many meals, and so on and so forth, and then they can divide up that work. For example, someone could go and find out how much a certain number of days of van rentals would cost plus fuel, and someone else could get ballpark estimates from restaurants, and someone else could get breakfast items donated from a business, and so on and so forth. He continued that as he said, everything is going well, and the PCC is way ahead of where they were last time. Discussion continued about transportation details.

Chair Mitchell stated that once they determine details like which days need vans and which meals are needed, PCC members can find out what the ballpark figures are and bring the information to the PCC as a whole. The PCC can give feedback on those figures and plans and they can adjust as needed. Once the PCC agrees on the plan, then they go back and get the firm numbers and have a firm budget. It adds up fast. It is typically \$12,000 to \$16,000. He spoke of how the PCC and the Einbeck committee have both been working on reducing costs, and people are still having just as much fun and the exchanges are growing.

B) Fundraising Ideas and Opportunities

Mr. Kuhn asked Mr. Lins if the idea of the cookbook (with recipes from Keene and Einbeck) was meant to be a fundraiser. Mr. Lins replied yes. He continued that if it does not raise any money it would still be a good thing to do, but they were thinking of selling it at Pumpkin Fest. Discussion ensued with ideas about the cookbook and how and where to sell it.

5) Communications

A) Derek Blunt – Yard Sale Fundraiser to Benefit Student Exchange – Update

Chair Mitchell asked Mr. Blunt how MC2's fundraiser went. Mr. Blunt replied that it went very well and MC2 is planning another for the spring. He thanks everyone who helped out and stopped by. He will keep everyone posted about the next one. MC2 welcomes donations for their next yard sale.

B) Facebook – “Keene Partner City Committee” – Like, Share, Suggest

Ms. Howe stated that she got access to Facebook, so if anyone has anything they want to post, they can. She continued that the PCC has not posted for over a year. It would be great to share some photos from the last exchange, for example. She encourages anyone who has not yet liked and shared the Facebook page to do so. Chair Mitchell asked if the PCC can post the photos, or if someone else (in the City) has to. Ms. Howe replied that she does not know, but PCC members can send her photos to post, with captions.

Ms. McCollester stated that she posted the PCC's Christmas card to Einbeck and was told she was not supposed to do that. She continued that she suggests Ms. Howe check the rules (about who can post). Ms. Howe agreed.

6) Reports

A) Treasurer Report – Eric

Mr. Weisenberger stated that the fundraising account has a balance of \$16,182, and the general appropriations fund has a balance of \$17,506.

7) New Business

A) Notification of Council Action – Reports to the Council by Boards and Commissions

Chair Mitchell stated that Ms. Howe shared that the City Council is asking for some type of report. Ms. Howe stated that it is optional. She continued that the City Council has brought up the fact that City boards and committees do not get a lot of recognition for what they do and the City does not get to hear about a lot of them. Thus, if the PCC wants to give a report, they can, written or verbal. It would be at the beginning of the fiscal new year, in July. If the PCC wants, they can report on their successes, goals, challenges, and so on and so forth.

Chair Mitchell replied that they used to do this when Kendall Lane was Mayor, and he thinks it is a good idea. He spoke about how it is a great way to get information about the PCC out there, and the Councilors are friendly people. Discussion ensued. Ms. McCollester asked if the City Council is looking for an itemized report of where the money goes. Ms. Howe and Chair

Mitchell replied no, it is not about the money. Ms. Howe added that the PCC could choose the report's format and contents. Mr. Blunt stated that he would be happy to help with such a report.

B) MC2 Student Exchange Update & Request of Support

Dylan stated that he, Cedric, and Camille are here representing MC2, a small charter school in Keene. He continued that they do not have a large student body, but students are heavily involved within their school. They do a lot of fundraising and plan their own projects, such as the yard sale fundraiser. Students have outside learning opportunities such as internships, where they get to do full work days outside of school. Being a small school, they have some challenges. They are not as well known in the area, compared to bigger schools like Keene High, and they have less funding and have to do their own fundraising.

Dylan continued that he, Cedric, and Camille are part of the Germain Exchange program at MC2. They have a class about it, and he is here representing the class. Their school, especially the German Exchange, aligns well with the PCC, because MC2 students are trying to show their German Exchange students what America is like, particularly Keene. They want to show them Keene's local businesses and local markets, such as the Wyman Tavern and its Keene history. MC2 has had a good connection over the past couple of years, with two MC2 staff members, Mr. Blunt and Mr. Kuhn, on the PCC. MC2 has made a strong connection with the PCC and they would like to ask for some funding assistance. He will pass out copies of their itinerary to show what they are asking for. The list is itemized and includes mileage, because it would help them a lot to have assistance with travel expenses.

PCC members asked MC2 students questions. Discussion ensued about the timing of the student exchange, the PCC's exchange, and the chorale exchange.

Chair Mitchell asked Cedric why he wants to be in the Einbeck group. Cedric replied that he has had an interest in Germany for a while. He continued that he thinks it is a great place, and it is amazing that he has this opportunity to go there at no cost to himself, and to help fundraise for it and plan it. He thinks going to Germany will be a great experience he will have memories of for the rest of his life.

Mr. Weisenberger asked how many students are looking to go to Germany in the spring. The students replied eight.

Chair Mitchell asked Camille why she wants to be involved in the Germany Exchange. Camille replied that she has had an interest in Germany for quite a while, and because this is so student-led, she wanted the experience of forming these bonds and planning this trip. It is a big thing. She has been having a great time participating in the planning process. She looks forward to making connections outside of the country, and the idea of getting to know people different from herself drives her curiosity.

Ms. McColleston asked if she is interested in specific cities. Camille replied no, she is interested in Germany as a whole. She continued that she is fond of Germany's culture, arts, and language. She has been interested in Germany since middle school, and it is great to finally have a chance to (be involved with) something she has been fascinated with for years.

Chair Mitchell asked the students to talk about what Mr. Blunt has them doing to prepare for this exchange. Dylan replied that 14 students have had three meetings each week. He continued that they do German language lessons every Friday, led by a student. They do readings and do reports on them and compete against each other in a Duolingo class. Camille stated that they have also been planning their itinerary, and the yard sale fundraiser was planned and run by students.

Chair Mitchell asked if there were any further questions for the students. Hearing none, he thanked them for coming, and for speaking and preparing their paperwork. He continued that the PCC will meet again and they need a larger group of PCC members than this to discuss MC2's request. They will have an answer for MC2 within two months, possibly within a month.

8) Next Meeting: April 8, 2025

Chair Mitchell noted that the next meeting is April 8, 2025. The agenda is a typo.

9) More Time

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 6:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Nicole Howe, Staff Liaison