

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH

Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Sister Cities

Thursday, January 15, 2026

MEETING MINUTES

For the Zoom recording: <https://youtu.be/EhLS47Z2RWQ>

1. Old Business:

- a. **Update on Sister City Fund/ Next Steps** – Atty. Sullivan and Christine Friese are meeting with the Legal Department on January 22 to discuss the documentation supplied for setting up the fund.
- b. **Approval of minutes from December 16, 2025 meeting** – on a motion by Christine seconded by Mary Carey Foley.
- c. **Santarcangelo artwork: refer to Public Art Review Committee** – At the November meeting, Councilor Blalock reported that Mayor McEachern believes the Vaughan Mall redesign project is a logical place for the art installation and agreed that PARC should work on the project. Stephanie Seacord will forward the direction and supporting documentation to PARC.
- d. **Ordinance to establish Blue Ribbon Committee as permanent Sister City Committee** – Committee reviewed the language Councilor Blalock developed with City Attorney Susan Morrell and suggested adding the goal of Supporting the historical basis for the relationships. Councilor Blalock has included the draft in the packet for the January 20, 2026 City Council meeting and will introduce it with talking points discussed by the Committee and drafted by Seacord. The Council will consider the matter for First Reading at their February 2, 2026 meeting.

2. New Business

- a. **Explore Friendship City agreement with Halifax, Nova Scotia** – The information offered by Mayor Andy Fillmore on the Portsmouth UK Holiday call led the committee to think proposing an agreement made sense due to the parallels. Portsmouth NH does not have a Sister/Friendship City in Canada and shares both maritime/Navy considerations and history with the City. After leaving Portsmouth in 1775, Royal Governor John Wentworth wound up as Royal Governor in Halifax. Seacord will research whether Portsmouth NH was involved in the 1917 relief effort following the explosion

in Halifax Harbor on December 6. Mayor McEachern may be meeting in Boston with Mayor Fillmore in February to further trade relationships between Canada and NH – at the invitation of Senator Shaheen. The committee will supply a briefing memo on the Friendship City idea.

- b. **Boston** has deep connections with Halifax thanks to the city's relief efforts, they are not Sister Cities. Friese will explore inviting the Boston Sister City Committee for a future meeting.
 - c. **Portsmouth UK choral concert participation by PHS** – Portsmouth UK has supplied the background information [<https://www.portsmouthmusichub.org/on-shining-waters>] which Seacord will share with Eric Gagnon in the PHS Music Department. Deadline for us to submit a video is June 1.
 - d. **Lodging partnerships** -- Robert Conard suggested the committee explore lodging partnerships for future Sister City delegations so as to provide a more appropriate experience. Ben Van Camp will coordinate a discussion with Portsmouth lodging and transportation providers to see if we can define some options (and pricing tiers) we can share with future delegations from Portsmouth's Sister Cities.
3. Public Comment – none.

Next meeting February 19 at 5 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 5:51 pm on a motion by Van Camp seconded by Blalock.



Sister Cities Committee Meeting

Conference Room A at City Hall, 1 Junkins Avenue
Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 5 pm

For the Zoom recording of this meeting, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsJ48dAiLyk>

Draft Minutes

Attending: Councilor Rich Blalock, chair; Christine Friese, Stephanie Seacord, Robert Sullivan, Ben VanCamp, Robert Conard. Excused: Mary Carey Foley. Absent: Stephen Chinosi

1. Review and approve past minutes – None.

2. Old Business

- A. Update on Nelson, NZ – Councilor Blalock reported that Mayor McEachern has approved the application we drafted to go to New Zealand. His contact in Nelson is no longer the Ambassador for the Friendship City discussion but has designated other Americans in Nelson to continue.
- B. Correspondence with Hungary – There is a Sister Cities International (DC) Hungary partners roundtable scheduled for March 3 at 11 am. Councilor Blalock also to connect with Dr. Gary Kish at Peter Somssich's suggestion. Also an SCI roundtable for UK Sister Cities on Apr 22 at 11 am. SCI is actively scheduling more of these country-specific roundtables.
- C. Update on Halifax, Nova Scotia – Seacord to determine if Mayor McEachern had any conversation about this with Halifax Mayor Andy
- D. Update on Sister City Fund – Christine Friese met with the Legal and Finance Departments to discuss setting up this special revenue fund in the City's accounts that can accept tax deductible donations.
 - Special revenue fund can have subcategories: eg Santarcangelo, Nichinan, general
 - Robert Sullivan to work on the draft donation letter template that includes the tax-ID number for deductions.

