

Distinguished Visitors Committee

Agenda

Thursday, February 16, 2023

Shallop Room, 4th Floor, Plymouth Town Hall, 26 Court Street, Plymouth, MA 02360

1) Roll Call:

- a) Voting members
 - i) Andy Loretz, citizen at-large (acting)
 - ii) Harry Helm, Select Board representative
 - iii) Kim Savery, School Committee representative
 - iv) Steven Lydon, Visitors Services Board representative
- b) Non-voting members observing the meeting:
 - i) Evelyn Strawn, See Plymouth
 - ii) Matt Tavares, Town Meeting Member

2) Call to order at 7:00 PM

3) Old Business:

a) COVID's impact on this committee - update

An overview was given regarding how COVID interrupted this committee's proceedings, including regular delegation trips to/from Shichigahama, Japan; Plymouth 400 guests; any other visits from distinguished visitors; and regular DVC meetings. In-person travel delegations have been paused since 2020, and much of the work of this committee was limited as a result. Nonetheless, the relationship was strong with our towns sending one another gifts, such as the beautiful Tanabata flag sent by Shichigahama for Plymouth's Maritime Festival.

Our counterparts in Shichigahama's Kokusaimura reached out to us in late December 2022 offering to host another delegation this summer (2023). This committee thought Plymouth would host next (since Shichigahama hosted the last exchange in 2019), adding a bit of unforeseen time pressure on our end to establish a delegation and secure travel arrangements. We are now working diligently and swiftly to re-align this committee, establish a delegation of students, teacher chaperones, and elected officials from Plymouth, and procure the necessary travel arrangements.

b) Overview of the Virtual Delegations

The format and general experience of student delegations through Zoom conferences was explained. There were two student delegations: 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, as well as some informal exchanges in late 2020/early 2021. The students created videos about their respective towns, played games, and exchanged cultural as well as day-to-day information. It was evident that these exchanges were meaningful for the students. This was the primary

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Agenda

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method of continuing the Shichigahama-Plymouth relationship. These meetings were arranged, organized, and facilitated by Andy Loretz and the Kokusaimura staff in Shichigahama with the help and support of the Plymouth school department and school committee.

c) Brief overview of this committee's charge, purpose, and functions

The committee reaffirmed its main charge is the Shichigahama-Plymouth relationship, but also works on hosting or coordinating with other distinguished visitors and delegations from other locations, particularly international ones.

d) Re-aligning the committee - where do we stand, and what (if anything) is still left to do to ensure the committee has all vacancies filled?

The following boards have appointed their representative:

- (1) School Committee: Kim Savery
- (2) Visitors Services Board: Steven Lydon
- (3) See Plymouth representative: Evelyn Strawn
- (4) Chamber of Commerce: Paula Harris

The following representatives remain to be determined:

- (5) Select Board
- (6) Town Meeting
- (7) Citizen at-large

e) Account: update on the current budget/financial figures

An update on the account balance was given (\$76,680.96). It was explained how the account is sustained by annual contributions of \$5,000 (each) by the School Committee, Visitors Services Board, and Select Board. The importance of the DVC having a sustainable account to the preparations for sending and hosting delegations to/from Shichigahama was affirmed.

4) New Business:

a) Update on the student delegation going to Shichigahama

i) Outlining/summarizing the student ambassador selection process

Any Plymouth resident who was currently a student in 7th or 8th grade was invited to apply to be part of this summer's delegation. This was communicated to students in Plymouth Public Schools, as well as to the administrators at Rising Tide charter school, and other schools in Plymouth to notify

Distinguished Visitors Committee

Agenda

Thursday, February 16, 2023

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their students. An application was created based on previous applications, as well as translated into Portuguese. The application submissions were reviewed by the school administrators, members of this committee, school committee members, and the two teacher chaperones. Out of 31 students who applied, 18 students were invited to interview, with 3 students opting to withdraw before interviewing. Those students interviewed for a panel consisting of Andy Loretz, Kim Savery, Jacie Veno (teacher chaperone, PSMS), Jacklyn Gervais (teacher chaperone, PCIS), Christine Gillis (former student ambassador and former chaperone on previous delegations). The panel independently ranked candidates' fitness to be a student ambassador according to criteria previously used by this committee in conjunction with the school department. The final rankings were tabulated by the school department and given to this committee.

