



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH
Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Sister Cities

Wednesday, February 19, 2025

MEETING MINUTES

Attending: Councilor Rich Blalock, chair; Christine Friese, Atty. Bob Sullivan, Mary Carey Foley, Robert Conard, Ben VanCamp, Stephanie Seacord

Committee designated Christine as Sister Cities Committee secretary, with responsibility for the meeting minutes shared by Christine and Stephanie.

1. Old Business

- Relationship with Szolnok, Hungary- next steps, long term goals. Committee heard from guest and dual Hungarian citizen Peter Somssich who visits Hungary every three years. He commented on the political situation – that Viktor Orban, a strong ally of Putin and Russia is a resident Szolnok. There had been a Hungarian Consulate in Boston who was withdrawn as the relations with Hungary have deteriorated. He wondered what the motivation might be behind the letter from the Szolnok Mayor's office. Generally Sister City relationships encourage business interests, student exchanges and cultural events but the latter two areas are less likely at the moment.
 - Dr. Gary Kish, orthopedic surgeon in Portsmouth (son Brian) is Hungarian and may be a good partner. Councilor Blalock to inquire.
 - Daughter of Hungarian Katalin Karikó (won a Nobel for mRNA vaccine research), Susan Francia, is a two-time Olympic gold medalist in rowing who rowed with Mayor McEachern. She visited him in Portsmouth six months ago and is another connection.
 - Peter offered to be point person to contact the former Hungarian Consul
 - Next steps: send the revised letter suggesting a zoom with Adrienn Adam, International Relations Manager in Szolnok Mayor's office (and photographer – recent exhibit in NYC).
- Updates on Trust – Bob anticipates the Trustees of the Trust Funds will approve. Once that happens the Trust goes to City Council to confirm. Mary Carey Foley has offered to make the first donation to the fund in anticipation of expenses to support the visits by Nichinan and Santarcangelo students in the fall. Peter Somssich also volunteered to donate.
- Santarcangelo – reviewing parallels with Portsmouth for the "Slow City" movement – tradition of evening strolls "passeggiata"
- Sister City gifts – Stephanie noted that the new labels identifying the gifts and some of

the associated cultural traditions are now in place in the City Hall cases.

2. New Business

- Share Article on Portsmouth Sister Cities
- Sister Cities International Zoom Meeting on Sports and International Diplomacy – Councilor Blalock to participate on Feb 25. Opportunities re: World Cup in US (Canada and Mexico as auxiliaries) in 2026; Olympics in LA in 2028. Halifax NS, Sister City with Portsmouth UK is also hosting international sailing races. A Youth Symposium Day is planned in DC for June 15-21.
- Other New Items – Ben Van Camp/Chamber has met with a representative from Collette Travel who is suggesting a 10-day itinerary, Edinburgh-London in April 2026 that would include an extension overnight to visit Portsmouth UK. Pricing out the details. Minimum group = 15; maximum = 40. One comp per every 15 guests. Price would build in a \$200 commission per person that the Chamber offered to split with Sister Cities Trust.

3. Public Comment – none.

Adjourned at 4:48 pm.