- City Manager will approve any allocations from the fund that meet the established purposes.
- City will track the donations to thank donors and explain expenditures and provide a report to the Committee

3. **New Business**

A. Visit from Santarcangelo, March 27-April 2. Guests: Amy Boylan, UNH Italian Department and Donna Pesaresi Garganta.

- Mayor Sachetti and artist Tiziano Corbelli and others arriving late on March 27. Film festival at UNH – a “traveling version” of the film festival in Bologna (also in Romagna) and Portsmouth High School exchange with four students and three faculty. Silent film, Eisenstein’s “Strike” on Saturday, March 28 at The Press Room with live band, Griff Ritso’s Dog Lips.
- Public Art Review Committee has some questions about the art-light installation and perhaps can discuss it with Tiziano Corbelli (through interpreter) when he’s here.
- Final films on Sunday, March 27 at The Music Hall Lounge, 10 am – 1:30 pm. Including clips from new “Lost North End” prequel documentary being created by UNH students.
- Santarcangelo hoping to expand its collaboration with Portsmouth and model initiatives. First Santarcangelo visit in 2015, Friendship City Dec 2019, connection with UNH 2021 when Superintendent Steve Zdravec approved teaching Italian at PHS and hired teacher Joseph Marquette to honor the families and businesses displaced from the North End by Urban Renewal.
- Tonino Guerra is Santarcangelo’s famous poet and film maker who worked with Fellini. His son who is also a composer and maintains a museum in Santarcangelo to his father’s work may join the delegation.
- UNH team now working with Santarcangelo to create a nonprofit Association to accept two potential grants
 - From the Italian Government to fund cultural events
 - From Emilio Romagna to honor those from the region with scholarships, film festival support and other cultural events
- Discussed hosting a reception starting at 2 pm.
 - Location TBD. Ben VanCamp exploring one option, but Friese has reserved Portsmouth Public Library Levenson Room.
 - UNH has some funds for the reception. 20-40 people? Invite: Santarcangelo delegation, UNH film festival team, Sister Cities Committee, Mayor and

Council. Consul General from Italian Consulate is invited. Santarcangelo descendants? PHS students who visited Santarcangelo in February?

- Film festival participants will not have had lunch, so refreshments should include sandwiches – ask DeStefano’s (purchase) and desserts from Massimo (purchase).
- B. Letter from Severodvinsk, Russia – Friese to distribute to Committee for discussion at next meeting.
- C. Carrickfergus discussion with Friends Forever. Jim Noucas brought women’s PHS basketball team to Carrickfergus and then Clr. Blalock hosted their team.
- D. Friese exploring the SCI Roundtable on Sports – potential exchanges eg. Nichinan baseball, or a rugby tournament.
- E. Committee format – discussed the Sister Cities Committee “elevator pitch” to explain the Committee’s purpose to potential donors and other interested community members e.g. the mission statement in the permanent committee ordinance draft. Determining the audience: high school, adults? Committee to suggest sales pitch and consideration whether committee should be nonprofit. Sullivan noted that a strength of the permanent committee is that it is a City committee. Sister City relationships are mayor-to-mayor. Friese continues to look for strong Sister City Committees in cities the same size as Portsmouth to learn best practices.
- F. Ghana – The African Union, through the president of Ghana is presenting in March 2026 a United Nations resolution recognising transatlantic slavery as the "gravest crime in the history of humankind" and calling for reparations, declared in our Sister City Accra. “This marked a historic turning point in the life of [the African Union], not as a symbolic or commemorative act, but as a strategic and international commitment,” Ghana President Mahama said, referring to the African Union’s designation of 2025 as the Year of Justice for Africans through Reparations. [Mahama to present historic resolution on slave trade to UN in March. - The Presidency, Republic of Ghana](#)

4. Adjourned 6:23 pm.

NEXT MEETING: Special meeting to discuss Santarcangelo visit, March 5.

