

Distinguished Visitors Committee

Minutes

Thursday, September 14, 2023, 7:00 PM
Ropewalk Conference Room, 2nd Floor, Plymouth Town Hall
26 Court Street, Plymouth, MA 02360

Zoom information:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/92970759154?pwd=aFMwWIBuS1R3OVdUWjdXREYrQ1hMdz09>

Meeting ID: 929 7075 9154

Passcode: 750646

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place which has been extended to March 31, 2023, this meeting will be conducted via remote and in person participation.

This meeting is being recorded.

- 1) Meeting called to order at 7:03 PM.
- 2) Old Business:
 - 1) *Vote to approve the previous meeting minutes (7/27/23):*
 - i) *Moved by: Mrs. Burgess*
 - ii) *Seconded by: Mr. Lydon*
 - iii) *Votes for:*
 - (1) *Mr. Len Levin*
 - (2) *Mr. Chris Talamo*
 - (3) *Mr. Kevin Canty*
 - (4) *Ms. Evelyn Strawn*
 - (5) *Mr. Steven Lydon*
 - (6) *Ms. Margie Burgess*
 - (7) *Ms. Kim Savery*
 - (8) *Mr. Andrew Loretz*
 - iv) *Abstentions:*
 - (1) *Mr. Matt Tavares*
 - (2) *Ms. Sandra Almaguer*
 - v) *Votes against:*
 - (1) *None*
 - vi) *Result: Passes*
 - 2) Review of meeting procedures and protocols

3) Update on the delegation that visited Shichigahama this past August (summer 2023):

i) Presentations by student ambassadors, teacher chaperones, and/or town officials who were part of the 2023 Plymouth delegation visiting Shichigahama this past August.

(1) Seven out of ten student ambassadors attended, as well as one out of two teacher chaperones, and reported on their experiences: Bridget Blaisdell; Sophia Kovach; Samuel Emery; Sara Deacon; Lila Shay; Violet Luke; Isabelle Guenther; Jacie Venno (teacher chaperone). Mr. Canty and Ms. Savery (DVC members) also reported on their experiences.

(2) The students' reflections were positive. They noted the deep connections they made with their host families, Japanese peers, Shichigahama community members and volunteers involved with hosting them, trying new food, and diving into new experiences. Many of the students commented on the bond they also established with one another as fellow Plymouth delegation members. Ms. Venno and Ms. Savery noted that the educational summit was also helpful to further explore how best to have students live their dreams, and how there were many similarities between the Japanese and American regarding the educational issues we currently face. Mr. Canty similarly described the experiences the "VIPs" had, noting the amazing hospitality shown to the delegation.

ii) Reflections from the chair:

(1) The student delegation was reported to have been "one of the best-prepared delegations in a long time". The four orientation meetings with students and families (where cultural information, cultural sensitivity, and behavioral expectations were covered in depth), as well as the virtual meet-up with host families, and other pre-trip social preparations were likely crucial to the students' success. It was emphasized during the orientation meetings that the student ambassadors' primary focus should be on spending time getting to know their host families and other Japanese folks (rather than their peers from Plymouth), and this is what they did. I am very proud of this group of young adults

for representing their town, their families, and themselves well!

- (2) Travel to and from Japan occurred without incident, and the delegation was safe and healthy through the duration of their visit.
- (3) The official gifts were received well and appreciated.
- (4) The student ambassadors made presentations to the School Committee on Monday, September 11, 2023 and the Select Board on Tuesday, September 12, 2023.
- (5) The chair would like to thank everyone on this committee for their work to ensure that students and the adult members of the delegation had a successful visit. Special thanks to those who reached out to their respective boards/committees for help with items such as unofficial gifts, further donations, etc.; or who helped procure the official town gifts. This was a group effort and everyone's contributions benefited the delegation and the continued strength of our sister-town relationship with the people of Shichigahama.

iii) Wrapping up thoughts:

- (1) Photos from the delegation should be stored somewhere for posterity. It was suggested by a member that the DVC obtain a Google account for this purpose.
- (2) Mr. Canty added that the next delegation to host should look into bullet trains instead of the charter bus due to the amount of extra time the charter bus added.
- (3) Ms. Savery sent general procedures to Mr. Loretz and general ideas that we should consider and use for future delegations (both when sending a delegation or hosting).

iv) Shichigahama sent us an official town gift. This was a Sendai tansu, which is an ornate paper box. A detailed description was attached to the box the tansu arrived in about the craftsmanship of the wood lacquer and metal ornamentation. The tansu was presented to the Select Board at their meeting on Tuesday, September 12, 2023.

- (1) The tansu will be displayed somewhere in Town Hall; that location is being determined.

4) Account update:

i) Incoming funds:

- (1) Updates on incoming funds from representatives of the School Committee, Select Board, VSB.

(a) Mr. Lydon reported that the VSB is planning on upping their annual contribution from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for next year (fiscal year 2025) and going forward. He has been in contact with other contributing committees, who also seem to be in agreement that they will do the same.

(2) Ms. Savery updated the committee that the Rotary Club will be potentially donating to the students (even though the trip is now over). These funds may be made out to the Town. It will be up to this committee to ensure that that money is distributed to the families of the student ambassadors – either as direct disbursement to the families from the Town, or as a single disbursement to the families' joint account (for them to distribute). We will determine this based on the advice of Lynne Barrett and the Finance Dept.