ii) Finalizing the list of students in the delegation

The Kokusaimura had asked to limit the number of total students in this summer's delegation to 10. The committee reviewed the students' interview rankings and selected the 10 highest-ranking students to participate in the delegation. The committee noted that if students/families decide to withdraw after being selected, those vacant seats will not be filled.

iii) Discussion: Identifying the costs for the students' families and how this committee can provide assistance in their fundraising efforts.

Based on previous experiences with previous delegations, some students/families still struggle to come up with the required funds for this expensive trip, even after they have done sufficient fundraising. It was discussed that this committee is amenable to providing very limited financial support to students on an as-needed basis, and after fundraising efforts have been exhausted. This will be tabled until we have a clearer picture of whether accepted students will require additional assistance beyond their own contributions and their own fundraising efforts.

Distinguished Visitors Committee

Agenda

Thursday, February 16, 2023

Shallop Room, 4th Floor, Plymouth Town Hall, 26 Court Street, Plymouth, MA 02360

b) Update on the elected/town official delegation going to Shichigahama

i) Outlining/summarizing the selection process

Per the request of the Kokusaimura, who covers the cost of lodging and other tourist amenities for elected officials, this delegation is limited to 3-4 elected/town officials: 2 school committee members and 2 elected/town officials from Town Hall. The School Committee nominated Kim Savery and Luis Pizano. Derek Brindisi (Town Manager) was offered to be part of this delegation and accepted. The Select Board chair determined to wait on a decision to some point in the future, likely after the May election.

ii) Finalizing the list of elected officials in the delegation

Due to all members of the Plymouth delegation being deemed "Guests of the Mayor of Shichigahama", previous policy has been to only send elected officials from Plymouth whose terms were not expiring prior to traveling with the delegation, to ensure 100% confidence that all elected/town officials would be representing Plymouth in their official capacity. It was therefore decided that this committee would move forward with making travel arrangements for the 3 aforementioned elected/town officials, but to table the 4th seat for the Select Board representative with the understanding that separate travel arrangements will likely need to be made when the Select Board makes a determination.

c) Discussion on this committee's role in procuring travel for the delegation:

i) Flight costs: Family contributions and fundraising cover the students' flights.

An update was given regarding the rising cost of flights. During student interviews, families were made aware of the fact that the trip could cost as much as \$4,000, and that they were responsible for the full cost through their own finances and their direct fundraising efforts. Onus is put on the families and students to cover the full cost. As discussed previously in this meeting, this committee will decide (if

Distinguished Visitors Committee

Agenda

Thursday, February 16, 2023

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needed) whether to provide very limited financial assistance pending any such need to certain students.

ii) Update on the travel arrangements from the travel agent

The travel agent this committee is working with quoted the cost of the flight from Boston Logan to Tokyo-Narita as being between \$2,500 and \$3,100, but that does not include the cost of traveling from Tokyo-Narita to Sendai or another destination closer to Shichigahama, which is no longer an option as a result of the pandemic. We are awaiting further communication from the travel agent regarding the final travel arrangements from Tokyo-Narita to Sendai and the subsequent total cost.

iii) Update on the vaccination policy per Japan and per the host families

The entrance policy for Japan nationally remains that individuals need 3 vaccinations/be up-to-date on their COVID-19 vaccinations, or submit a negative COVID test taken within 72 hours of travel. This committee was concerned that the students' host families might only host students who are fully vaccinated. Student ambassador candidates and their families were made aware of this during their interviews. We are waiting to hear back from the Kokusaimura regarding their decision.

5) Next meeting date: tentatively Thursday, March 9th at 7:00 PM at Town Hall in a room TBD, pending space/time availability.

6) Meeting adjourned at 8:16 PM