Next regular meeting, Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 5 pm.



Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Sister Cities

Conference Room A, 1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth NH 03801
and Zoom: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKxiELhg9Ro>

Special Meeting

Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm

Participate via Zoom: .

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/suEiupWATcyPJErvmqpSg>

Draft Minutes

1. **Attending:**

A. Councilor Rich Blalock, Christine Friese, Stephanie Seacord, Ben Van Camp, Robert Sullivan, Mary Carey Foley, Robert Conard

2. **Santarcangelo visit; March 29 reception**

A. Film festival at The Music Hall Lounge 10 am – 1:30

B. Reception at 2 pm, Portsmouth Public Library Levenson Room (UNH transportation or walk over)

C. Screening of Lost North End from 3-4 pm. Friese to check if Library owns a copy.

D. Anticipated 20-30 guests: 4 from Santarcangelo, UNH coordinators, PHS students and teachers who visited Santarcangelo, Lost North End filmmakers, Donna Garganta (Friese) and others in film, Mayor and City Council (Councilor Blalock), Sister City Committee

E. Discussion about refreshments: Friese agreed to ask DeStefano's (sandwiches purchased with \$500-600 from UNH). If they are unable, who would they

recommend. Or The Kitchen. If there are enough funds, also purchase from Massimo a selection of small desserts. Library can provide beverages including coffee/tea.

3. Motion to adjourn by Foley, seconded by Seacord at 5:30 pm.



Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Sister Cities

Conference Room A, City Hall, 1 Junkins Ave., Portsmouth and Zoom

Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 5:00 pm

Zoom recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EghBCnJEtwI>

Draft Minutes

1. **Review and approve past minutes (Jan 14, 2026) – hold for next meeting**
2. **Old Business**
 - Permanent Committee Ordinance – approved by Council at March 16 meeting
 - Update on Sister City Fund – Seacord and Sullivan will draft the template letter.
 - Letter from Russia – Similar reply as to Hungarian inquiry. Committee is focusing on active relationships
 - Santarcangelo Mayor visit to Durham and UNH Film Festival Cinema Ritrovato
<https://www.cinemaritrovatonh.com/2026-edition.html>
 - Arriving Fri afternoon, departing Mon afternoon
 - TMH Lounge at 10 am
 - Reception at PPL, 2-3 pm

DeStefano's providing 12 sandwiches and 10 calzone, all cut in half, including vegetarian and a few dairy-free chicken salad sandwiches; vegetable platters and fruit from Hannaford; Popovers' Portsmouth Orange Cake; Two Poets chocolates made for Cinema Ritrovato; Seltzers, coffee and tea from the library

- Mayors exchange gifts (chart clocks*)
- Tiziano Corbelli (Santarcangelo)*
- Filippo Sacchetti (Santarcangelo)

- Laura Facondini (Santarcangelo)
- Alice Parma (Santarcangelo)*
- Luca Cancellieri (Santarcangelo)
- Carrickfergus discussion with Friends Forever – Delegation traveling to Carrickfergus on April 2 and will identify the contacts we should have for the relationship. Both agreed to work together on future visits/opportunities.
- Portsmouth UK 100th
 - PHS chorus is sending a video of their performance of “On Shining Waters” song
 - Mayor videotaped greetings; forwarded to Lord Mayor
- Update on Nelson, New Zealand – Friends Forever alum from Nelson may be a connection.
- Update on correspondence with Hungary -- none
- Update on Halifax, Nova Scotia – Mayor McEachern had only a brief conversation with Halifax Mayor
- Update on SCI Roundtable on sports – Friese to follow-up on examples Portsmouth could develop