(a) Mr. Levin suggested that this committee do even more outreach to similar charitable organizations going forward, and especially when Plymouth is hosting.

ii) Expenses:

(1) All expenses for the 2023 delegation have been paid.

(2) Four student ambassadors' families required reimbursement for overpayment for the trip. Those were (names of students' parents listed below):

(a) Meredith Emery: \$0.36

(b) Denise Luke: \$13.85

(c) Meghan DeMarco: \$278.85

(d) Tamari Kovach: \$278.85

iii) Overall status of account:

(1) The most recent figure for the account balance is \$65,110.98 as of 8/17/23. This figure does not yet include the reimbursements listed above.

3) New Business:

1) Planning the Shichigahama delegation's visit during the summer of 2024: The following should be considered as this committee prepares:

i) What dates and how long will their delegation visit during? Is there a particular date range/length we would like to encourage?

(1) Summer, particularly August, works best for us

- (2) Mr. Canty noted this committee could reverse-engineer an itinerary based off the itinerary planned for the 2023 Plymouth delegation.
- ii) What is the size of the delegation (students, teacher chaperones, town officials/VIPs)?
- (1) It was agreed that it would be good to match the same numbers sent as part of the 2023 Plymouth delegation's student ambassadors (10) and teacher chaperones (2); but to increase the number of VIPs since they did not get to come in 2020 (we sent 4). Their delegation also requires several interpreters (that will automatically necessitate a greater expense for housing VIPs and translators, also known as CIRs).
- iii) Who will the elected officials/VIPs include, and have any of those individuals been here already (and if so, when)?
- (1) As stated above, the number of VIPs should increase since they did not get to come in 2020. They also need interpreters - so that will automatically necessitate more expense for housing VIPs and translators (CIRs). The exact titles and positions would be determined as planning occurs and dialogue with the Kokusaimura about who is available.
- iv) Where will town officials/VIPs be housed?
- (1) A local hotel or B&B in the downtown area would be best, since this will greatly reduce the need for transportation (and therefore reduced transportation costs).
- v) Host families for student ambassadors and teacher chaperones should begin to be secured.
- (1) We can encourage former Plymouth delegation members' families or former host families to volunteer for this, especially if they have a connection with any of the Japanese delegation members visiting.
- (2) It was settled that by this committee's November meeting, a plan to secure host families should be in place and begin to be implemented.
- vi) How will we transport the delegation to/from the airport, as well as during itinerary items to be attended just by the elected officials/VIPs?
- (1) A school bus would be best to/from Boston Logan airport for the whole delegation.

- (2) Most other transportation for students and teachers would be the responsibility of host families.
 - (3) Transportation for VIPs could include limos or chartered drivers, especially for closeby events.
 - vii) What has this committee done in the past that worked well, and what did not?
 - (1) Known itinerary items that went well:
 - (a) Dinner at Plymouth Bay Winery for VIPs
 - (b) Baseball games either at Fenway or Pawtucket Red Sox
 - (c) Visiting Plimoth-Patuxet Museum
 - (d) Beach outings
 - (e) Educational summit
 - viii) How can we ensure that the town at large knows about the delegation's visit, and provide an open, welcoming environment during their stay?
 - (1) Sending press releases to the Old Colony Memorial and Plymouth Independent and other media outlets, such as the "Stroll" in Pinehills, PAC TV, announcements from the Town Manager and Select Board members, and EdTV.
 - (2) It was emphasized that the committee start as early as possible with all community outreach and marketing.
 - (3) It was noted that it might be nice to host a gathering on the waterfront to have any one who was previously involved with the sister-town relationship or delegation visits greet the 2024 Shichigahama delegation.
 - ix) As much as possible, donations or price reductions should be sought for transportation, itinerary items, events, and meals.
- 2) Final thoughts from the chair:
- i) Mr. Loretz (the current chair) will be resigning fully from the committee within the next few days (but prior to the October 2023 meeting), after wrapping up some final items regarding the 2023 Plymouth delegation's visit to Shichigahama. He noted it has been a privilege to serve on the committee, to see the committee through the pandemic, and to ensure a successful delegation visit this past summer. He will still help in small ways if needed through the transition to a new chair and committee, especially in regards to answering questions that may arise.
 - ii) This committee will have the following vacancies: two at-large seats and one Chamber of Commerce designee seat (Paula Harris

resigned; Amy Naples of the Chamber of Commerce is working on filling her vacancy).

- 3) Items not reasonably anticipated by the chair:
 - i) Mr. Talamo recommended that developing a mission statement for the committee will help ensure that we can market this opportunity effectively, especially when spreading the word to the community about contributing to the efforts of this committee when we host a delegation from Shichigahama.
 - ii) Ms. Strawn noted that See Plymouth is thinking about the economic relationship between Shichigahama and Plymouth, and hoping to increase the amount of economic activity between the two towns.
- 4) **Next meeting date:** Thursday, October 12th at 7:00 PM in the Ropewalk Conference Room on the 2nd Floor of Plymouth Town Hall.
- 5) ***A VOTE was taken to adjourned at 8:43 PM:***
 - 1) ***Moved by: Mr. Lydon***
 - 2) ***Seconded by: Mr. Talamo***
 - 3) ***Result: passes unanimously***